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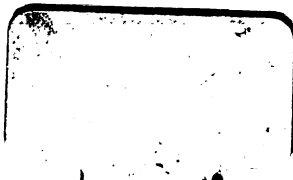
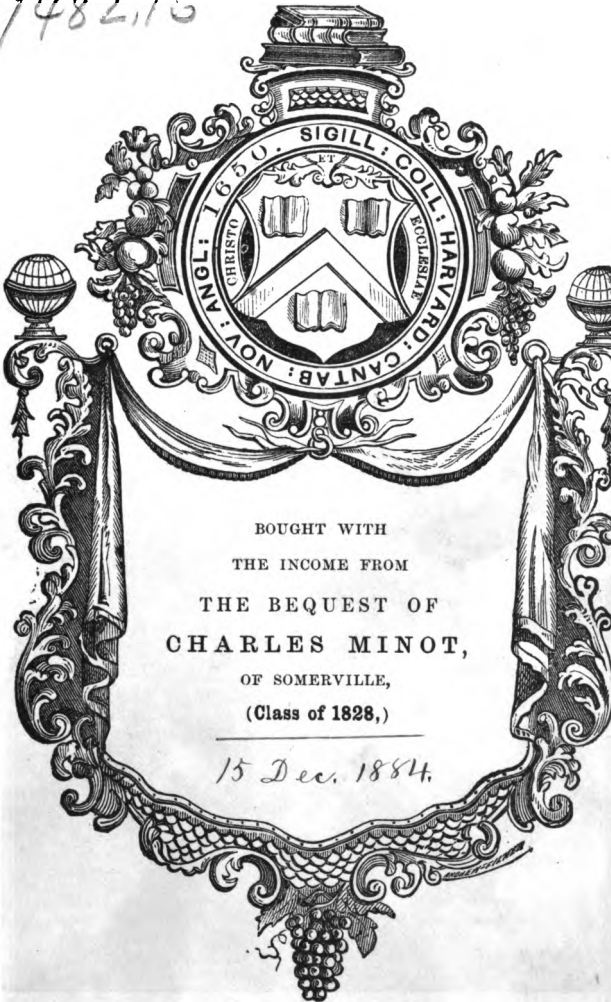
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THE  
FALL OF NINEVEH.

A Poem.

BY  
EDWIN ATHERSTONE.

SECOND EDITION: DILIGENTLY CORRECTED, AND  
OTHERWISE IMPROVED.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

LONGMANS, GREEN, READER, AND DYER.

1868.

17482.16

DEC 15 1884

*Minot fund.*

LONDON:

PRINTED BY C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.



The reader is entreated to correct the following misprints :

- Page 26, last line but one, *for* "saith," *read* "said."
- „ 88, 16th line from top, *for* "Mede," *read* "Medes."
- „ 101, 8th line from bottom, *for* "fallen," *read* "falling."
- „ 146, 11th line from top, *for* "geat," *read* "great."
- „ 216, 18th line from top, *for* "god," *read* "gods."
- „ 295, 16th line from top, *for* "ear," *read* "fear."
- „ 310, 18th line from bottom, *for* "O," *read* "Of."

# FALL OF NINEVEH.

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## BOOK THE FIFTEENTH.

MEANTIME Sardanapalus, with the pride  
Of victory made drunken, as with wine,—  
Self-glorying, said : “ Lord of the earth am I !  
Who shall control me ? what can harm me now ? ”

And when the captains of the cars and horse  
Who had pursued,—returned, and said to him,  
“ Arbaces is gone down into the pit ;  
Thine enemies are scattered like the dust, ”—  
More swelled his heart with glory of his might :  
Unto the music of the flatterer’s tongue  
More pleased he listened ; every fear shook off ;  
And, with a madman’s leap, into the flood  
Of sensual joys plunged headlong. For, not now,  
As erst, amid his concubines alone,  
Or some few chosen revellers, he sat :  
The hall immense—in which, from end to end  
Ere it could reach, must a strong warrior’s arm,  
At utmost strain the chosen arrow send—  
Now often with unnumbered golden lamps  
Blazed through the night. The roof of burnished gold  
Poured sunshine down ; the walls of porphyry,  
Bright gleaming ; and the jasper pillars vast,  
Up to the proud roof shooting,—flung the light,  
As from the face of polished mirrors back.  
At costliest tables, ebony and gold,

And ivory, with rarest gems inlaid,—  
On silken couches, stiff with woven gold,  
His nobles, captains, and chief ministers,  
And women of the city, beautiful,  
Radiant in garments of all delicate hues,  
Sat at the frequent feast. From golden cups,  
Rich wines they quaffed; from vessels of pure gold,  
On every luxury which the fruitful East  
Could yield, they feasted. Music, dance, and love,  
Followed the banquet; and the morning sun  
On the unfinished revel oft arose.

So did the king his good resolves forget.  
And when Azubah, prostrate at his feet,  
Pardon for her unhappy father sued,  
Harshly did he repulse her. "Twice have I  
At thy sole prayer life granted him. Fool he,  
Who, for the third time, would the viper trust,  
That twice had striven to sting him! Then, desist:  
Both canst thou never serve. Him leave, or me:  
My palace, or his prison—which thou wilt—  
That choose; the other quit, and murmur not."

Azubah then wept bitterly; and went  
Unto her father, to abide with him.

When her Rabsaris saw; and heard that she  
A prison, with her father, rather chose,  
Than a proud palace, with Assyria's lord,—  
His stern heart melted: on her neck he fell;  
Embraced, and kissed her; and wept out aloud.

Yet loved she still the king; and many a sigh  
Breathed after him, and murmured oft his name.  
Nor was the haughty monarch all unmoved  
When that best loved one went: but his proud heart  
'Gainst her he strove to harden; and in thoughts  
Vain-glorious to seek comfort. "Lo the Mede,  
The boastful, and the terrible, is fallen!  
His iron arm, that made the thousands quail,  
Is now as potter's clay; his dreadful voice,  
Hushed as a last year's tempest: that fierce eye  
Which, like the lightning, flashed upon his foes,  
Dull as cold ashes lies. Ah! rebel base!

So is thy glory vanished as a dream !  
Where be thy armies now ? thy countless foot ;  
Thy steel-clad horsemen ; and thy charioteers ;  
Wherewith thy boast was, the eternal walls  
To overthrow ; and leave no stone behind ?  
Even as the fleecy clouds of yesternorn  
That the wind scattered, have they passed away.  
So have they perished ! so shall perish all  
Who impiously their hands against the king  
Have lifted ; or his bidding set at nought !  
Woe to *you*, men of Bactria ! on you next  
The avenging arm shall fall. The sword shall smite  
Your captains ; and your soldiers shall be given  
For slaves unto the nations. Ah, accurst !  
When, in my trouble, I did send to you,  
And say ; ‘ behold the rebel waxeth strong ;  
Haste to me, then, and in my battles stand,’—  
Ye would not hearken ; but my bidding scorned ;  
And, laughing, mocking, went upon your way.  
But *now*, because it hath been said to you,  
‘ The king hath vanquished all who ’gainst him stood :  
Hath trod them like the sand beneath his feet :  
Return ye, then, obedient ; and bow down  
Before him ; and your sin shall be forgiven :  
Yea, ye shall wealth, and fame, and honors have ;  
For the king’s vengeance now is satisfied ;  
And blood shall flow no longer’—because thus  
It hath been told you, lo ! you hither come,  
As to a joyous banquet. *Now* ye send  
And say, ‘ upon the twelfth day will we come :  
And, as the king hath promised, even so  
Surely will he deal with us.’ Rebels ! fools !  
The riches that ye look for, shall be stripes !  
Your honors shall be mockery, chains, and death !  
So shall your insolence meet fit reward ;  
And every heart of all the nations quake,  
And tremble at the anger of their lord.  
But, meantime, ere the tenth day, will I feast  
My armies on the plain ; and gladden them ;  
And make them strong to tread the rebel down !”

Thus in his heart revolved the subtle king ;  
But his design to no man would make known ;  
Lest, haply, to the Bactrians might be told  
The fate which waited them ; and they might 'scape.

Then, that same day, as at the feast he sat,  
Amid his nobles and his valiant men,  
He spake to them, and said : " Behold, each day  
The king, his nobles, and his captains feast :  
But the brave soldiers, who his battles fought,  
Feast not at all. This shall no longer be.  
Through camp, and city, thus be it proclaimed.  
' The fourth day hence, upon the northern plain,  
Shall the whole army banquet : and the king,  
His lords, and captains, and chief ministers,  
Shall eat and drink among them. For two days,  
From noon till midnight, shall they hold the feast.  
Of all delicious things, abundantly  
Shall every man partake ; and richest wines  
Their hearts shall gladden, and their arms make strong.  
But, on the seventh day, shall the legions pass  
Before the king, for combat all arrayed ;  
And then his farther purpose will he speak.' "

He ended ; and, with tumult of acclaim,  
The nobles and the captains all rejoiced ;  
And clapped the hand, and cried, " long live the  
king."

But they whose task it was, at once went forth ;  
And, as the king had spoken, made proclaim.

Then all within the city shouted loud ;  
And all the host throughout the camp ; for joy  
Filled every heart ; and every voice cried out,  
" Long live Sardanapalus, king of kings !  
May the king live for ever !"

On that night,  
The king, and twice a thousand lords, and chiefs,  
Who with him revelled, drunken were with wine,  
And wantonness ; and great their folly was.

But, in the city, and throughout the camp,  
The sound of preparation for the feast,  
All night was heard. Through the wide opened gates,

Went forth unceasingly the loaded wains :  
Hammer, and axe, and saw, their labor plied :  
Voice answered voice ; with fires the plain was bright ;  
And all the city, with the torches' flare.

Upon the morrow ; and the second night ;  
And till the fourth day, at the hour of noon,  
The sound of labor ceased not. Through the camp,  
Huge fires incessant blazed. Of sheep, and goats,  
And oxen, and all creatures yielding food,  
Were slain innumerable. And of fruits  
Delicious, from all climes, was gathered there,  
As for a feasting nation. Of all wines,  
Rosy, and golden hued, and luscious drinks,  
Great was the abundance. With unnumbered tents,  
The champaign broad was covered ; every tent  
Wide open, and the tables spread within.

'Midst of the camp—as if by magic built,—  
Gorgeous, and vast—high soaring over all—  
Stood the pavilion of the king of kings.  
Six cubits from the ground, the floor was laid :  
Its length a hundred cubits ; and its breadth  
A hundred : fifty cubits was its height.  
The wood was cedar ; and, on every side,  
Were cedar stairs capacious. Pillars strong  
Of cedar, at due distance placed apart,  
The roof supported. With rich purple silk,  
Spattered with gold, was every pillar wreathed.  
Green were the silken cords ; the tassels gold :  
The dome-like canopy was silk, sky-hued ;  
And, all around, a silken network fringe,  
Pale green, with threads of gold entwisted, hung.  
The silken curtains, of pale amethyst,  
Were wide withdrawn, and to the pillars looped  
In graceful sweep ; so that by every eye  
The rich interior well might be beheld.  
Full in the centre, underneath the dome,  
Where stood the couch and table of the king,—  
Another cubit still the floor was raised.  
Rich stuffs of crimson hue a carpet made.

The tables for the guests were ebony,

With gold inlaid : the couches were rich stuffs,  
Embroidered thick with silver : but the couch  
Of the voluptuous monarch was of silk ;  
Purple, and stiff with gold, and golden fringed.  
His massive table was of beaten gold ;  
And every vessel that upon it stood  
Was gold, or silver ; or some lustrous stone,  
By cunning workman wrought. The serving men  
Who at the feast should wait,—in garments white,  
With silver edged, were clothed : around their necks  
Were collars of pure silver ; and their loins,  
With belts of purple silk, gold-edged, were girt,  
And buckles of pure gold. So gorgeous shone  
The great pavilion of Assyria's king.

A spear-cast round it, was there vacant space :  
A circle, then, of splendid tents, for those,  
Nobles, or chiefs, who with the king sat not ;  
And still beyond, in circles widening still,  
The tents thick clustered, of that countless host.

'Twixt the pavilion, and the Nisroch gate,  
A broad smooth path was left : on either hand,  
A line of bright-eyed girls, and smiling boys,  
In gay attire, all bearing choicest flowers,  
To cast before the coming of the king.

With many a glance impatient now they looked  
Along the path, expecting when the gate  
Should open : and the eyes of every man,  
That could behold it, on the gate were fixed :  
For now the noon was passed ; the feast was spread ;  
And for the presence of the king, alone,  
The myriads waited.

Soon was heard a shout  
Within the city ; then the clangor shrill  
Of silver trumpets ; the clear cymbal's ring ;  
The sound of many instruments sweet-toned ;  
And choiring voices singing joyfully.

Anon the brazen portal opened wide,  
And the bright train came forth.

In garments white,  
Gold-edged, and bearing chaplets in their hands,

Came first a troop of youths, and virgins young :  
The singers, male and female, then, in robes  
Azure, and silver-rimmed ; and, after them,  
The trumpeters, in scarlet and in gold ;  
And the musicians in great multitude.

On horses, gorgeously caparisoned,—  
Short space behind, a band of captains came ;  
And haughty nobles, flaming all in gold,  
Jewels, and festive robes magnificent.

Them following close, a troop of jocund boys,  
And girls, in vesture of bright emerald,  
Gold-fringed, came onward, dancing airily :  
And then, with glory dazzling every eye,  
The sun-like chariot of the king of kings.  
Eight cream-white horses, glittering all with gold ;  
Tossing the head, and champing on the bit ;  
With flashing eye, arched neck, and nostril spread,  
Foot high uplifted, and impatient snort,  
Drew on the blazing car. By every steed,  
A captain of the guard walked heedfully.

Alone within his chariot sat the king :  
The burning crown was on his head ; his robe  
Was like one waving diamond. Behind,  
In splendid chariots, rode his concubines,  
Richly arrayed, but every countenance veiled.

Last of the glittering train, another troop  
Of nobles, and of captains, on their steeds  
Came riding haughtily ; with gold and gems  
All glittering, as though each a king had been.

Still, as the wondering multitude looked on,  
They lifted up the voice and cried aloud,  
“ God save the king ! long live Assyria’s king !  
Long live Sardanapalus, king of kings !  
May the king live for ever ! ” To the sound  
Of instruments, and voices singing loud  
Triumphant hymns, the dazzling pageant moved.

As slowly through the lines the monarch rode,  
The joyous girls and boys their flowers cast down  
Before him ; on one knee bent gracefully,—  
Drooping the arms, and bowing low the head,—

Then rose ; and, when the whole proud train had passed,  
Behind it went in orderly array,—  
As they joined in, uplifting each the voice.  
And, as the king went onward, all the host,  
Hands waving, heads uncovered, swelled the hymn.  
The sound of voices rose magnificent.

'Midst of the camp arrived,—with aspect proud,  
Yet smiling, from his chariot came the king ;  
And, with his nobles and his mighty men,  
Before him, and behind him, moving slow,  
To the pavilion mounted. But, with him  
His concubines went not ; for, at the feast,  
Before the eyes of all that multitude,  
Unveiled they might not sit. When ceased the hymn,  
They in their chariots to the city went.  
The virgins, and young children of each sex,  
Went also ; but the stronger boys remained,  
And roamed where'er they would.

At distance placed,

Round the pavilion the musicians sat,  
That, when the king should order, they might play.  
Then, when the monarch, and his lords and chiefs,  
Each in his due degree, had sat them down,—  
By sound of trumpets was the signal given,  
The banquet to begin.

So, through the day  
They feasted ; and the hearts of all were glad.  
Of every savoury thing the soldiers took  
Abundantly ; of spices, and of wines  
The richest, and of every luscious fruit.  
Throughout the spacious camp was heard the sound  
Of timbrel, sackbut, harp, and dulcimer ;  
Of singers, male and female ; now alone,  
And now full choiring in triumphant hymn.

And, as the eve drew on, with the cool breeze,  
The damsels of the city came abroad ;  
And with the nobles and the captains danced ;  
And with the soldiers,—each in her degree.  
In bright attire were even the humblest gay :  
The prouder, in rich robes of gorgeous hue ;

Linen, like snow; silk, light as gossamer.  
Their gleaming anklets were of burnished gold;  
And golden chains, and strings of pearls, and gems,  
Circled their necks: their ear-rings were pure gold,  
And jewels; and their zones, of Tyrian dye,  
Round the slim waist, with buckles of fine gold,  
And gems, were clasped. Adown the shoulders, some,  
Had dropped the ambrosial ringlets, waving loose;  
Some, the rich tresses into graceful knots  
Had woven; and in golden net-work bound,  
Or strings of orient pearl. With jest, and laugh,  
Flushed cheek, and sparkling eye,—foot, light as air,  
And arm upflung, untired they trod the dance.

Great was the gladness over all the plain.  
The monarch looked around him, and rejoiced;  
Nor spared the wine-cup; but drank fearlessly;  
And in his proud heart said, "Am I not now  
A god amid these numberless? Who shall shake  
My throne eternal? who again shall dare  
Forbid the banquet, or the joys of love?  
Have I not feasted? have I not drunk deep?  
Have I not revelled 'mid my concubines,  
Even till the sun arose? and hath aught ill  
Fallen therefore on me? But, where now is he,  
The pale-browed prophet who, with insolent tongue,  
The banquet, and the water, and the fire,  
Bade me to dread: and evil still denounced,  
Unless unto his God, to *Israel's* God!  
Obedient I should bow, and pardon sue?  
Fool! madman! his own doom he knew not; mine  
Still less could he have known. From the dark pit  
His prescience saved not *him*: but I, the mocked,  
The threatened, live; and over all the earth  
Am great and glorious, even as a God.  
Away, away then with the idle dream  
Of the gaunt seer, famine and frenzy-bred;  
I'll think no more on't."

Thus the infatuate man—  
Even while the bolt was pointed at his head,  
Boasted, and scoffed at heaven.

Swift flew the hours;  
Loud grew the revelry. When, at length, he knew  
That every man had drunken plenteously,—  
The king bade criers go throughout the camp  
Commanding silence: and, when all was still,  
To others thus he spake. "Proclaim ye now  
And say, 'let every man throughout the camp,  
Take in his hand a vessel filled with wine;  
And stand attentive. What the king shall speak,  
Soon will be known to all: and, those same words,  
Let every man speak also: afterward,  
When the king drinketh, shall the trumpets sound,  
Signal thereof: and, then, let every man  
Drink likewise, and leave not a drop behind!"

Then, when the criers had his will proclaimed,  
And every man had taken in his hand  
A wine-cup, and in silence waiting stood,—  
Slowly uprose the king, and lifted high  
A brimming goblet. The resplendent bowl  
Seemed as one ruby,—for the Day-god now  
Was setting, and red glory on it poured.  
A moment he stood silent, and looked round;  
Then, with a strong voice, gave he out the word,—  
"EAT, DRINK, AND LOVE: NOUGHT ELSE  
IS WORTH A THOUGHT."

Promptly as speaks the thunder to the bolt,  
Thousands of voices echoed it: from them  
Catching the gay words, tens of thousands spake:  
Hundreds of thousands heard, and shouted them.

After they all had spoken, and were still,  
The monarch put the goblet to his lips,  
And the quick trumpets told it. Every man  
Raised then his cup, and drank, and left no drop.  
Then sat the king: but still his nobles stood,  
And all the host; for the musicians now,  
And singers, a loud hymn of praise began:  
"Sardanapalus, king of kings," they sang,  
"And lord of lords; sole ruler o'er all earth;  
The great, the terrible, the armipotent."

The monarch, on his couch reclining, heard;

And his vain heart more mad with pride became.  
As ceased the hymn, the multitude sat down ;  
Again filled high their cups ; and revelled on.

When now the sun had set, and twilight come,  
The rich pavilion, by unnumbered lamps  
Of gold, with oil of sweetest perfume fed,  
As with a second sunshine was lit up.  
Likewise the tents, where sat the lords and chiefs,  
With lamps of silver and perfumèd oil  
Shone brightly : but the soldiers, through the camp,  
Kindled huge fires, that far along the plain,  
And on the brazen gates, and walls, and towers,  
And palaces, a trembling radiance flung.  
Loud roared the countless fires : more loud the din  
Of all those myriads in their revelry.

As, flushed with wine, the king upon his couch,  
With eye half closed, reclined ; a timid hand,  
Touching his robe, he felt ; and, at his feet  
Kneeling, beheld Azubah. Her soft eyes  
With tears were filled ; her countenance was pale,  
And sorrowful : her trembling hands she clasped,  
And gently said, " My father ! " But the king  
Looked angrily, and cried, " What dost thou here—  
A public spectacle ! Thou knowest 'tis vain.  
Never shall he be free ! Away ! away ! "

Yet did she not desist : with streaming eye,  
And quivering lip, " Oh ! at the feast think thou  
Of him that sitteth lonely ! when thy heart  
Is glad, oh ! think of him that mourns ! " Yet still  
Unto her words the king would not give ear :  
But yet more sternly spake ; and stretched his hand  
To thrust her from him. " Hence, fond woman ; hence ;  
Lest that mine ire be kindled ; and he die."   
But on his hand she seized, and held it hard :  
" Hear me, O king, oh ! hear me ! Grant my prayer,  
Or my life, too, thou takest." And while thus  
She spake imploringly, and struggled still  
To hold his hand, she from his finger stole  
The signet ; and he knew it not ; so wrath  
And wine confounded him. Then, when his hand

He snatched away, and yet more sternly spake,—  
She rose; and, answer making not, retired :  
Mounted her chariot—to the prison flew—  
Showed the dread sign which none might dare resist,—  
And said, “ bring forth my father instantly,  
For the king calleth for him.”

Doubting nought,  
The jailer from the captive took the chains ;  
Rich robes put on him, that more fittingly  
In presence of the monarch he might stand ;  
And brought him forth.

The driver first dismissed,  
Rabsaris climbed the car; seized rein and scourge,—  
Looked for a moment in his daughter's face,  
Lost in amazement,—spake not—then drove on.

But, as they rode together, she the truth  
Told to her father; and he blessèd her.  
A little way, as through the northern gate,  
And to the plain, intent to pass, he drove;  
But, leftward turning suddenly, sped on;  
Through nearest western gate the city left;  
And o'er the bridge, rejoicing, urged his flight.

Within the camp, meantime, the revelry  
Yet hotter grew: wine, music, woman's smiles,  
Inflamed all hearts; and each to each oft said,  
“ Eat, drink, and love: nought else is worth a thought.”

Long had the sun gone down: upon his couch  
The monarch lay,—his eyes, with wine, and sleep,  
Heavy, and dim.

But now before him stood  
A damsel, beauteous as a flower of spring:  
A dulcimer was in her snow-white hand;  
And, as she played, a song of love she sang,  
That stirred, and melted him. Her gem-starred zone,  
As heaved and fell her bosom, might have seemed  
With smiles now brightening, darkening now with  
sighs.

An atmosphere divine, the breath of love,  
Like glory round the sun, encompassed her.  
Her face was radiant as the pearly cloud  
Of summer's dewy dawn: her hair like night,

When no star shineth. As she lifted up  
The dark-fringed curtain of her lustrous eye,  
'Twas like the glance of moonlight through swift clouds.  
Her voice was soft as cooing of young dove  
In a spring evening, when the nightingale  
Singeth alone; yet breathed voluptuously  
As the warm south, when flowers are in their bloom,  
And the rain softly droppeth. The king's soul  
Was melted at her voice: her lustrous eye  
She turned upon him; and his breast was flame.

But now, among the nobles and great chiefs  
With the king feasting,—a drear whisper ran:  
Gay hearts were troubled; anxious faces met;  
For, from the east, beyond the noisy camp,  
Came men who said, "far off, as if in air,  
Is sound like tramp of armies hurrying on!"

As spread the whisper, some turned pale; and some  
Smiled in derision: many toward the king  
Looked timidly; yet none dared speak to him;  
For still the damsel sang; and all his soul  
Was ravished by her beauty.

But, at length,  
Hurriedly flying through the astonished camp,  
Came a scared horseman,—from his courser leaped,—  
Up the pavilion stairs sprang at a bound,—  
With wild eye, like a maniac, glared about,—  
Then, as with death-shriek, cried "Break up! Break up!  
Eastward is heard a great host pressing on!  
The earth is shaken by their horses' hoofs."

Amazement then came over every man:  
All started to their feet: some, terror-blanced,  
Stood staring on their fellows: some, more bold,  
Went hurriedly,—bent low before the king,  
And told the tidings. Nought afraid was *he*:  
Was he not conqueror—king of kings—earth's lord?  
Were not Arbaces, and his rebel horde,  
Scattered like chaff, or slain? The Bactrians, too,—  
Were they not marching blindfold to the snare;  
To scourgings, bonds, and death? What should *he*  
fear?

With smile complacent, then, he answered them.

“ Think ye I heard not, clearly as yourselves,  
What spake yon foolish ? Of a verity,  
He whispered not. But ye his ignorance  
Know not as I. A host, indeed, may come ;  
But not as yet. The sound that hath been heard,  
Is but the night-breeze, roaring in the fires :  
They flare, as newly fed. Then, sit you down ;  
Fill to the brim your cups ; be high in mirth ;  
And vex the king no more, lest he be wroth.  
EAT, DRINK, AND LOVE : NOUGHT ELSE IS  
WORTH A THOUGHT.”

So he, and yet another goblet drained :  
Then lay him down ; and on the damsel fixed  
His hot and glazing eye ; and bade her sing.

But Salamenes the pavilion left  
With hasty step, and sprang upon his steed.  
Nebaioth, Jerimoth, and other chiefs,  
Quickly went after him ; and eastward rode  
Impetuously, that they the truth might learn.

Swiftly throughout the camp the rumour flew :  
Dance, song, harp, timbrel, mirthful sports, were stilled.  
Gay women, laughing boys, at once stood mute ;  
Gasped as they heard ; turned pale, and toward the  
gates,  
Speechless with terror fled.

More dark, meantime,  
And ghastly, grew the faces of the men,  
Who with the king yet sat ; for evil news,  
Aye worse and worse, from trembling group to group,  
In hurried whisper ran : yet their dread lord  
None dared again approach.

The wine-cup still  
Oft tasted he ; till soul and sense were dulled  
As in a dream : and even the damsel's voice—  
For yet she sang, though tremblingly, and faint,  
And blanched with awe—seemed scarce to move him now.

But, suddenly, far off, loud panic-cries,  
And the dread trumpet-scream—signal of flight,—  
Shot horror through all hearts. The wretched king  
Rose staggering, stony-eyed, with arms outspread ;  
A look like his who riseth from the grave.

The nobles and the captains also rose,—  
By the great terror so confounded all,  
That no man knew which way to look, or move.  
Louder and louder yet the tumult grew;  
With harsher, quicker blasts the trumpets screamed.

Anon, a nearer cry, a wild shrill yell,  
As of delirious myriads, rent the air;  
“The Medes! the Medes! the Medes!” From East  
to West,

From North to South, o’er all the camp it flew.  
They in the city heard: from street to street,  
From wall to wall, the cry of terror ran.

From the pavilion, lords and captains fled;  
And, with the fainting damsel, all alone  
The king was left. Yet, the first shock o’ercome,  
“Bring me my arms,” he stammered, “spear, and  
sword;

Shield, armour, chariot. I will wither them!”

But, bounding upward with a leopard’s spring,  
Nebaioth came, and caught him by the arm:  
“Haste, haste,” he cried, “thy chariot standeth nigh:  
Fly to the city; for the cup accurst  
Hath overcome thee; and no strength remains  
To bear thee in the strife. Nay—linger not;  
For, if the king be slain, Assyria falls.”

Yet speaking, with a vigorous arm he drew  
The tottering monarch: nor resisted he,  
For soul and strength were quelled. But, as he went,  
The damsel in a swoon upon the floor  
Outstretched he saw;—and, with thick utterance, said;  
“Take first the maid, and bear her to the car;  
Else will I not go with thee.” Speaking thus,  
Upon a couch he sank, and would not move:  
Nor heeded that the priceless regal crown,—  
Even as a peasant’s cap, flung carelessly  
From the hot brow,—had fallen to the ground.

Nebaioth, then, the maiden in his arms  
Lightly uplifted; with a rapid step  
The stairs descended; to the chariot climbed,  
And placed her safe within. As from a sleep,  
She wakened; gazed about her, and sat up.

Then to the king Nebaioth hurried back :  
 "Haste, haste, my lord," he cried ; " safe in thy car  
 The damsel sits ; but the crowd thickens fast ;  
 And, if we be entangled in the midst,  
 Ill may befall the king."

While yet he spake,  
 O'er all the sounds of tumult rising high,  
 A distant voice he heard, that through his soul  
 Sent shuddering : "'Tis the dreadful Mede !" he said ;  
 "The grave hath given him up to punish us !"

Yet to the king he told not what he heard ;  
 But with more eagerness still drew him on,  
 And with more anxious urging.

All his words,  
 To a deaf ear were spoken. Pale as death,  
 With slackened joints, glazed eyes, and quivering lips,  
 Feebly the monarch tottered ; muttering still,  
 "The banquet ! Ha ! the banquet ! Lo ! 'tis come,  
 The prophet's threat !—What said he ? ' Eastern  
 king,—

Lords, captains, armies—midnight revelry . . .  
 Chariots and horse come on them ! . . . Blood, like  
 rain ! . . .  
 Dead, thick as hailstones ! . . . Tempest then, and  
 flood . . .  
 Then earthquake . . . Fire . . . Destruction . . . Not  
 one stone  
 Upon another left ! . . . Flood . . . Earthquake . . .  
 Fire ! "

Still muttering thus, Nebaioth drew him on :  
 Into the chariot raised him ; sprang himself :  
 His right arm round him twined, lest to the ground,  
 Unaided, he might fall : to Dara then  
 Gave signal ; and the horses bounded on.

Continually, with voices lifted high,  
 They called to clear the way ; for, torrent-like,  
 The fear-struck myriads hurried toward the wall ;  
 Thick covering all the ground. With fires the plain,  
 As 'neath a crimson sunset, hotly glowed ;  
 And, as they onward moved, Nebaioth oft  
 Looked anxiously behind ; for still the noise

Of horse and cars, advancing, nigher came,  
And the pursuers' shoutings.

But the king

In a deep stupor sat ; nor uttered word ;  
Nor looked around ; nor aught appeared to see.  
Nor spake the damsel aught ; but, with her robe,  
Covered her face, and trembled, and bowed down.  
Still on they moved ; though slowly ; for the press  
Relaxed not ; and, 'neath horse, and chariot wheels,  
They feared their friends to crush. But louder, soon,  
And louder, rose behind them the dire din :  
And when, as they the nearest gate drew nigh,  
Nebaioth backward looked,—at hand he saw  
The lofty chariots, and the straining steeds,  
Like swift waves coming on ; and, over all  
High eminent, the tower-like form beheld  
Of the dread Mede ; and, over every sound,  
His strong voice heard, inciting to pursuit.

To Dara then he called ; “ On ! on ! lash on !  
Drive like the hurricane ! Call to clear the way,—  
For, close upon us the arch-rebel comes,  
Nor can the king resist.” Both then at once  
Shouted vehemently ; “ Make clear the way,  
Or be down trodden ! Get from out the way !”

While thus he cried, Dara the horses smote,  
That, like swift leopards darting on their prey,  
Forward they hotly bounded.

Through the throng,

Wide opening, they dashed on ; and cleared the gate.  
Glad was Nebaioth then ; “ The king is safe !”  
Joyfully cried he : but, even while he cried,  
An arrow struck the damsel in the neck.  
She spake not ; struggled not ; nor felt the wound ;  
But, stone-like, from the chariot dropped down, dead.  
A second shaft Nebaioth's right arm grazed ;  
Slightly the monarch wounded, and flew on.  
Roused by the smart, the king his head uplift,  
And opened wide his eyes ; but, instantly,  
In a deep stupor sank again ; nor knew  
Whence came the pain ; nor whitherward he went.

But the torn robe Nebaioth saw, and blood  
Down trickling ; and, when now they had advanced  
Short space within the city, thus he spake.  
“ Dara, the king is wounded, sore oppressed,  
The palace yet far off ;—I counsel, then,  
That rather to my house he should be borne :  
There—the leech summoned, and the sore bound up,—  
In quiet might he rest, and slumber off  
The accursèd wine-fumes. 'Vantage this, beside,  
That, should he rouse anon, and gather strength  
To mingle in the conflict,—to the gates  
Will he be nigher.”

Him the youth obeyed.

Then, when the car had stopped ; and to the house  
The monarch had been carried ; thus again  
To Dara spake Nebaioth : “ Keep thou now  
The chariot and the steeds within the court ;  
Lest enemies know the king is in the house :  
But, be thou ready, when the word shall come,  
To bring them on the instant ; for, even yet,  
May he go forth : send, therefore, for his mail,  
His shield, and arms, that all may be at hand.”

As thus advised, the anxious charioteer  
Did instantly : and, when the gates were closed,  
That no man from without the car might see,—  
He bade the grooms before the horses place,  
As harnessed yet they stood, corn steeped in wine.  
At every horse's head, a trembling groom  
Stood feeding him : and, after they had fed  
Abundantly, with hand upon the rein,  
Each stood in silence, waiting the command.  
Nigh to the chariot, with a restless foot,  
Walked Dara to and fro ; his bosom torn,  
With thoughts conflicting, as the dreadful roar  
Of havoc from beyond the walls he heard.

Meantime, upon a couch Nebaioth laid  
The helpless king ; his gorgeous robe took off,  
And searched the wound. Like a keen knife, the shaft  
Had lanced the arm, and still oozed forth the blood ;  
But injury was slight. A bandage then,

With tender hand, he bound upon the sore ;  
Disposed, for easiest rest, the passive limbs ;  
Then sat, to watch, and ponder. "What were best ?  
There to attend the waking of the king,  
And aid his going forth ? or speed to fight ?  
The soldier, not the nurse." Long time he mused ;  
But, by the thickening uproar of the field,  
Unbearably stirred at last, sprang sharply up ;  
Gazed for a moment on his senseless lord ;  
Called on the gods to shield him ; and passed out.

Yet, ere departing, he his sister sought,  
And briefly thus. "Beloved Rebekah, thou,  
With thy handmaidens, hasten to the king ;  
And silently keep watch. Quick messengers  
To Peresh have been sent : again I send ;  
Then arm me, and go forth. Yet, to what end !  
Surely we have the gods displeasèd much,  
Or not thus wrathfully would they have given  
Our myriads to the sword ! Farewell at once."

So speaking, on her cheek a kiss he pressed,  
And hastily withdrew ; his armour donned ;  
Snatched spear, sword, shield—went forth—on his mailed  
steed

Vaulted,—and, like an arrow, cleft the air.

Dense was the throng that poured within the gate ;  
And long he labored, ere, against its rush,  
A path he forced, and stood upon the plain.

Burst on him then a roar, as though earth gaped,  
To let out hell. Hither, and thither, rolled,  
Like battling waves along the howling beach,  
The fear-struck multitudes. For life, for life,  
Was all their struggle : honor, victory, now,  
Unthought of quite : for, by their long debauch,  
Enfeebled were they ; arms, or armour, none  
Had any man ; and terror withered them.

Within the angle of a jutting tower,  
Screened from the torrent of the fugitives,  
Nebaioth for a time, despairingly,  
The direful rout beheld ; and with his soul  
Thus questioned. "Sight of misery and dread !

Whither, oh whither shall I go ! how hope  
To render help ! Upon the timid sheep,  
Chased by the ravenous tiger, I as well,  
To turn and face their enemy, might call,  
As on this throng unarmed, and terror-struck.  
And, were my voice the thunder,—in this din,  
No man could hear me ! Shall I tamely, then,  
Stand, to behold the slaughter, and to die ?  
Or shall I not in thick of battle plunge ;  
And slay, ere I be slain ? Is this the night  
Predoomed ; and by strange prophets oft foretold ;  
When the imperial city, like a torch  
Extinguished, shall go out, and be no more ?  
And this, at last, the fell destroyer then ;  
The vanquished, the annihilated Mede ?  
Said not the men who came from long pursuit,  
' Arbaces is gone down into the pit !  
Thine enemies are scattered like the dust,—  
Like clouds of yesterday are gone for aye ?'—  
Falsely, then, spake they to Assyria's king,  
To lure him to destruction ? But, themselves  
Are, also, in destruction overwhelmed !  
Ah miserable ! how have we been lulled  
In hollow safety ! Our foundations we  
Have laid upon the earthquake's bed ; and cried,  
' Surely our walls shall stand for evermore !'  
On a smooth water have we sailed along,  
Even to the cataract's brink ; and, foolishly,  
Said to ourselves, ' let us lay down the oars,  
And toil no longer ; for our labor now  
Is over ; and the gentle stream will bear  
Our vessel pleasantly ; then, let us feast,  
And sport, and lay us down to sleep !' But lo !  
We have awakened midway down the abyss !"

Thus pondering, an armed horseman he beheld,  
Forth issuing ; and to meet him went ; for, now,  
He saw 'twas Jerimoth. The face was stern,  
Pallid, and anxious. Soon as he perceived  
Nebaioth coming, Jerimoth approached ;  
And, close to his ear, with voice uplifted high,—

For deafening was the uproar,—sharply thus :  
“ Why linger'st here ? the battle is not lost.”  
“ Lead on,” was the quick answer ; and, at once,  
Both horses spurned the ground. In his right hand,  
Each warrior bore a spear ; loose at his back,  
The shield was slung ; the sword was on his thigh.  
Then, as they rode, thus Jerimoth pursued.  
“ Their horse and chariots, first, like torrent-flood,  
Swept camp, and plain ; and toward the river chased  
Our unarmed soldiers : but, long after them,  
Breathless, disordered, came their infantry.  
With such as hastily had been equipped,  
Them to encounter, Salamenes flew ;  
And, near the Well of Giants, backward drove.  
To him I hasten now. By his command,  
I sped into the city, to make known  
Where conflict had begun ; and send quick aid.  
Ere long it will be here. The armouries all  
Are open thrown ; and they who make escape,  
Snatch weapons thence, and hurry back to fight.  
Our chariots, too, and horse, in multitudes,  
Are hasting to the contest. If awhile  
We can the onset of their foot resist,  
Our horse and chariots from the gates will pour  
Upon their horse and chariots in the rear ;  
And so divide their battle : but, meantime,  
Into the river myriads will be driven,  
Ere we can help ; and myriads by the sword  
Will perish ! Oh accursèd be this night !  
Accursèd our own folly ! And the king——  
What shall I say—If he hath sense to hear,  
How hears he the hell-chorus of this field !  
But word hath gone about that he is slain.  
Even as he passed the gate, behind him close,  
The chariot of Arbaces was beheld,  
Pursuing ; and his arrows flying thick.  
A shaft, 'tis said, hath wounded him to death.”  
“ Nay—for the king fear not,” Nebaioth said ;  
“ In my own house he resteth ; and his wound  
Is nought. His steeds and chariot ready wait

To bring him forth, when from his brain shall pass  
The stupor of the wine-cup. But, great gods !  
When, when shall pass away this night's disgrace !”

O'er the dead-sprinkled plain, as best they might,  
Hasting, and talking thus,—they saw, at length,  
With Salamenes, a great force of foot,  
In slow retreat, yet fighting valiantly.  
But, backward looking, they, with joy, beheld  
Assyrian horsemen likewise, and no few,  
Though all unordered, yet with aspect firm,  
Advancing to their aid. Nebaioth then ;  
“ Abide thou here the coming of the horse ;  
That to the onset in more fit array  
Thou may'st conduct them. I, meantime, will speed  
To Salamenes, and make known to him  
What thou hast seen, and what the help at hand.”

“ Wise are thy words,” said Jerimoth ; “ be it so.”  
Speaking, he turned. Nebaioth onward flew ;  
And to the Assyrian foot advancing, cried,  
“ Now, now, ye valiant men—put forth your strength :  
The field is not yet lost. Brave Jerimoth,  
With numerous horse, draws nigh : the king yet lives,  
And will come forth to victory. For your wives,  
Your children, and your parents, and your homes,  
Conquer, or nobly perish.”

Calling thus,  
Still on he flew ; till, in the thick of fight,  
Armed with a sword and shield alone, he saw  
The noble Salamenes ; by his voice,  
And valiant deeds, inciting to resist.  
Approaching him, Nebaioth from his horse  
Hastily leaped, and, with quick utterance, thus.  
“ The armouries are thrown open. As they 'scape,  
The soldiers thence snatch arms, and hurry back.  
The chariots, too, and horse, in multitudes,  
Are hasting to the contest. Close at hand,  
With many horse, even now is Jerimoth.  
But, wherefore, in this conflict perilous,  
Unmailed art thou ? Great prince, be wise as brave.  
Bethink thee, on thy fate Assyria's hangs ;

With thee we live, or die. Mount, then, my steed;  
 Haste to the city, and thine arms put on.  
 In my own house the monarch resteth safe,  
 And little hurt; but still with soul and strength  
 Crushed by the wine-cup: and to thee alone  
 Must all now look for help. Away, away!"

Breathless with toil, the prince no word replied;  
 But grasped Nebaioth firmly by the arm;  
 Looked in his face with melancholy smile;  
 Sprang on the panting steed; and rapidly  
 Rode toward the nearest gate. Nebaioth then  
 Ardently bounded to the battle's front,  
 And roused the soldiers' courage. Jerimoth  
 Came also with his horsemen furiously,  
 Breaking the Median ranks, and scattering;  
 So that a moment balanced seemed the fight.

But nothing now might long the foe resist:  
 For, every instant, with terrific cries,  
 And confident of victory, came on  
 Fresh numbers; that the Assyrians, overborne,  
 Again, though bravely combating, retired.

Meantime, the Median chariots, and the horse,  
 Terribly thundering, toward the river drove  
 Myriads, and tens of myriads, with great noise  
 And carnage inexpressible. The steeds,  
 Amid the heaps of trampled, and of slain,  
 Stumbled continually: the chariot wheels,  
 As in deep roads, were clogged. With pity filled,  
 Then cried Arbaces; "Trumpeters blow out,  
 To cease from slaughter." But, in that dire din,  
 The blaring trumpets were as infants' toys,  
 Blown in their sport: and, mad with victory,  
 For conquest yet athirst, reluctantly,  
 The soldiers ceased from slaying. On them still  
 Incessantly Arbaces called aloud;  
 To and fro riding: louder, and more loud,  
 Still blew the trumpets. When he could be heard,  
 And when both armies for a moment paused,—  
 Upstanding in his chariot, his strong voice  
 He sent abroad, and cried; "Cease now from fight:

And you, Assyrians, hear me, and fly not.  
Why should ye perish all? Let every man  
Who will the tyrant leave; and truly join,  
For life or death, in our most holy cause,—  
Pass now the bridge; and he shall be unharmed.  
Let every Mede make room, that they may pass;  
And let the men who hear me, in both hosts,  
Proclaim aloud my words, that all may know."

Then were the hearts of the Assyrians glad;  
And cheerfully from man to man were sent  
The tidings; and a loud acclaim ran on,  
"Long live Arbaces! may the tyrant fall!"  
While thus they cried, still toward the bridge they  
moved,

And every Mede made way. Arbaces, next,  
To Azareel thus spake: "Abide thou now,  
With all thy horse and chariots, in this place:  
And, when the Assyrians shall have crossed the bridge,  
See thou that none return. But, when I send  
Spearmen, and archers, who shall guard the pass,  
Then to the battle, with thy valiant men,  
Hasten thou back; for, haply, even this night,  
Into our hands the city may be given."

Thus having spoken, in the van he rode,  
And called aloud: "Now turn your horses' heads,  
And drive into the camp; for, in our rear,  
The foe will gather strength." Throughout the host  
Soon flew the word; and quickly all wheeled round.  
But Azareel, with horse and chariots, stayed;  
That, when the Assyrians should have passed the bridge,  
No man might thence return.

So these. Meantime,  
Through every gate that faced the northern plain,—  
Like the full spring-tide up a river's mouth  
Driving and roaring,—the Assyrians fled:  
And, in a counter current, also thronged  
From every gate, fast as they could be armed,  
Horsemen, and charioteers, and foot, all hot  
To plunge into the hurly of the fight.

Within the city was there uproar dire;

All voices were uplift, all feet astir.  
Along the northern wall, to light the field,  
And aid the fliers to escape, huge fires  
Were kindled, and ten thousand torches waved.

Meantime, his noble heart with grief oppressed,  
Across the plain, and through the crowded gate,  
Flew Salamenes.

In Nebaioth's house,  
Stretched on a bed, the helpless king he found ;  
And, close beside him, with a proffered cup,  
Which, with his trembling hand, he still repelled,  
Peresh, the good physician. Round the couch,  
Rebekah, with her handmaids, stood and wept.

When Salamenes entered, thus the king,  
With faint voice, but a kindling eye, began.  
"Why art thou here? Is all lost utterly?  
And hath the city then already fallen?"

To him the prince. "Thine enemies, O king,  
Not yet within the city have set foot;  
Nor is the battle lost. To thee I come,  
To know if still thou can'st not issue forth,  
And from destruction save it. For, thy helm,  
Seen in the fight, would be a fiery star,  
To lead the soldiers on." To him the king :  
"The accurs'd poison of the grape-juice yet  
Doth blind mine eyes, and stupify my brain :  
As by a leaden load, my limbs are pressed ;  
And my heart's blood is cold. With thee alone  
Would I have speech, and briefly, that again  
Thou may'st go forth."

Rebekah, at these words,  
With Peresh, and the handmaidens, withdrew.  
To Salamenes then thus said the king.  
"The glory of this mighty Nineveh  
Is passing like cloud-shadow. On her throne,  
No child of mine shall sit. Her giant walls  
Shall be cast down ; her stately palaces,  
Be heaps of blackened ashes : slaves her sons ;  
Her beauteous daughters shall be concubines !  
In my brief dream, since on this couch I lay,

Thus hath it surely been revealed to me.  
Never again can I her armies lead ;  
For shame sits heavy on my head, that thus,  
In pride and foolishness, I have brought down  
Destruction on us. In the hour of fight,  
Mine arm hath not been feeble, nor my heart  
Afraid : but, in the time of revelry,  
Blind have mine eyes been ; and my thoughts all  
vain !

But thou art not the slave of thy desires ;  
And all thy thoughts are wise : thou, rather, then,  
Go forth ; my armies lead ; my people save !”

But Salamenes knelt beside the couch ;  
Pressed close the extended hand, and softly said ;  
“ Let not the king too harshly blame himself ;  
Nor let his soul be utterly cast down.  
From hard adversity men wisdom learn ;  
And he that hath his fault sincerely owned,  
Hath half redeemed it, too. The weight, O king,  
Will from thy limbs be taken ; and thy heart  
With a new life will glow : and thou wilt yet  
Go forth unto thine hosts, and lead them on ;  
And, at thy presence, will the battle turn.  
Rise then, O monarch of Assyria, rise ;  
Put on thine arms—go forth—thy people save !  
But, ere too late, arise : for, now, *indeed*,  
With aspect black and terrible lowers Fate !”

Sardanapalus, at these words, arose,  
And upright sat. Death-pale his countenance was ;  
Trembled his limbs ; his eyes were wild and bright.  
He spake not yet ; but pointed toward the camp,  
And listened ; for terrific was the din.  
At length thus hoarsely,—“ Hence ; put on thy mail,  
And speed unto the plain. I too, anon,  
Will arm, and issue.”

Joyful at that word,  
Then Salamenes kissed the monarch’s hand,  
Arose, and went his way. To Peresh, next,  
Thus saith the king ; “ Now give me of thy cup,  
That strength may come to me. That done, retire ;

For I would be alone." So he, and drank :  
 Then lay him down ; and fain would have reposed.  
 But, with a heavy grief his soul was crushed,  
 And sleep fled from him. On the prophet's words  
 He thought, and said ; " the banquet hath indeed,  
 To me more fearful than the battle been !  
 Oh that I had but listened to his voice !  
 Then had I 'scaped this misery ! Fool ! oh fool !"

Meantime, his armour Salamenes donned ;  
 Sprang on his horse, and hurried toward the field.

Passing an armoury, whence came soldiers forth,  
 Equipped for combat,—he the queen beheld,  
 Within her car, nigh the great central gate ;  
 And, as the soldiers hasted by, she called  
 Continually, and said ; " Be strong ; fear not ;  
 Fight for your agéd parents, and your wives,  
 Your sisters, and your children, and your homes !  
 Turn not your backs on this rebellious horde !  
 Let not your sons be taken for their slaves ;  
 Let not your beauteous daughters, and your wives,  
 Become their servants, and their concubines !  
 Die rather, nobly die ! Call on the gods,  
 Call on the gods in battle ; and your arms  
 Shall have the strength of giants ! Valiant men,  
 On to the fight ! Let not your foes rejoice  
 In this their cunning : let not your great city,  
 This mighty Nineveh, the queen of earth,  
 Be made the den of rebels, or wild beasts !"

With words like these, incessantly she cried  
 Unto the soldiers ; and their hearts made strong.

When Salamenes this beheld, and heard,  
 More nigh he drew ; stretched out his hand, and said ;  
 " My sister ! my dear sister !" She to him,  
 " Brother ! my dearest brother ! But, alas !  
 Why art thou not in battle ? And oh ! where,  
 In this dread hour, is *he* ?"

She faltered ; wrung  
 Convulsively her hands ; and on her face  
 Pressed them, as if on her *his* shame had fallen.

Then Salamenes ; " Wounded, and borne down

By sore distemperature, the king, as yet,  
Refrains from combat ; but, in little while,  
Will rise, and arm for fight. Yet, seek not thou  
To stir him ; for thy voice will be as wine  
To strengthen every man that heareth thee.  
Not utterly is yet the battle lost.  
Our foot, and horse, and chariots, toward the plain  
Are crowding fast ; and thither now haste I."

Then to the soldiers, as they hurried forth  
From out the armoury, he called aloud :  
" Let every man that fighteth upon foot,  
Speed toward the Well of Giants,—there the foe  
His foot hath also : but let every horse,  
And every chariot, toward the river fly ;  
For there the horse and chariots of the Mede  
Rage unresisted. Now, let every man  
That these things heareth, cry them out aloud,  
That all may know. And thou, my sister, send  
To every gate, within the northern wall,  
And every armoury, to make them known."

Thus having spoken, he threw up the rein,  
And toward the field rode forth. Him, as he passed,  
All knew ; and called down blessings on his head.

In the great square of Jupiter, there stood,  
Around the giant statue of the god,  
Altars, and many priests who sacrificed,  
And called upon his name. Their heads were bare,  
Their faces pale, and withered up with fear.  
A moment Salamenes paused, and cried,  
" Ye holy men, what tokens ?" Nought they spake ;  
But lifted up the hand, and shook the head.

On then he rode ; and, having passed the gate,  
Nigh to the wall a numerous throng beheld,—  
Chariots, and horse, and foot : but strange dismay  
Upon them, that they knew not what to do.  
Him soon they saw, and shouted out his name ;  
And he, with cheerful voice, to animate  
And order them began ; when, at full speed,  
Came riders, with wild looks, who cried aloud ;  
" The chariots and the horsemen of the Medes

Have in the river driven our myriads ;  
And now are this way hasting ; trampling down,  
And slaying all before them."

With strong voice,  
Then Salamenes cried, " Fear not, fear not !  
But hear my words ; and look that all obey.  
Let every charioteer and horseman, now,  
Skirting the wall, straight toward the river speed ;  
And on the rear of the audacious foe,  
Break like a thunder-bolt. But, full in front,  
Let all the archers and the slingers go  
To meet them ; and drive on them deadly hail.  
Now, let all men who hear me, cry aloud,  
Proclaiming to the rest."

When this was heard,  
And by a thousand voices spread abroad,—  
The horse and chariots toward the river sped ;  
The archers, and the slingers, with strong hearts,  
Went forward on the foe. Then yet again  
Cried Salamenes, " Let the spearmen, now,  
And those who fight with sword, or battle-axe,  
Haste toward the Well of Giants : rageth there  
Fierce conflict ; yet, let every man be bold,  
And stand unto the death. Here will I stay,  
And unto all send help." With cheerful voice,  
The soldiers answered, and went swiftly on :  
But, by the gate of Nisroch he remained ;  
And, as the chariots, and the horse, and foot,  
Came forth, he ordered and encouraged them :  
And captains to the other gates he sent,  
Who in same way should stand, and give command.

Still, everywhere, before the exulting Medes,  
Weak was the Assyrian's arm. Like men from sleep  
Roused suddenly, their senses were confused ;  
Their strength was wasted by long revelry.  
Nebaioth, with the foot ; and Jerimoth,  
With all his fiery horsemen, rapidly  
Backward were driven ; for, in a mighty stream,  
The Median and the Bactrian foot poured on,  
Flooding the camp. And, when the Assyrians saw

That, with the Medes, the Bactrians had conjoined,—  
More sank their hearts; and they cried fearfully;  
“We are betrayed! Fly to the city, fly!  
The Bactrians with the Medes are 'gainst us come!  
Men of Assyria, to your city fly!  
Fly to the city, and shut fast the gates!”

Thus crying, thousands turned their backs, and fled.  
And, of the horsemen also, many turned,  
And toward the city flew,—crying aloud,  
“The Bactrians with the Medes are 'gainst us come!  
Fly to the city, men of Nineveh,  
And shut the gates! we are betrayed! fly, fly!”

When Salamenes,—standing nigh the gate  
Of Nisroch yet,—this outcry heard, his heart  
Sorely was troubled. Flinging up his arms,  
He looked to heaven, and said. “All ruling gods,  
Our fate is in your hands! This night, perchance,  
Your doom is that we perish! Yet despair  
Is impious; for your counsels who can know?  
Who then shall dare forestall them? Hear me, gods!  
If past forgiveness we have angered you,  
Then must we fall; and prayers, and tears, are vain.  
If but to punish, not destroy, ye stretch  
The arm of wrath—in mercy stay it now;  
For great our misery is!” Dropped then his hands;  
His head sank down, and he groaned bitterly.  
But, strength and heart recovering soon, again  
Erect he stood, and resolutely thus.  
“Yet, come what may, man in his own hand holds  
Honor, or infamy. To live, or die,  
He may not choose; but, life with infamy,  
Or death with honor, in his choice remains,  
And who can waver? Come ten thousand deaths,  
Rather than ages of ignoble life!”  
He said, and, flinging to his horse the rein,  
Vehémently into the battle rode,  
Plunging, as in a torrent.

But, meantime,  
Among the Assyrian foot, the Median cars  
And horse drove irresistibly,—like wolves

Amid the sheep, rending and scattering them.  
Nor, when the archers, and the slingers came,  
Could they before the shock a moment stand :  
For, in the van of fight Arbaces rode ;  
And terrible as Death his aspect was.  
Ahab, not less, and Abdolonimus,  
And every Median captain, furiously  
Drove on them : and Belesis still cried out,  
Foretelling victory, and the city's fall.

Among the Assyrian force, there stood a man  
Of Astaroth, named Anak : for his size,  
And strength prodigious, o'er a thousand spears,  
The captain chosen. But, the mighty bulk,  
A little heart contained. Above all men,  
Did he Belesis hate ; for that the first  
Was he, against the king to counsel war.  
When, now, the chariot of the priest he saw  
Nigh toward him coming, frenzy filled his soul :  
His spear he hurled ; next, from a fire plucked forth  
A huge brand, fiercely blazing, and, on high  
Lifting it, aimed and threw. With sullen roar,  
And trailing smoke and flame, it cleft the air ;  
Full in the faces of the horses struck,—  
Scorching their eyes ; staggering, bewildering them ;  
That they ran backward ; suddenly wheeled round,  
And, with harsh jar, the chariot overthrew.

Rejoiced the Assyrians then ; and every man,  
Example taking, from the fires snatched brands,  
And hurled them 'mid the enemy ; that, now,  
Terror and great confusion covered them.  
The steeds drew back,—sprang upright,—leaped aside,—  
Struggled, and shrieked : cars were together jammed,—  
Axles snapped short,—poles broken,—wheels torn off ;  
And tumult inconceivable arose.

Then more and more the Assyrians were rejoiced :  
Arrows, and stones, darts, lances, in thick shower,  
They poured among their foes ; and ceaselessly  
Hurled flaming brands ; with bitter mockery,  
Laughing to scorn their enemies sore perplexed.

But now the soldiers, on both sides, plucked brands,

And flung them at their enemies. Anon,  
Tent after tent caught fire, and streamed aloft ;  
The clouds grew red before the sudden flame ;  
The air was hot, and smoky, like the breath  
Of furnace ; and the roar was terrible.

As when, at night, on ocean long becalmed,  
That, 'neath the downright burning of the sun,  
Hath gendered shining creatures numberless,  
And sleeping fires phosphoric,—a strong wind  
Awakes, and lifts the waters,—near, and far,  
On every curling wave the flashes ride ;  
With every roll, and every back recoil,  
Shaking their sparkling lamps, that all the deep  
Seems kindling into flame,—so vast, so bright ;  
So tossing restlessly its fires about ;  
So in continuous motion, to and fro,  
Rising, and falling, seemed the battle-plain.

But, not long time could the Assyrians boast  
Their chance-given triumph ; for the horse, anon,  
Of their strong enemy, with doubled rage  
Burst in among them : and the chariots, too,  
Fast as they freed themselves, came thundering on.  
All frantic were the coursers ; for the fires,  
Before, behind, around, flared fearfully :  
Yet, furiously the drivers shouted, smote,  
And 'mid the throng impelled them,—that, as mire,  
The mass was trampled. Hideous shrieks arose,  
Howlings and cries : and, as the scattered fires  
And blazing tents went out, a darkness fell  
O'er all the field, that dimly every man  
Beheld his enemy.

Belesis now,  
Who from his fall unharmed had 'scaped, and rode  
With Necho, the Arabian, in his car—  
Seeing the darkness gather, and the force  
Of the Assyrians in confusion dire,—  
Toward the bright city pointing, cried aloud,  
“ Behold ! upon his wall, the enemy  
Hath kindled fires, to guide you on your way !  
Drive on, then, to the gates ! linger not here

To slay these miserable ! To the gates,  
Speed cars, horse, foot ; for, haply, even this night,  
Into our hands may God the city give !”

Arbaces also, with a mighty voice,  
Cried, “ Smite your horses now, and force the way !  
On to the gates ! the gates ! This night, perchance,  
The city shall be ours.” As *they* cried out,  
So every captain, every soldier cried :  
And, like some mighty current of the main,  
Changing its course, gulf-drawn, or turned by rocks,  
The Median host ’gan wheel,—when, suddenly,  
On their right hand, and in their rear, arose  
Sound of new onset : for the Assyrian horse  
And chariots that had toward the river gone,  
Exultingly drove on them. In the gloom,  
Not well they saw their foe ; nor them the Mede  
Aright could see,—their numbers and their strength  
To tell : but furiously together rushed  
The opposing hosts ; and dreadful uproar rose,  
And tumult inexpressible.

But now,  
When those who from the wall o’erlooked the plain,  
Beheld the fires put out,—then also they  
Their fires extinguished ; for they said, “ Behold,  
Our soldiers hope in darkness to escape !”

So in a thick obscure both armies stood,  
Mingled together ; and no man might know  
Which way to move ; and no man dared to strike,  
Or speak ; for, whether enemy, or friend,  
Beside him stood, he knew not. Gory War,  
As struck by sudden apoplexy, slept.  
No sound was, save the blowing of the steeds,  
The restless foot, and champing on the bit ;  
The clash of armour, as dropped momentarily,  
Some wounded warrior ; and, of all that host,  
The thick laborious pantings ; the dull creak  
And grind of iron wheels together locked ;  
The groan of pain, the long, deep gasp of death.

## BOOK THE SIXTEENTH.

BUT, in a little while, as passed the smoke,  
And to the gloom the eye grew reconciled,—  
Slowly did War from his deep torpor wake :  
And, when the Medes, near the yet smouldering mounds,  
Huge piles of fuel saw,—with eager haste  
They 'gan rekindle them : but this withstood  
The enemy ; and, forthwith, round every fire,  
Quickly the contest thickened. So fared these.

Meantime, the Assyrians, who had crossed the bridge,  
Stood on the farther bank, and cast their eyes  
On that strange conflict. In the hearts of some,  
Was joy for their escape. They looked to see  
The downfall of Assyria's tyranny ;  
Expecting, with the morrow's light, to stand  
Enrolled among her conquerors. But no few  
Were natives of the city : they their eyes  
Turned on it mournfully ; and on their homes,  
Their wives, their parents, and their children thought.

Of these was Tartan,—o'er the royal guard  
Chief captain. Of the royal blood was he ;  
Faithful, and noble, brave, and well beloved.  
But three days was he wedded ; beautiful  
His gentle spouse ; and in his inmost soul  
Did he adore her. By the press borne on,  
He had crossed the bridge ; but, while the cry arose,  
“ Long live the Medes ! may the proud city fall !,”—  
His voice had lifted, and the boon refused,

By treason to be bought. Yet, urged along  
By that dense tide of men, no power had he  
The life to offer, which he scorned to hold,  
So purchased,—in his own despite thus safe.  
On the great city casting now his eyes,  
Tearful and dim, “No! no!” he said; “come death,  
And blessed come, far rather than stained life!  
'Gainst thee, thou glorious city of my birth,  
Never can I the ingrate sword uplift!  
Be this arm withered, rather than enact  
The foul, unnatural deed! No terms have I  
Accepted of the rebel; for, by force  
Was I driven hither; and with honor, then,  
May strive against him. And oh! where art thou,  
My best beloved, in this dreadful hour?  
How is thy gentle soul made desolate!”

Thus thinking, by the river's bank he stood;  
Now toward the city, now the battle, looked:  
But, when he saw the fires extinguished all,  
And that a silence suddenly had fallen,—  
Within himself he said, “The contest now  
Surely is ended; and, until the dawn,  
There will be rest. If but this numerous throng,  
Here standing idle gazers, could be armed,  
And led again into the field,—even still  
Might we have hope of victory.” Toward the bridge,  
Where yet was gleam of torchlight—by the Mede  
So ordered—next he looked, and inly said;  
“Surely they cannot at this distance see;  
For night is thick about me.” Then he stripped  
His gorgeous festive mantle: to the gods  
A silent prayer put up; a blessing called  
On his loved wife; and in the deep stream plunged.

In darkness he the swift and turbulent wave  
Did buffet: but his youthful limbs were strong,  
His heart resolved: the river he crossed o'er;  
And safe, though breathless, stood upon the bank.

Then from its moorings he a boat unloosed;  
Leaped in it; seized the oars; and rapidly,  
Again the river crossed. Unto the bank

As he drew nigh, his plashing strokes were heard ;  
And numbers toward the boat went eagerly.

Leaping on land, before the crowd he stood ;  
His arms uplift, attention to invite ;  
And, with low tone, thus spake. " In this obscure,  
Few see ;—perchance none know me. Yet 'tis fit  
Ye learn with what authority I speak.

Prince Tartan, captain of the Royal Guard,  
Is he who now commands you. Silent stand ;  
And mark me heedfully ; then, 'mid the throng  
Go some of you ; and unto all make known  
The thing that must be done. Boats numerous lie  
Beside the farther bank. Let, then, each man  
Who crosses, one of those unloose,—return,—  
And a full load take back ; till every boat  
Shall ply the stream, and every soldier 'scape.  
But cautious be ; and whisper, if ye speak.  
And let none strive for precedence ; but still,  
The nearest, first embark. One hot, loud word  
Might bring the foe upon you, and quick death.  
Landed,—straight toward the royal armoury  
At once make speed ; arm,—and in order wait  
Till I shall come to you."

That said, again  
Into the boat he sprang ; and, after him,  
Those nearest,—till he signed, no room for more ;  
And thrust it from the bank.

Arrived, in haste,  
As they had been commanded, every man  
A boat unloosed ; recrossed ; and, with full load,  
Unto the city side returned anew.

Some to the gates advanced, and called aloud  
Upon the watchers. Then the portals wide  
Were opened ; and the fliers went within.  
Thus all the boats were loosened : through the night,  
Went to and fro ; and every man escaped.

Nor, by the Median guard beyond the bridge,  
Aught was this noted ; so were eye, ear, thought,  
To the dread battle chained immovably.

But, not by all were these things unobserved.

Rabsaris, when the city he had left,  
At great speed onward drove : till, having reached  
The house of one in whom he might place trust,—  
And shades of night now falling rapidly—  
He lighted from the chariot ; on the door  
Struck hurriedly : and, when the man came forth,  
Besought him that, till break of day, he there  
Might, with his daughter, tarry.

Cheerfully,  
Was he made welcome. He took then the steeds  
From out the car, and to the stable led :  
With water sparingly, with corn upheaped,  
Their wants supplied ; then to the house returned ;  
Took food, and wine ; and lay him down to sleep.

But slumber came not : he arose, erelong,  
Restless, and anxious ; and, forth looking, saw  
The far-off city, and the spacious camp,  
Starred with its countless fires. While yet he looked,  
Lo ! a great sound arose, shrill cries of fear,  
And trumpets harshly screaming. In amaze  
He listened ; and, again, o'er all the din,  
A wild cry heard, as of a perishing host.

Now more and more he marvelled, and thus said ;  
“ What may this token ? Hath the scattered Mede  
Gathered again his strength ? or new revolt  
Outbroken ? Or the Bactrian, hath *he* turned  
His arm against the city ? ” Then he went,  
And called his daughter to him, and their host ;  
And bade them also to look forth, and say  
What this might mean. But nothing could they judge,  
And greatly were bewildered ; for the din  
Yet louder waxed ; and, soon, they might descry  
Chariots careering, and the flash of arms.  
Rabsaris to his host now turned, and said ;  
“ Come thou with me. Let us ascend the car,  
And toward the city quickly take our way,  
That we may see ; for surely some great thing  
Hath come to pass.” So they girt on them swords ;  
Brought forth the car, and horses ; and, straightway,  
Toward the bridge hastened.

But Azubah rose,  
And from the house-top looked forth anxiously  
Toward camp and city. Fearful for the king,  
Then in her heart she said : " If evil now  
Be coming on him, never will I fly ;  
But on the morrow will return to him :  
And that which for my father I have done,  
He will forgive ; and I to him may be  
A comforter, when he hath none beside."

Meantime, Rabsaris, speeding toward the bridge,  
While yet far distant, saw, or thought he saw,  
Thereon the flare of torches ; and, beyond,  
A glimmer, as of arms. What this might be,  
He marvelled, yet went on ; though slower now,  
And with more heedful look. South of the bridge,  
Along the river's bank, at length, he saw  
What seemed a crowd of men : but silent all ;  
Or, in the uproar of the distant fight,  
Unheard. The rein then suddenly he drew,  
And looked again, and listened. A low hum  
Of voices seemed to rise ; and more and more  
Was he confounded. But, in whisper now,  
Trembling in every limb, his host thus spake :  
" Let us turn back, or mischief may befall ;  
For, if they see us, verily we die."  
Yet nought Rabsaris feared, and thus replied :  
" Abide thou in the car : if any man  
Against thee come,—ply scourge, and save thyself :  
But, if no evil threaten thee, remain  
Till I return ; for surely to the men  
Will I draw near, and hearken."

Having said,  
He from the chariot stepped ; and cautiously  
Went onward toward the throng. When nigh them  
    came,  
He saw that all the people were unarmed,  
And some great sadness on them. Then he walked  
Boldly among them ; and, to all he heard,  
Anxiously listened ; yet himself spake not,  
Lest any man should know him.

When he, now,  
Had gathered from their talk what things had chanced :  
And when he had the multitude espied .  
Escaping by the boats,—he hasted back  
Unto the car, and to his host thus said :  
“ The Medes and Bactrians, with a mighty strength,  
Fell on the Assyrians, feasting, and unarmed ;  
And are o’erwhelming utterly. Those men  
Who crowd the river’s bank,—on promise given  
That they the tyrant would no longer serve,  
But to the Medes vow fealty,—from death  
Were spared, and sent unharmed across the bridge :  
Yet, faithlessly, into the city now,  
By thousands, are they stealing. Drive thou, then,  
Across the bridge,—for there the Median horse  
And chariots watch—and tell it them aloud.  
No man of these will see thee. I, meantime,  
Will pass the river with the multitude,  
And to the city speed ; that I may know  
Where most its weakness is ; for, even this night,  
Perchance it will be ours. Haste, then : fear nought.  
Nor for my safety fear ; for, in the gloom,  
And in this robe attired, by not a man  
Shall I be known.” Thus saying, and reply  
Awaiting not, with dauntless air he went,  
And mingled in the press : the river crossed ;  
Passed through the gate ; and hurriedly sped on.

But, when the man whom he had counselled thus,  
A little distance toward the bridge had gone,—  
He checked the steeds, and to himself thus said :  
“ Now, wherefore in this danger should I go ?  
I am a man of peace, and love not strife :  
I, also, of much substance am possessed ;  
Have sons, and daughters ; and yet many years  
May hope to live : but, in this dangerous thing  
If I do meddle, I may be cut off ;  
And in a moment lose, what all my life,  
From morn till night, I labored to obtain.  
Gladly would I the haughty one behold  
In her pride humbled ; but, is not the breath

Within my nostrils, of more worth to me  
Than weal, or woe, of all the earth beside?  
And wherefore, then, should I this peril brave?  
Even let the hosts contend. To whom He will,  
God can the victory give; and needeth not  
My serving. Safely, then, will I look on;  
But meddle not, where I can nothing gain."

So he; undreaming that his cowardice,  
From the death-stroke would save Assyria's king.

Then round he wheeled the horses, that for flight  
He might be ready; drew the reins; stood up;  
And, backward looking, toward the river, now,  
Now, toward the roaring plain, gazed fearfully.

Rabsaris, meantime, in the city roamed,  
Boldly, and swiftly. Everywhere he heard  
Sounds of great terror: all the streets were thronged,  
With frenzied multitudes: gray-headed men;  
And tottering children, by their mothers led;  
Young boys, and aged women; trembling girls;  
Pale virgins, bright and beautiful as morn,  
And delicate as bud of tenderest flower,—  
All in this night of terror were abroad.

With rapid step still hurried he along,  
All things observing; but the lightning's speed  
Longed to command; that, in one point of time,  
He everywhere might be. Close by, at length,  
A mailed steed he beheld; and, tending him,  
A groom, who for the rider waiting stood.  
Forward then sprang he; seized upon the rein;  
And, when the man resisted, and cried out,—  
With strong arm flung him headlong to the ground;  
Leaped on the horse; and rode off furiously:—  
Yet, as he went, still warily marked all;  
And no man questioned him.

But now, at length  
Before Nebaioth's gateway, he beheld  
The flaming chariot, and the milk-white steeds,  
Of the Assyrian monarch; and, around,  
A throng of horsemen, in bright panoply,

Who seemed awaiting him : and, by the talk  
Among the people who stood watching them,  
He learned that on the king had suddenly come  
A grievous sickness ; yet that resolute  
Was he to rise anon, and lead the fight.

Then sped he swiftly ; through the crowded gate  
Of Ninus forced at length his difficult way ;  
Flung up the rein, and, at his utmost speed,  
Along the battle-field the horse impelled.

Meantime, among the Assyrians was there rout,  
Fearful, and deadly. Also of the Medes  
Perished no few ; for, in confusion dire  
The hosts were mingled ; and, on neither side,  
Could voice of leader be at distance heard.  
The fires, too, that had newly kindled been,  
Again burned low, and over all the field  
A dark red radiance cast.

Near toward its noon  
Was now the night. Arbaces looked around  
On the entangled mass, and thus aloud :  
“ Oh that, before the glorious Light-god comes,  
Our banners on the haughty wall might wave !  
Could all the host at once, both see, and hear,  
And follow in one body to the gates,—  
Surely the city in our hands would fall !  
But, in this burning gloom, few eyes can see  
Where I would lead them ; in this uproar wild,  
Few ears can hear me. Mighty god of war !  
Send us a flood of lightnings, as a torch  
To lead us to the gates ! and give my voice  
To speak with more than thunder ; that all ears  
At once may hear me.”

Ceasing, he moved on  
Toward where, with cavalry, and numerous cars,  
Fought Ahab,—him against the gates to urge.  
But, when short distance he had gone, behold !  
Before him the pavilion of the king,—  
Like to a purple cloud appearing, first,  
But, soon, aright discerned,—and, on its floor,

Furiously warring, an Assyrian force,  
With arrow, sword, spear, dart, and battle-axe,  
Against the Bactrian foot defending it.

This when Arbaces saw, he cried aloud,  
"Bring hither fire! Strike in the red-hot brands  
Your spear-points: bear them boldly, and fling up;  
And we will turn this lurid to great light.  
Fire, fire, bring fire!" So crying, from his car  
At once he leaped; and, with his huge lance poised,  
Went forward, running swiftly.

On the floor

Of the pavilion, the gigantic form  
Of Anak stood, nigh to the royal stairs;  
And, with a monstrous mace, brass-headed, smote  
All who to climb them strove. His lips with foam  
Were covered, and his eyes shot living flame.  
But, toward himself, when, with death-threatening spear,  
He saw Arbaces bent,—his whole huge strength  
Up-gathering,—'gainst him, as from catapult shot,  
He launched the ponderous mace;—with head out-  
stretched,  
And starting eye-balls, watched its flight, and fall;  
Then, fear-struck, turned, and fled.

Straight to its mark,

Rapidly whirling, booming through the air,  
Held onward the grim Mischief. Its sure aim  
Arbaces noted; lightly stepped aside,  
And the full crush escaped: yet 'scaped not all;  
For, on his buckler's rim, with such dire clang,  
Came down the whirling brass, that, jarred to the bone,  
His strong arm dropped. Nor ended there its rage:  
Rebounding from the earth,—so forcefully  
A youth beloved and honored by the Mede  
It smote, that, as by lightning, he fell dead.

Arbaces saw, and dreadful was his wrath.  
Vengeance resolving,—up the cedar stairs,  
At a bound he sprang; and through the terrified throng,  
O'erthrowing all that stood within his way,  
Pursued the coward foe. Then Anak saw  
That flight was vain; and, turning, drew his blade,

Crying aloud, " Upon him every man !  
He is Arbaces, the arch-rebel. Smite !  
Cut him to pieces ! give his flesh to dogs !"

Like hounds upon the lion, at these words,  
'Gainst him the Assyrians turned. Them heeding not,  
Arbaces drew his sword ; on Anak flew,  
And, as with thunderbolt, smote him. Crashed the mail ;  
Out burst the life-stream ; and, like tree hewn down,  
The whole mass fell together. On all sides,  
As in same point of time, flashed then his blade ;  
His shield dashed numbers down : his voice, and look,  
Stiffened the arms that were uplift to strike.  
All shrank before him, and unharmed he passed.

But, when again upon the ground he stood,  
He from a soldier took a red-hot brand,  
Borne on a spear ; and close beside the planks  
Thrust, and there held it. When this thing they saw,  
Again the Assyrians hotly on him flew,—  
Spears and darts hurling. Some, yet madder, leaped  
Down the stairs headlong ; and, with sword and axe,  
Began more close assault. But, with his shield  
Before him held, he stood, and called for fire :  
And, as the soldiers brought, and cast it down,  
He with the spear still thrust it to the planks :  
And, when to snatch it thence a foe drew nigh,  
Forward he sprang, and slew, or wounded him.  
Of Bactrians, many to assist him came ;  
But, of Assyrians, to oppose, far more :  
So that the strife and tumult now waxed great ;  
And the hot brands were scattered, and burned not.

But, in a fire at hand, one blazing log,  
A burthen for a man of common strength,  
Arbaces saw ; and, by the unscorched end,  
Grasping it, called aloud to clear the way :  
Then, with full swing of his herculean arm,  
'Gainst the pavilion cast it. Roaring up,  
Like to a meteor streaming,—it burst through ;  
Among the startled thousands flaming fell ;  
And, in few moments, silken roof, and sides,  
One sheet of fire became ; that, for brief time,

Flooded the camp with splendor. Headlong down  
The scared Assyrians hasted. To his car  
Ascending then, Arbaces raised his voice :  
“ Now toward the gates at once—horse, chariots, foot !  
The city shall be ours. Cry out aloud,  
That all may hear it, ‘ to the gates ! the gates ! ’ ”

Then did the horsemen and the charioteers,  
Send forth their voices, and urge on their steeds :  
Throughout the Median, and the Bactrian force,  
The cry was echoed, “ to the gates ! the gates ! ”  
And a great rush began.

But bravely yet,  
Foot, horse, and cars, the Assyrians fronted them.

Rabsaris, when short distance on the plain  
He had advanced,—before him, to the right,  
The Median cars beheld ; and, towering high  
Above them all, Arbaces. Him to meet,  
Swiftly then rode he ; and, when nigh at hand,  
Cried out, “ I am Rabsaris. Harken now,  
Arbaces ; and the city shall be thine.”

In wonder, on that haggard face, awhile,  
Arbaces gazed, and spake not : but, at length :  
“ In that gay robe attired, I knew thee not.  
Come up into the car.” With loud voice then,  
Unto the charioteers who near him rode,  
“ Hold hard your steeds,” he cried : “ till word be given,  
Stir not a man.”

Rabsaris eagerly  
Leaped to the ground, and in the chariot sprang.

Freed from his rider, the loud-neighing horse  
Tossed his proud head, and shook his curling mane,—  
Wildly looked here, and there—and bounded on.

Then to the Mede in haste Rabsaris thus ;  
“ ‘ Scaped from the dungeon,—needs not to tell how,—  
Straight from the city come I—Mark me then.  
The tyrant will to battle. I beheld,  
Close to Nebaioth’s gate, his steeds and car  
Awaiting him ;—for, with the fumes of wine,  
Sore drunken hath he been ; but gathers strength.  
If, then, with horse, or chariots, through the gate

Of Nisroch thou wilt haste ; and also send  
Chariots, or horsemen, through the gate of Palms,  
That they may go about, and bar escape,—  
Betwixt you he must fall. But, come what may,  
Return will easy be ; for uproar wild  
Is over all the city ; and no man  
Knows what to do, or what to leave undone.”

Arbaces listened, and thus, doubtfully ;  
“ We thought thee dead, Rabsaris ; and, in truth,—  
So dire the ruin by thy madness wrought,—  
Scarce pitied thee. Ill Fortune dogs thee close !  
How know we if, again with thee colleague,  
The inexorable Fate, pursuing thee,  
May not again crush us ?”

“ Be merciful !”

Exclaimed Rabsaris,—“ madness was it all !  
Stark madness ! But mine eyes again are clear ;  
My Reason is in sunlight. Trust me then.”

For answer, on his charioteers, the Mede  
Cried joyfully ; “ To Abdolonimus  
Haste, some of you ; and bid him quickly here,  
With five score chariots only. Even but now,  
I passed him in the rear, and called him on.  
Haply he heard me not.”

At once went forth  
Two chariots from the group ; but all the rest,  
Even as they stood, remained : and they who heard,  
Wondered, and knew not what might be to come.

Not long they marvelled ; for, the Arabian king  
Arriving soon, to him with loud voice cried  
The Mede, that all might hear ; “ Haste thou away ;  
And through the gate of Palms at swiftest drive,  
Straight toward the fountain of Semiramis.  
North of the square, before Nebaioth’s house,  
The chariot of the king thou wilt behold,  
Waiting to bring him forth. But if, perchance,  
He should be gone,—then onward to the square  
Of Jupiter drive rapidly ; and, thence,  
Right toward the gate of Nisroch. Like thyself,  
With five score chariots only, I, meantime,—

The gate of Nisroch entering,—toward the square  
Of Jupiter will speed ; and onward, thence,  
Straight toward the fountain of Semiramis.  
Betwixt us thus the king shall surely fall.  
Now get thee gone ; and drive on steadily.  
And let no voice be lifted, lest the words  
Betray you. I, awhile, will here abide,—  
For mine the shorter course,—that both at once  
May fall together on the astonished king ;  
And slay perchance, or capture.”

“ Though ye fail,”

Cried out Rabsaris, “ your return is safe.  
The city, wheresoever I have been,  
Was filled with women only, aged men,  
And children ; and with those that bear not arms.”

Nodding for answer, Abdolonimus  
Called to his charioteers ; and they flew on.

Next, to Rabsaris spake the Median king :  
“ For thee, my friend, befits not, mailed in silk,  
That on this perilous errand thou should'st go.  
Mount then some car ; that to the battle's rear  
Thou may'st be borne ; and safely there abide,  
Till morning rise ; or till the strife be done.”

Angrily came the answer. “ Never ! no !  
Thou dost me wrong, Arbaces. What foul act  
Hath stained my name, that, like a frightened girl ” . . .

There stopped he ; for a chariot, rapidly  
Right toward them driving, came. The charioteer,  
Standing, and leaning backward, with both hands  
Drew at the reins. Nigh to the Median car,  
The steeds at length were stayed ; and heavily  
The warrior fell to earth. Arbaces knew ;  
And to assist him hastened : but the hand  
Of death had touched him : open stood his eyes,  
Glaring, and meaningless ; his jaw had dropped.  
A moment on him looked the Mede ; sighed deep ;  
Then to Rabsaris thus. “ The chance of war  
Comes to decide our difference. Malachi  
Hath fallen ; and his vacant chariot now  
May bear thee to the city. Speed thee then ;

Take thou his armour, helmet, sword, and shield ;  
And gird thee for the combat."

Instantly

Upstarting, from the car Rabсарis leaped :  
In the bright mail, rejoicing, clad himself ;  
Girt on his thigh the sword ; upon his head  
The helmet fixed ; braced on his arm the shield ;  
And in the chariot sprang. Arbaces then  
Stood upright, looked around him, and cried out :  
" Now toward the Nisroch gate : but silently :  
And, as ye see me do, so do ye all."

That said, he sat ; and soon, in ordered line,  
Car following car, at slow pace all went on.

No enemy opposed ; since, to their left,  
The battle chiefly raged ; and distant view  
Was none : for now again the light grew dim ;  
The blaze of the pavilion had sunk down ;  
And a red gloom once more was o'er the field.  
So, gently, and in silence, they moved on.

But, nigh the gate when now Arbaces drew,  
And saw armed soldiers issuing ; and that hope  
Of quiet entrance could be none,—at once  
Upstood he ; looked behind him ; and cried out :  
" Now, now, lash on your horses, and burst through."

In the same moment every scourge was raised ;  
And every horse-foot spurned the trembling ground ;  
And, with a rush as of a mighty wind,  
Right toward the gate they flew.

Their coming on,

The enemy saw : some lifted spear, or dart,  
Intent to oppose ; but most, with breathless haste,  
Turned back, and fled. Like a swift mountain stream  
O'erflooded, bursting through a narrow chasm ;  
With fury uncontrollable, and noise,  
Making the rocks to tremble ;—through the gate,  
So irresistibly Arbaces burst.

Twice twenty cars alone the portal cleared ;  
For, pierced to the heart, a courser dropped down dead :  
Down with him dropped his fellow, struggling hard :  
The chariot, sharply checked, with loud clash fell ;

And blocked the way ; that, with a sudden shock,  
Car against car throughout the line was driven :  
All were stopped short ; and great confusion rose.

Arbaces saw not, heard not,—such the roar  
Of leaping wheels, the iron clang of hoofs,—  
And, with but two score chariots, onward flew.

The square of Jupiter he passed, where still,  
Praying and sacrificing, stood the priests :  
Before the ancient, dark, gigantic pile  
Of Ninus shot ; and, soon, the fountain reached,  
Named of Semiramis. While distant still,  
Horsemen and cars, before Nebaioth's gate  
Awaiting, he beheld ; and a great flare  
Of numerous torches : but his eagle eye  
Told him the royal car was empty yet.  
Upstanding then, and looking back, his arm  
He lifted, and cried " Hold ! hold hard your steeds ! "

Quickly the cars were stayed. Arbaces then,  
Alighting, backward walked ; and, taking place  
Where best throughout the line he might be heard,  
With slow, clear utterance spake. " Too soon we come ;  
The tyrant is not there. But, mark me now.  
If, as I hope, he shall at once be slain,—  
No needless conflict would I with the rest ;  
But wheel round instantly, and backward speed,  
Our missing friends to join : then, with them haste,  
The Arabian king to meet : for all our strength  
Tasked may be now, through any northern gate  
A pass to force. Meantime, in silence wait :  
And, when we come upon them, 'gainst the king,  
Him only, hurl your spears. "

That said, he turned :

Again into his car sprang eagerly ;  
And, on the royal chariot, his keen eye,  
Like steadfast lightning, fixed. So long he watched,  
That the loud-panting, restless steeds, at length,  
Drawing calm breath, stood still : but yet the car  
Empty remained : and, from the battle-plain,—  
As from a storm-lashed ocean, 'gainst the cliffs  
Angrily thundering,—when, with louder din,  
Borne on the breeze, the horrible uproar came,

Impatient grew he; and with anxious thoughts  
Sore troubled. "All the night through might we watch  
Unflaggingly; yet miss at last our prey;  
While, meantime, the grand crowning victory-stroke  
Might have been stricken."

To Prince Geber then,  
At last thus spake he. "Safely till the morn  
Here might we bide; for they who hurry by  
Regard us not; and yonder cars and horse,  
All looking for the king, behold us not:  
But even one hour from this great battle lost,  
May be as loss of kingdoms. On his bed,  
Doubtless the drunkard lies, and cannot stir.  
No longer then—Ha! look! he comes! he comes!  
The lightning helm betrays him! Onward now—  
Yet gently, till within short arrow-flight  
We shall have neared them."

Geber heard; the steeds  
Touched lightly; and the chariots all moved on.  
Due distance gained, "Away!" cried out the Mede;  
"Heed not their numbers; but like thunderbolt  
Break in upon them!" At those stirring words,  
Geber flung up the reins; raised high the scourge,  
And smote the coursers; right against the horse  
That girt the chariot driving.

Pale, yet wroth,  
The monarch, at that instant, to his car,  
Giddy and faint, was climbing; his hot steeds  
Impatient to be gone. With ears erect,  
They, first, the sound of coming wheels had caught;  
And, as it neared them, from the toiling grooms,  
Snorting, and rearing, struggled to get free.  
The king, yet mounting, caught the sound, and paused,  
Anxiously listening: to himself then said:  
"Who from the battle comes so furiously?  
Can all be lost?—Or be the tidings good?"

Even in that moment, urged to hottest speed,  
The chariot of Arbaces, 'gainst the horse  
Round the king's chariot, drove. Astonished, they  
Sprang, as they might, aside. Free space thus left,

Right toward the royal car flew on the Mede;  
And, passing, hurled his lance. The marvelling king,  
Just seated, like the rush of vulture's wing,  
Close to his ear its sullen whirring heard;  
But the foe knew not: for, like flash of light,  
The chariot passed him. With sharp hiss flew next,  
As he shot by, the spear of Azareel:  
Touched on the monarch's shoulder—wounding not:  
And, the next moment, driven with madman's rage,  
The lance of stern Rabsaris, on his helm  
Glanced, and held onward. But that sight, and sound,  
The horses of the king no more would bide:  
From the scared grooms who held them, with wild  
    bound,  
Away they sprang; and every other spear,  
Hurled at him, missed the mark.

From their amaze,

Erelong recovering, the Assyrian horse  
And chariots fiercely 'gan the Medes assault:  
But, when they saw Arbaces 'mid the foe,  
Madder their terror, and their fury grew;  
And, with loud cries, each on the other called  
To slay him. He, meantime, round wheeling, saw  
The chariot of the king in rapid flight;  
And, pointing with his spear, cried, "Look! he flies!  
Let him not 'scape! Away, away! lash on!"

Then every Median charioteer, his steeds  
Turned hastily. Arbaces, at their head,  
Stood in his car, and shook his beamy lance,  
Death threatening. From the terror of his arm,  
And from his look, the enemy shrank aside;  
And swift as flight of eagle he shot by,  
The king pursuing. Close behind him went  
His chariots also: against *them* the darts  
And spears flew thick: yet harmless they escaped.

Then, when the Assyrians saw the enemy pass,  
Each on the other called, and furiously  
Rode after them; still crying as they went,  
"The Mede! the Mede! the Mede! O'ertake and  
    slay!"

Unequalled were the coursers of the king,  
 And all pursuit defied. He, looking back,  
 His enemy in full career beheld;  
 The charioteers upstanding, and the scourge  
 Plying unceasingly : but, gladder sight !  
 Behind them close, Assyrian cars and horse,  
 Hotly pursuing. Onward as he went,  
 All knew him ; and a thousand voices cried,  
 " Long live the king ! long live Assyria's king !  
 Long live Sardanapalus, king of kings !  
 The king to battle goeth ; and our foes  
 Shall surely fall before him !" But, while thus  
 They clamored, the alarm behind him grew :  
 Voice after voice arose, " The Mede ! the Mede !  
 The Mede is in the city ! Haste ! Pursue !  
 Pursue, and slay ! The Mede ! the Mede ! the Mede !"

Still fled the king,—his soul with terror filled ;  
 His brain confused, as in a fearful dream ;  
 That, what to do, he knew not. Doubtfully  
 Self-questioning then, he said : " Shall I thus fly  
 Ingloriously before a rebel foe ?  
 Or shall I turn, and meet him ? But my limbs  
 Are feeble ; my heart faileth. 'Gainst him now  
 If I go on, surely shall I be slain ;  
 And all my glories, all my loved delights,  
 Will perish like a vapour ! But what then !  
 Is not my sole dominion o'er half earth  
 Threatening to pass for ever ? And, dethroned,  
 What were life worth to me ? No—let them go  
 Together, or together still be mine !  
 This arm indeed is feeble ; but my foes  
 Are few ; and fate may yet be merciful."

Determined so, to Dara he cried out,  
 " Wheel round the chariot ; for, against the Mede  
 I will go on ; and slay him, or be slain."

While self-communing thus, at rapid speed  
 Through the great square of Jupiter he drove.  
 And, when they saw him, from the multitude  
 Went up a joyful clamor. Then cried out  
 The priests who at the altar sacrificed,

"An omen! lo! an omen! Still the king  
Shall triumph; and the city shall not fall!"

That hearing, the dense throng of men sent up  
Yet gladder cries: and when, to curb the steeds,  
And turn the chariot, Dara now began,  
Thickly they gathered round: but loud he called,  
"Stand from the way; the rebel is behind:  
Make room, that 'gainst him may the king go on."

The king cried also, "On him, every man!  
Ten thousand golden talents unto him  
That slays Arbaces!"

While he spake, the throng  
Turned, and beheld, like a dark running fire,  
The chariot of the Mede; behind it close,  
The rebel cars; and, in a hot pursuit,  
The Assyrian chariots following, and the horse.

The Mede, now drawing nigh, again stood up;  
And shook a glittering spear. To the bright glare  
Of torches, and the altar fires, his arms  
Shone vividly: his face was like fierce flame.  
The trembling throng on every side shrank back:  
Nor was the king unfearing; for too well  
The strength of that terrific arm he knew;  
And felt his own was feeble. Yet he stood,  
Poising his spear, and in his heart thus prayed:  
"Great god of battles! whoso'er thou art,  
Give me to send this scourge unto the pit;  
And to thy name I will a temple build  
That shall o'erlook the clouds."

As thus he prayed,  
Meteor-like, the terrible Mede drew nigh;  
His great spear glittering, his left foot advanced,  
His body leaning back, that with the blow  
He might spring onward. Terror then, and rage,  
Seized on the king: his lance, with all his might,  
He hurled; but lifted instantly his shield,  
The answer dreading.

Full upon his breast  
The weapon struck the enemy; but dropped down,  
Innocuous. In the self-same moment flew,

With force as by some mighty engine cast,  
The Mede's gigantic lance. The king's broad shield,—  
As yet but half uplifted, and askaunt,—  
With clangor horrible near the rim it struck ;  
Pierced not, but 'gainst him dashed it, and flew by ;  
Till, on the flinty pavement ringing loud,  
Fire streaming as it ran, it passed from sight.

Shuddering, the monarch saw. Down dropped his  
arm,

Stunned by the blow ; his brain was in a whirl ;  
His tongue was speechless ; dazzled were his eyes ;  
And, reeling, he sank back. Then, instantly,  
The spear of Azareel his breastplate smote :  
Passage found not ; but, with an angry ring,  
That jarred him to the heart, struck, and glanced off.  
Up sprang the king ; another lance caught up,  
And aimed for vengeance ; but the foe was gone.

Next came Rabsaris. Him,—in armour strange,  
And all unlooked for,—might the king have seen,  
Yet known not ; but that his pale, quivering lip,  
Bright, burning eye, and deeply-muttered curse,  
Like to a tiger's growl, betokened him.  
Amazed the monarch saw ; and wrathfully  
His lance hurled at him. But, with deadlier rage,  
Baring his hard-closed teeth, Rabsaris threw ;  
And, throwing, forward sprang, till from the car  
Well nigh he tumbled. Half way on their course,  
The spear-shafts touched ; and from their aim both  
glanced.

The weapon of Rabsaris, on the leg  
Grazed Dara ; but the spear-point of the king,  
One of the horses of his enemy smote,  
Lancing the nostril. Hastily drew back  
The wounded courser, shaking his arched neck,  
Snorting, and struggling hard, as from the pang  
To free himself. His frightened fellow, too,  
Drew back ; and suddenly the car was stopped.

The chariot also of the king was stayed ;  
For Dara,—by the javelin keenly stung,—  
Convulsively starting, sharply jerked the reins,—

Turning the horses and the car aside,—  
And, harshly grating, wheel 'gainst wheel was driven;  
Shocked—and stood fixed.

With yell of fierce delight,  
Rabsaris, like a panther on his prey,  
Sprang in the car of the astonished king,  
And grappled with him. In one hand, with clutch  
Rapid as stroke of tiger's paw, he seized  
The gilded band that underneath the chin  
The helm secured; and, with the other, sought  
To draw his dagger. By the bony fist  
That pressed against his throat, nigh suffocate,  
The king, unaided, speedily had fallen;  
For now the weapon in his enemy's hand  
Was lifted for the stroke: the neck was bare:  
"This for my daughter!" cried the frenzied chief,  
And drove the dagger. But, in that small space  
Between the blow's commencement, and its end,  
Upon the falling arm so strongly smote  
The spear of Dara, that the iron nerves  
Relaxed; the hard-clenched fingers lost their hold;  
The dagger, bloodless, dropped. To frenzy fired,—  
His left hand still against the monarch's throat,—  
Rabsaris, with a look like some wild beast  
Maddened with hunger, when his prey is snatched,—  
To Dara turning, shrieked. "Ah, wretch accursed!  
Who in a moment robb'st me of the fruit  
Of years of toil, and anguish, worse than death!  
Thy bones be gnawed by wolves! thy soul go down  
Into the bottomless pit!" While yet he spake,  
To draw his sword he strove; but the stunned nerves  
Obeyed him not; his hand hung motionless.  
In wrath then to his charioteer, "thou fool!  
Out with thy sword, and strike!" But other thoughts  
Possessed the driver. With uplifted spear,  
Dara confronted him; Assyrian cars  
And horse were speeding onward. With loud voice,—  
While he drew back the steeds, the wheels to clear,—  
Then to Rabsaris called he; "Quick! Return!  
Or perish instantly." Rabsaris saw

That all was vain, and, cursing bitterly,  
Sprang to his seat again.

Confused, and wild,  
Grew now the struggle ; for the Assyrian horse,  
And cars, came on ; and, in the self-same time,  
The Median chariots also, which, at length,  
With labor hard had passed the gate ; and all  
In conflict undistinguishable mixed.

Arbaces, when his friends he first beheld,  
Rejoiced, and with a glad voice called them on ;  
For now he deemed assuredly the king  
Must perish. But, when round his car was wheeled  
To go against him, lo ! an iron wall  
Of chariots, and mailed horse, encompassed him ;  
And a thick multitude, with spear and dart,  
Prepared to cast. Yet still, with terrible voice,  
His warriors leading on—right in the midst  
He drove ; and none before his face dared stand.

But soon the Assyrians, with fast-gathering force,  
Hovered around, and hemmed them in ; that seemed  
Destruction must o'erwhelm them. Ne'ertheless,  
Still furiously they fought, and many slew :  
But, likewise of themselves, no few were slain ;  
And all with toil grew wearied. Steeds fell dead ;  
Cars were o'erthrown ; and many a valiant heart  
'Gan sicken with despair. Arbaces still  
With stirring call emboldened them to fight ;  
" Have courage yet, for aid is drawing nigh : "  
Yet to himself continually he said,  
" Why lingers the Arabian king ? if soon  
He come not, surely shall we perish all ! "

But Abdolonimus, meantime, in strife  
As deadly, labored long. For, when the gate,  
By none resisted, he had passed ; and thought  
Still unopposed to hold upon his way,—  
Upon a sudden toward him coming, lo !  
A warlike multitude, in close array,  
Orderly marching on. The myriads these  
Who, led by Tartan, had the river crossed,  
And armed themselves for fight. Yet, on he must ;

For path by which to shun them was there none,  
Save by retreat. Beneath the flickering glare  
Of torches,—from the windows, and house-tops,  
Waved to and fro,—their spears, and brazen helms,  
Gleamed brightly; nor, as yet, of the long train  
Was seen the end; that, what their strength might be,  
Could no man tell.

Paused now the Arabian king;  
Stood up, looked back, and called to stay advance.  
The charioteers behind at once drew rein,  
And all stood still. Communing inwardly,  
Then thus he questioned; “What now may this mean?  
Said not Rabsaris, ‘your return is safe:  
The city, wheresoever I have been,  
Was filled with women only, agèd men,  
And children, and with those that bear not arms.’—  
Who, then, are these? But, whosoe’er they be,  
Retreat, or conflict, waits us. Shall we turn?  
Or shall we drive among them, and burst through?  
Surely most deadly will the struggle be!  
Nay, haply, all may perish! for, indeed,  
Great is the multitude that cometh on.  
But if, ourselves to save, we now turn back,  
Then may Arbaces perish; and, with him,  
The heart of all our host! No! let us on!  
In God place trust; break through, or nobly die!”

Resolving thus, he raised his arm, and cried;  
“What say you? Ye behold the enemy:  
Shall we turn back, by flight to save ourselves,—  
Godlike Arbaces leaving to his fate?  
Or shall we drive among them,—force the way—  
Or bravely fall; an honorable death,  
To a base life preferring? Perish he  
That would the vile alternate rather choose!  
Upon them, then; and let the tyrant fall!”

He ceased; and the loud cry of onset rose.  
Then every charioteer his horses smote;  
Home drawn was every bow; and every lance,  
On high was lifted. Foremost went the car  
Of the swart king himself. Swift as the wind

His coursers. Standing as he flew, his voice,  
Like a shrill trumpet, raised he, and cried out,  
"Get from the way, or die!"

Before that rush,  
The Assyrians feared to stand: to right, and left,  
Hastily fled they back: but, as he passed,  
Spears, darts, and arrows, shot. Behind him close,  
Came every chariot, flying rapidly.  
But men, and steeds were slain; cars overthrown;  
And a dire struggle rose.

Then, turning back,  
The Arabian king, with all who had gone through,  
Again amid the Assyrians fiercely drave;  
Beneath their horse-feet trampling them: and still  
Upon his warriors called he, and their hearts  
With courage filled, that through the gory press,  
Though slowly, and with toil, and sweat, and blood,  
They forced, at last, their way. The steeds with foam  
Were covered, and the axles were dyed red.

Meantime, Arbaces, with his valiant few,  
Held on the desperate contest; hoping still  
That Abdolonimus swift aid would bring;  
And that the tyrant, even yet, might fall.  
Against the car-girt chariot of the king,  
Arrow, and dart, and spear, strongly he drove,  
Till all were spent; but, in the rock and roll  
Of that rough sea of conflict, on the mark  
Struck none: and him the monarch shunned; for still  
He felt his arm was feeble: 'mid his horse,  
And chariots, therefore, he secure remained,  
And urged them to the contest.

But, when now  
No arrow, dart, or spear, Arbaces found  
Remaining to him,—worse than vain he deemed,  
The struggle to prolong: to Geber then,  
With heavy heart, thus spake; "Turn round the steeds:  
Too surely Abdolonimus hath fallen;  
And, if we 'bide, we also shall be slain."

Then on his warriors he called out aloud,  
Bidding them follow. They, at his command,

As best they might, 'gan from the press emerge :  
But, while the horses Geber yet wheeled round,  
A brazen javelin on his helmet struck,  
With force terrific, that at once he dropped  
Headforemost to the ground. When that was seen,  
The Assyrians a great din of triumph raised,  
And on the Mede called out deridingly ;  
For now the masterless horses, in great fright,  
Ran backward, and the reins were on the earth.

With fury terrible then Arbaces burned :  
Leaping from out the car, he lifted, first,  
And in it placed, the senseless charioteer :  
His shield, and ponderous battle-axe, took forth ;  
And, with a shout appalling as the roar  
Of a roused lion, on the enemy sprang.

They, terrified, before him shrank aside,  
Or fell beneath him. Horsemen from his path  
Fled hastily ; and charioteers their steeds  
Lashed, to escape the sweep of his dread axe.  
On, on, still toward the king right on he forced,—  
Hewing his dreadful way. But, as he went,  
They who before him fled, behind him came ;  
Horsemen, and chariots, with an iron wall  
Girding him in,—that fate inevitable  
Seemed settling o'er him. In that moment rose  
A cry of onset, " Abdolonimus !"

The Assyrians heard, and saw,—and in their souls  
Felt withering terror ; for, they doubted not  
The army of the conquering Medes was nigh ;  
The eternal city lost !

The welcome voice  
Arbaces heard ; and, with a burst of joy,  
Shouted in answer,—toward the tyrant still  
Fighting his desperate way. Then terror fell  
On the yet feeble king : and, when to fly,  
His captains urged him,—with a trembling hand,  
He gave the signal ; and the car flew on.

Short distance had he fled, ere toward him came  
Horsemen in full career. He stayed his course,  
Ill news expecting. Sharply they drew rein ;

And Zadok, leaping from his steed, advanced,  
 And cried unto him. "Let my lord the king  
 Go instantly upon the plain. More fierce  
 Than fire the foe doth wax. Assyria's hosts  
 Tremble and fly before him. Oh, great lord!  
 Hasten then instantly, and strengthen them;  
 Else must the city fall; for, with the throng  
 Of fliers, all the northern gates are choked."

Sore trouble then upon the monarch came,  
 And in his heart he said; "On every side  
 They compass me about! This very night,  
 Perchance, the sceptre of Assyria's kings  
 Shall be reft from me; the great city fall!  
 Then let me also perish! On the plain,  
 And in the sacred city, death invites.  
 If from the gates I go,—by some vile hand,  
 Even like a peasant-churl, may I be slain  
 Ingloriously; no chance of sweet revenge,  
 To savour the death-draught: but, by the hand  
 Of yon dread homicide in fight to fall,  
 Not ignominious quite,—for king he is,  
 Though rebel; and, in valour, like a god,  
 To rule the battle: and, should fate decree,  
 In the same hour, *his* end; and by this lance,—  
 The bitterness of death would sweet become,  
 And I could die rejoicing. 'Gainst him, then,  
 Will I go back; and slay him, or be slain."

Resolving thus, to Dara he cried out;  
 "Turn round the chariot. Not upon the plain  
 Will I go forth, ingloriously to fall;  
 But the great rebel meet;—by him to die,  
 Or him, perchance, to slay."

Unwillingly,

Dara the car wheeled round; and the king rose,  
 With hard grasp on his spear—burning to strike.

But, where the Medes had stood, was now clear room;  
 Nor, by the torch light, and the altar fires,  
 Saw he one car, remaining of them all.  
 Great was his wonder: but, when Zadok still  
 Conjured him; and his captains also spake,

Exhorting; boldly then again he cried;  
"Once more, then, on! Arbaces now hath fled!  
Surely the strength we dreaded, was not nigh,  
Or he had still pursued. After him now,  
Horsemen, and chariots! Drive him from the walls!  
Or capture him—or slay! But, for myself,  
I will go forth; and with my people stand;  
Or with them fall!—Ten horse, two cars, alone,  
With me come on:—all else, back in pursuit!"

As ordered, was it done. Dara wheeled round;  
And toward the field, with such scant train, the king  
Hurried impetuously.

But not to flight  
Had turned Arbaces. He, when first the king  
Hasting to shun him, he had seen,—cried out  
Exultingly; and to his chariot ran,  
Eager to mount, and follow. On the seat,  
Ruling his steeds, he Jeroboam found,  
The Hyrcanian; for a grievous sickness yet  
Hung on prince Geber,—though to sense returned,  
And in the chariot sitting. Like to one  
Drunken with wine, his head hung heavily;  
His arms drooped strengthless, and his eyes were closed.

Upspringing then, to Jeroboam cried  
The joyful Mede, "Haste,—lash the horses on;  
The tyrant yet shall fall." But, while he spake,  
Came Azareel, crying aloud, "Stay! stay!  
Arbaces, I implore thee go not on  
In mad pursuit of what thou ne'er canst reach,—  
Thy safety risking, and the lives of all!  
Our steeds are wearied; but the king's, like stags  
Fresh from their lair. And, should'st thou overtake,  
What hope of good? Our weapons all are spent;  
Our strength sore wasted: succour can be none;  
But foes may gather numberless. Pursuit  
Is death: in wise retreat is life, and hope  
Of a great victory yet. Bethink thee well,—  
Here lingering longer, what our chance to escape;  
What hope of 'vantage! All the Northern gates  
Must now be closed against us: and our foes,

Like a roused hornet's nest, ere long will swarm,  
And sting us to the death."

"Enough, enough!"

The generous Mede replied: "Thou teachest me  
My folly; and I thank thee. Let him go!  
Not less the city shall before us fall;  
His throne shall be cast down!" A moment still,  
Even like a lion whom his prey hath 'scaped,  
Toward the yet flying king his eyes he turned;  
Then stood, and cried, "Now every man alight;  
And from the earth snatch arrow, dart, and spear,—  
For thick they lie around—lest, all unarmed,  
We meet opposal: toward the gate of Bel  
Then on,—but slowly; that our panting steeds  
May gather breath; and lest the insolent foe  
Should boast we fled before him."

At the word,

All ran, and gathered weapons: then arose;  
And on together moved, firmly, and slow.  
Arbaces led them; while the gazing throng  
In silence saw them pass; and lifted not  
An arm against them. But, when all were gone,  
Loudly the people cried, deriding them;  
And after them their idle weapons cast;  
And of their valour boasted.

Meantime on,

Calmly awhile, the Median warriors moved;  
Nor opposition found: but when, at length,  
Behind them far the clamor of the throng  
Had ceased; and of pursuit no sign appeared;  
Then to their horses they flung up the reins,  
Shaking the scourge, and with a cheerful voice  
Encouraging. To the rebounding wheels,  
The streets resounded, and the hoofs' thick clang.

## BOOK THE SEVENTEENTH.

MEANWHILE, upon the plain raged uproar dire :  
In terror everywhere the Assyrians fled ;  
The exulting Medes pursued them. 'Midst of all,  
Conspicuous chiefly, shone Belesis now ;  
Crying continually, " Behold the hour  
Is nigh at hand ! the everlasting walls  
Shall be thrown down ! the tyrant shall be slain !  
The fetters from the nations shall be reft !  
Drive on your enemies then, and trample them.  
The eye of God beholds us. His dread voice  
Hath on the wicked city spoken doom !  
His arm to her destruction is stretched forth !  
On ! On ! this night, perchance, her fate shall come !"

The king, meantime, as from despair itself,  
New strength and courage gathering, to the field  
Once more went forth,—his kingdom and his throne,  
To save, resolved, or nobly with them fall.

Through the loud echoing streets, as toward the gate  
Of Nisroch he drave on,—dense throngs he met,  
Flying distractedly. But, when his car  
Was seen ; and the small force that with him came  
To go against the rebel,—then fell shame  
Upon the fugitives, and they turned back.  
And still, as spread the cry, " Behold the king  
Is going forth to battle," all who fled,  
Stopped instantly ; and 'gan to turn again :  
So that with him, at length, a mighty host,  
Chariots, and horse, and foot, together moved.

These things beholding, more the king was cheered ;  
And strongly he called out ; " Haste to the men  
Upon the northern wall. Bid them upheap  
Fires numberless, and countless torches lift,  
That a great light may be upon the plain.  
And, as ye go, cry out, that all may hear,  
' The king is coming forth. Let every man  
Be brave, and fear not ; for the rebel yet  
Shall be cast down, and trodden under foot.' "

Then all who heard him, raised a mighty shout ;  
Proclaiming what he said : and when the men  
Upon the wall had heard, they, too, lift up  
Their voices, and to them upon the plain  
Cried out, " The king to battle cometh forth :  
Be brave, and fear not ; for the rebel yet  
Shall be cast down, and trodden under foot."

Then speedily they kindled up the fires ;  
And every agèd man, and every boy,  
And every woman on the wall, held forth  
A torch bright flaming ; so that o'er the field  
Was there red light, as of the setting sun.

But not at once went forth the king ; for yet  
Unordered were the fliers ; and new strength,  
Horsemen, and cars, were gathering to him still.

At length the word was given, and all moved on.

Nigh to the gate, the chariot of the queen  
Still waited ; and, upstanding, as they passed,  
Still to the soldiers she called stirringly :  
" Think on your wives, your children, and your homes !  
Your agèd parents, and your tottering babes,  
Cry out to you ! When ye lift up your swords,  
Call on the gods for aid : and turn not back ;  
But nobly conquer, or with honor die !  
Oh ! not in vain your blood will stain the ground !  
Even as a precious sacrifice, will heaven  
Receive the smoke thereof ; and on your foes  
Bring vengeance ; on your children, and their sons,  
Ages of blessing bring. Go, brave men, go !  
Go forth to victory, or to noble death !"

So cried she : and her face shone radiantly  
As summer's morning. Every soldier's heart,  
At her bright aspect, and her words of fire,  
New courage gathered ; every foot seemed swift,  
And every arm grew strong. But, when the king  
Drew nigh, with yet a brighter light she glowed ;  
And, lifting up her arms, cried fervently,—  
“ King of Assyria, go : thy people save,  
Even as before thou savedst. Shield this night  
Thy city from the spoiler ;—and the hearts  
Of living millions, millions yet unborn,  
Will call down blessings on thee. Be thy voice  
Dread as Heaven's thunder ! lightning be thine eyes,  
To wither utterly those cursèd ones !  
Let not the sceptre from thy hands be reft,  
And from thy children ! Like a whirlwind sweep  
Yon field rebellious ! like dry forest-leaves,  
Scatter thine enemies ! To the battle, then !  
And may the god of armies lead thee on !”

So she ; and like war's fabled goddess seemed,  
In her grand aspect, her majestic form,  
And spirit-stirring voice. The admiring king,  
Gazed on her glorious beauty ; and his heart,  
Even in that hour of dread, a moment's throb  
Of passion felt. But the loud storm of war  
Howled in his ears ; and love to rage gave place.  
At her bold words, as with a kindling fire,  
His bosom burned : and, when he grasped his spear,  
One half its weight was gone. Then through the gate  
With a strong heart he went : and every man  
From him took courage. Horsemen spurred amain ;  
The charioteers their foaming coursers smote ;  
And on the roaring plain, like some proud fleet,  
Before a strong wind, from the river's mouth  
In a vexed sea emerging—through the gate,  
Deep in the ocean of their enemies drove.

Meantime, Arbaces, through the echoing streets,  
Toward Bel's great portal moved on steadily.

Few were the foes whom by the way he saw,—  
 Jaded and flying. From the city's glare  
 Passing at length, upon the plain he found  
 Thick darkness; for no moon was in the heaven;  
 And a dense vault of cloud shut out the stars:  
 But, northward as he turned, on earth he saw  
 A lurid gleam, and on the sky a tinge,  
 Like sunset's dying fire. Darkling drave he,—  
 His chariots close behind; and not a man  
 Spake any word. Onward, and onward still,  
 As they advanced, more clear the light became;  
 The sounds of battle louder, and more loud:  
 But, toward the northern wall as they wheeled round,  
 With fury tenfold burst the horrid din;  
 A fiery glare was over all the field,  
 And a terrific struggle. Then they raised  
 Their scourges, and the horses bounded on.

But, to the outskirt of the Median force  
 When they had reached,—Arbaces paused awhile,  
 And to a Bactrian charioteer called out;  
 "Bring thy car hither—close. Now, gently bear  
 Prince Geber from the field; for he is bowed  
 With grievous sickness; and may not again  
 Endure the combat." Lighting, while he spake,  
 In his own arms Arbaces then his friend  
 Uplifted; in the Bactrian's car disposed;  
 And, as they parted, warmly pressed his hand,  
 And bade be of good cheer. His chariot then  
 Remounted; and to Jeroboam thus:  
 "Now with a heedful watchfulness move on;  
 Lest our own soldiers we should trample down:  
 But, near the enemy when we shall come,—  
 Burst on them like a midnight thunderbolt."

So cautiously they went. As they passed by,  
 The soldiers knew them, and cried out aloud,  
 Rejoicing; for the word had gone about  
 That their great chief had fallen; and their hearts  
 Sorely had sorrowed. Still, as they moved on,  
 Arbaces, to the chariots, and the horse,  
 Whom they beheld, called out, and bade them join

To his their force; that, with a greater strength,  
They might break on their enemies. So they,  
With every moment gathering might, went on.

But, while yet distant, they the battle saw,  
Dreadfully raging; for, upon the wall,  
Fire after fire shook forth its banner bright,  
And torches numberless waved ceaselessly,—  
That all the plain, like to a burning sea,  
With fearful splendor rocked. Chariots, and horse,  
Bright helmets, gleaming mail, and tossing plumes,  
Tumultuously were working to and fro,  
Like sea-foam 'mid the breakers.

As they looked,  
Lo! from the gate of Nisroch, cars, and horse,  
A mighty multitude, poured furiously.  
The tumult then, and cries, grew more and more,  
And the king's name was heard. Arbaces saw,  
And in his heart thus said: "Assyria's lord  
Is issuing there; but not to victory now!  
Is this the night decreed, when he shall go  
Proudly to battle, never to return?  
What is your will, ye all o'erruling gods?  
But, to the ear of man ye answer not;  
Your words—events: great empires rise, and fall,  
Your thoughts to speak: and even this night, perchance,  
The haughty city shall in ruins write  
Your dread decree unspoken." Thus mused he;  
Then nigher to the wall, where space was clear,  
Turned suddenly; and, with a mighty force,  
Chariots and horse, attended,—toward the gate  
Of Nisroch, with an eagle's swiftness flew;  
And 'gainst the foe, still issuing, with a shout  
Strong as the War-God's battle-cry, drove on.

Even as a flooded river, with great noise,  
Its turbid waters in a raging sea  
Rolls headlong, beating back the angry waves—  
So had the ponderous chariots, and the horse  
Of the Assyrians, pouring from the gate,  
Driven back the furious onset of their foes.

Yet as, brief space elapsed, the encountering floods

In undistinguishable conflict mix,  
 Roaring, and foaming ; and, like mortal foes,  
 Grappling, and madly writhing, wave with wave,  
 That neither victor, neither vanquished seems,—  
 So had the Assyrian torrent, from the Medes,  
 Erelong stern greeting met ; that, soon, the fight,  
 With hideous uproar, and confusion dire,  
 On both sides, with like force and fury ragcd.

But as, at length, with irresistible might,  
 Some giant wave along the howling shore  
 Comes towering on ; and, at its very mouth,  
 The river sweeps aside ; right through the path  
 Of its strong waters breaking,—even so,  
 Arbaces with his chariots, nigh the wall  
 Fiercely careering,—by the very gate,  
 Broke, overwhelming, on the issuing foe ;  
 Dividing those that were upon the plain,  
 From those within the city.

Then began  
 Confusion infinite ; cries of maddening fear,  
 With peals of triumph mingling. From the gate  
 Distant three arrow-flights, the monarch fought ;  
 And, in the hurly, knew not that the foe  
 Behind had come, and all retreat cut off.  
 But, through the din, to them who manned the wall,  
 Came down a shriek of anguish. From the tower,  
 The queen, forth-looking, saw the impending fate ;  
 Flung up her arms,—and, as of heaven, and man,  
 For aid imploring, called. “ The king ! the king !  
 Help ! help ! the king ! the king !”

Her words were caught,  
 And flashed along the wall. Cried thousands then,  
 “ The king is in the midst of enemies !  
 Fly to the rescue !” Also on the plain  
 Went up a cry, “ Arbaces ! Gather round—  
 Hem in the rebel—let him not escape !”

The cries flew on ; and in both armies rose  
 Fresh fury. From all sides the Assyrians pressed,  
 The king to rescue ; from all sides the Medes,  
 With shouts victorious, hastcd to attack.

As when a whirlwind 'mid the forest roars,  
 Swinging the huge heads of the groaning trees,—  
 East, North, West, South, it turns,—in giddy wheel  
 Rocking the howling wilderness,—even so,  
 In wild confusion tossing, reeling round,  
 Toiled the close mingling hosts : here, fiercely driven ;  
 There, hotly driving : helmet clashing loud  
 'Gainst helmet ; shield 'gainst shield, and sword 'gainst  
                   sword ;  
 Steed blowing against steed ; and wheel 'gainst wheel  
 Horribly grinding.

                  That loud cry of fear,  
 Pealed from the wall, Assyria's monarch heard ;  
 And, backward looking, saw the Median cars  
 Behind him ; and the foe on all sides round  
 Against him urging. Then his countenance fell ;  
 And in his heart he said ; " The hour is come !  
 My kingdom is departing from me ! Still,  
 Let me not die, upon mine enemies  
 All unavenged. Could I but pierce the heart  
 Of the great rebel,—let his spear in mine  
 Be buried instantly, I heed not ! Ha——  
 His name I hear : his voice, too, hear I not ?  
 And Ahab, the false Bactrian,—upon him,  
 Boasting, they call. Now, by the eternal gods !  
 Against them both will I go back ; and slay,  
 Or else by them be slain ! " Resolving thus,  
 To Dara he called out ; " Turn round the car,  
 Swift as thou may ;—the rebel is behind.  
 Right toward the gate drive back ; and, if thou see  
 The chariot of Arbaces, or the car  
 Of Ahab, the false Bactrian,—then the steeds  
 Urge to their utmost, and drive wheel in wheel ;  
 For I will slay them, or by them be slain.  
 But, if thou see them not,—back through the gate,  
 Speed as thou may ; for, of a truth, hath God  
 This night his face against us set ; and given  
 His strength unto our enemies."

                  These words  
 The charioteer grieved sorely ; for he thought

Upon his promise to Nehushta given,  
Her sire to guard in battle; and saw now  
That all his power was gone. Reluctantly  
Then drew he at the reins; but, 'mid the throng,  
The horses were entangled, and the wheels  
Fast locked; for now, of chariots and of horse,  
Both Median and Assyrian, was the press  
Terrific; nor, awhile, could any move,  
Advancing, or retreating. Thousands there  
Were crushed, and trampled: thousands, in their cars,  
Or on their horses, slain,—unto the ground  
Fell not,—so dense the thronging; but—borne up,  
Hither and thither, on the hard-wedged mass,—  
Seemed as the ghastly fragments of a wreck,  
On war's stern ocean rocking. Sword, and axe,  
Arrow, and iron dart, and shortened spear,  
With their grim toil were crimsoned. Wheel in wheel  
Horribly grinding, clashed; trace, axle, broke;  
Horse 'gainst horse reared,—close grappling, chest to  
chest;

Fire from their eye-balls flashing—snorted, shrieked;  
And madly, with bared teeth, each other tore.

So stood the fight. With bow, spear, dart, or sword,  
Hotly the monarch combated: but still  
His valour was despair; for, all around,  
Nor distant far, he heard the direful roar  
Of his fierce enemies; and, for the throng,  
Even of his friends, might not by flight escape.

But, in awhile, o'er all the din of fight,  
Came to his ear the strong and terrible voice  
Of his great foe. Behind him looking then,  
The towering form in his high car he saw,  
Through the thick press of chariots, steeds, and men,  
Too rapidly advancing: for the Medes,  
Well as they might, drew back, to give him room;  
The Assyrians, as they could, to fly from him.

As when a lion, monarch of the wastes  
Of desert Afric, prowling for his prey,  
Hears from afar the bellowing of wild bull,—  
His shaggy mane upstarts; his eyes are flame;

From his deep chest quick thunder-pantings burst :  
Onward he springs ; and, through the tangled copse,—  
Rending, and crashing, trampling, bowing down,—  
Forces his headlong way,—Arbaces so,  
Through the dense throng of the Assyrians held  
His course resistless ; ever toward the king  
Urging impetuously ; all meaner foes  
O'erlooking, or despising.

At that sight,  
Fury, and terror, on the monarch seized :  
Bending his bow, shaft after shaft he drove  
Against the Mede ; and still to Dara called,  
“ Force on the chariot ! I will meet him now.”

Dara smote then the steeds ; and with loud voice  
Incited them. Like prisoned tigers, they  
Frantically bounded, snorted, and reared up ;  
And forward dashed again. But, close in front,  
Were many powerful horses ; and the wheels,  
On either side, 'gainst other wheels were jammed ;  
So that with difficulty, right, and left,  
Dragging a ponderous car, they labored on.  
Still, looking back, shaft after shaft, the king  
'Gainst his foe drove. The Mede, upon his prey  
His eyes for ever fixing, heeded not ;  
But, with his whole collected force, at length,  
Swift as an arrow, toward him launched a spear.

Drawing his bow, the monarch stood ; the barb  
Touched almost on the arch,—when bow and shaft  
Dropped from his hands : for the tempestuous lance  
Struck on his crest ; snapped short the girding band  
That passed beneath his chin ; and on the ground,  
Amid the horse-feet, drove the gleaming helm.

Back in his car Sardanapalus reeled ;  
Amazed, and stunned ; yet wildly staring round.  
Then saw he that his steeds were masterless ;  
For, as the spear from his own helm had glanced,—  
Rapidly swinging round, the ashen beam  
To the ground had stricken Dara,—the reins still  
Grasped in his hand. The Irresistible,  
Dread as an angry god, was coming on ;

In his strong gripe another beamy lance,  
The death-stroke threatening : then the monarch's soul  
Within him sank ; bewildered was his brain :  
The royal crimson mantle first flung off,—  
'Neath his broad buckler cowering, to the ground  
He hasted ; in his tremor muttering,  
“ Even yet, perchance, unseen I may escape.”

Then surely had he perished,—'mid the steeds  
And chariots crushed ; but that a hand unknown,  
Pressed o'er his brow a helmet ; and a voice,  
Deep and commanding, in his ear thus spake :  
“ Into my car, O king, now get thee up ;  
And fear not ; for thine hour not yet is come.”

The countenance of him that spake, was dark  
As the storm-cloud ; his eye like the red bolt  
That breaketh from it. Of gigantic height  
The form was, though sore wasted ; and the arm  
Was mighty. While yet speaking, to his car  
The king he lifted ; then himself upsprang.

The helm which on the bowed head he had pressed,  
Was black, and plumeless : a black mantle now,—  
That so the gorgeous arms might be concealed,—  
He flung upon his shoulders : with quick hand,  
Next, from the nerveless, trembling arm, he took  
The golden shield ; into the royal car  
Upflung it,—in its place, a buckler gave,—  
Steel, darkened in the fire : seized then the reins ;  
And, as they onward moved, close to his ear  
Thus said : “ Speak not, O king, lest to the foe  
Thy words betray thee : and, whate'er betide,  
Draw not the sword,—but, underneath thy shield,  
Lie safe from peril,—so, within the walls  
Unharm'd thou may escape. But, for thine hosts,  
They utterly discomfited will be ;  
Nor mortal power can save them.”

Answer none

The monarch made ; nor of resistance thought :  
A dizziness was in his brain ; his limbs,  
As in a fearful dream, were motionless.  
Through the dense throng, slowly the car made way ;

And no man knew him ; for loud cries went up,  
" The king is slain ! the gods are with our foes !  
Fly to the city, and make fast the gates ! "

Dara, meantime, recovering quickly, sprang  
Into the royal car ; and, anxiously  
Around him looking, saw the helpless king  
In a mean chariot, and in strange attire ;  
And knew he shunned the conflict. To himself  
Then thus ; " In that disguise he may escape :  
My voice shall not reveal him. Safer thus,  
Than by his wind-swift horses rapt along,  
In his own blazing chariot. But, for me,  
Sole duty now, from the fierce foe to save  
The steeds, and priceless car. Give me clear room,  
Then may they follow ; and, if their worn steeds  
Can overtake the arrow in its flight,  
Not vain may be pursuit."

Thus he, and strove  
From out the press to move. But Zimri now,  
Who had the monarch's fall, and flight beheld,—  
Leaped to the ground, and to his charioteer  
Thus spake : " Now, with what speed thou may, get  
hence ;

And to the city take my car and steeds.  
The chariot of the king, which he hath left,  
Shall bear me through the battle." Having said,  
He stooped ; caught from the earth the monarch's helm ;  
Upon his own head placed it ; and at once,  
Sprang in the royal chariot. O'er his back,  
The gorgeous crimson mantle next he threw ;  
The golden buckler braced upon his arm ;  
And thus to Dara : " Now lash on the steeds :  
The press is opening, and we yet may save  
The rich car, and the horses from the foe.  
If he the blazing helm shall see—doubt not  
Arbaces will pursue ; so shall the king  
Escape him ; and to us a great reward  
Surely will give : while our detested foe  
Shall we mock bitterly ; and, haply, slay.  
Drive therefore on : but, swiftly as thou may,  
Turn eastward ; and the northern wall approach,—

Skirting it close ; for thence the foe keeps back ;  
Dreading the stone, the arrow, and the spear,  
From the high battlement."

Him Dara heard,  
Approving ; and, with cool and skilful hand,  
The horses guiding, through the living maze  
Slowly 'gan wind. But Zimri, turning now,  
And shouting, 'gainst Arbaces hurled his lance :  
Another then caught up, and poised to throw.

Full on the breast the weapon struck the Mede ;  
But harmed him not. Nor, though the shout he heard,  
Knew he whence came it ; for, in combat hot,  
That moment stood he : nor, as yet, he knew—  
Such the confusion,—that the king had fled :  
So that when now, within the royal car,  
The diamond-flashing helm, the golden shield,  
And crimson vest he saw, nought doubted he  
That therein still he rode. The armour, too,  
Of Zimri was right splendid to behold ;  
His stature like the king's. Arbaces thus  
By show deceived ; and confident that now  
The tyrant underneath his arm would fall,—  
His spear uplifted, with one righteous blow  
Hoping the world to free. But Fate forbade :  
For, in that moment, through the opening press,  
Arrow-swift darted on the royal car ;  
And the fell aim was balked. - " He flies ! he flies !"  
Aloud then cried he, " see—the tyrant flies !  
Coward ! thou canst not 'scape ! thine hour is come !"  
To Jeroboam then ; " Now, now,—away,—  
Lash on the horses ; let him not escape !"

But Zimri with exulting heart beheld  
The Mede pursuing ; and to Dara thus ;  
" The fish hath gorged the bait ! See, where he comes,—  
Hoping the king to slay ! Traitor, and fool !  
Ay, madman ! rage, and scourge thy wearied brutes.  
As well the Sloth might chase the Antelope,  
As thy dull beasts our storm-swift steeds pursue !  
Meantime the king will 'scape ; our stricken host  
From this foul pest be freed ; and, haply, yet  
Drive back the rebels. But, check now the steeds,

Lest he lose sight of us, and turn again ;  
And so escape me. Yet not overnear  
Let him approach : and close beneath the wall  
Speed when thou may ; lest 'mid the enemy  
We be entangled."

At these words well pleased,  
Dara the horses guided cunningly,—  
The foe avoiding ; keeping still in view  
Of the pursuing Mede ; till, clearer space  
Attaining now, close underneath the wall  
Gladly he drove. The Assyrians, looking down,  
Knew well the royal car, and let it pass :  
But, when the chariot of Arbaces came,  
Darts, arrows, stones, let fly.

Not unobserved,  
The royal car had from the fight withdrawn :  
Chariots, and horse, Medes, and Assyrians, both,—  
These for defence, those for pursuit, flew on ;  
So that, of either host, no few, at length,  
Behind the chariot of Arbaces went.

He, nothing heeding, urged upon his way ;  
And in his heart still said ; " The tyrant now  
Surely will perish ; for the gates are closed ;  
His valiant captains all are far away."  
And, ever and anon, he cried aloud,  
" Behold ! his horses flag ! Strength have they not  
Much longer to fly from me. Full of blood,  
High fed, and pampered, soon will they be spent.  
Now, Jeroboam, ply the scourge : our steeds  
In truth are wearied ; but, to toil inured,  
And trained for use, not idle pageantry,  
Thrice will outwear yon sleek and courtly drones."

So he : but ever, as they nigher drew,  
The royal car sprang from them ; for, less swift  
The shadow of the storm-cloud sweeps the earth,—  
Wearying the eye that strives its course to track,—  
Than might the horses of Assyria's king,  
To full speed urged. But, with a tightened rein,  
Dara still curbed them ; fearful lest, too far  
Pursuit outstripping, might the Mede despair  
To overtake ; and thus his dreaded arm

Turn to the fight again. Delaying now,  
Now speeding onward, they the impatient Mede  
Lured thus to chase them, and the battle quit.

But, in the shadow of the eastern wall  
When they turned round; and saw that, save from  
gleam

Of fire-tinged cloud, before them was dusk night,—  
To Dara, Zimri thus: "At slow pace now;  
Lest in this gloom he lose us, and return;  
And so escape me."

To his feet, anon,  
Upstarting, he looked backward; sharply then,  
"Stop! let us listen."

Gently, but at once,  
The car was stayed. Then Dara, too, stood up;  
Looked back, and hearkened.

"Gods! he *has* returned!"  
Fiercely cried Zimri. "Yet he shall not 'scape!  
Wheel round, and after him!"

But, on his arm  
A pressure; in his ear a warning "hush,"  
Checked him; and still he listened.

"Hist!" he said;  
"Methought I heard the blowing of his steeds. . . .  
Again . . . He comes! His giant bulk I see,  
'Gainst the red cloud, like some huge hideous god  
Of Ethiopia, sculptured from the rock.  
Ha—now he sees us: let the coursers go."

But, when the cars and horse that followed them,  
Both Median and Assyrian, had wheeled round  
In the thick shadow of the Eastern wall,—  
As with one mind, their jaded steeds they curbed;  
"For surely hath the king escaped," they said;  
"And farther toil were vain." So to the fight  
Slowly did some return: some slacked the reins,  
When they stood still; and on the dewy grass  
Let their tired horses feed; themselves, the while,  
Their outworn limbs relaxing for repose;  
These, in their chariots stretched,—those, on their  
steeds;

With drooping head and body, a short sleep,

And troubled, snatching.

But Arbaces nought  
Relaxed pursuit ; though often did he turn,  
And look behind ; for, fainter, and more faint,  
The sounds of conflict came. Within his heart  
Still said he, " Surely now the Assyrian host  
Must utterly be vanquished ; and my arm  
Cannot be needed for the victory.  
Let me but slay the tyrant ; and in him  
Will all be overcome. He cannot 'scape  
Within the walls ; for every gate is closed.  
Heaven grant my horses do not fail me now !  
Yet, after but short rest, from set of sun  
Have they toiled on ; and sorely wearied are.  
The tyrant's steeds are fresh ; but full of blood ;  
And less to toil inured : so, haply, soon  
May they be wearied ; and my coursers yet  
O'ertake them in their flight. All-ruling Power,  
In whose hands are the mighty of the earth  
But as the sands which the wind scattereth,  
Hear thou my prayer ! This despot to my hands  
Deliver ; and the groaning nations free ! "

So he ; and, with a cheerful voice, the steeds  
Encouraged to their toil. With stamping foot,  
Shaking the reins, the driver urged them on.

But vain their labor, had not Zimri now,  
In pride and foolishness of heart, resolved  
His foe to meet ; that, should he slay him not,  
He might at least deride, and madden him.  
Seeing that from the battle now far off  
Were they ; and that the Mede no aid had nigh ;  
Thus in his heart he said ; " Traitor, and fool !  
Scourge on ; scourge till thy stumbling brutes fall down,  
And cast thee headlong ! The dull owl as well  
Might think to outfly the eagle. Pity 'tis  
Thy towering aim to slay Assyria's king,  
Thus should be mocked. A great renown, no doubt,  
From this night's bravery thou dost hope to achieve.  
But, haply, thy own murky torch may die,  
Where thou didst look to see Assyria's sun  
From its bright sphere cast down. Now, far enough

The king hath fled : against thee shall he turn :  
 Though Zimri's spear within thee, less delight  
 May give, than thou hadst felt, to see thine own  
 Rock in thy monarch's heart. Rebel, heed well !  
 Thy foot upon my neck hath been : look now  
 That thou thyself be not worse trodden down.  
 In love thou'st robbed me ; in ambition foiled ;  
 But, in fair combat, never hast o'ercome.  
 Give me, great gods, this pestilence to drive  
 From face of earth ; and if in that same hour  
 I, too, must fall, triumphant shall I die !"

Resolving thus, to Dara he called out ;  
 " No more we'll fly : turn therefore now the steeds,  
 That we may meet the rebel ; for I feel  
 That Fate this hour hath given him to my spear."

This counsel pleased not Dara ; for he hoped  
 The royal car to save : nor willingly  
 Would he again the terrible Mede confront.  
 Neither the might of Zimri trusted he ;  
 For well he knew that fury blinded him ;  
 And that, against Arbaces' iron arm,  
 His utmost force were weak as infancy :  
 Therefore the steeds he turned not, but replied ;  
 " Surely I may not so unto the king,  
 For the rich chariot and the steeds account,  
 Which he hath trusted to me. Think awhile.  
 When he shall ask, ' Where be the steeds and car,  
 The price of realms, which to thy care were left ?'  
 Will it a tale well pleasing to him be,  
 If I shall say, ' Thy horses and thy car  
 Unharm'd were brought from fight ; but, foolishly,  
 Though nigh the gate, and safe, again we turned  
 To meet the foe ; and, truly, are they now  
 A spoil unto Arbaces.' How shall I  
 Thus answer to the king ?"

The ireful soul  
 Of Zimri kindled, when these words he heard ;  
 And hotly he replied ; " Then, when the car  
 And horses to the Mede have spoil become,  
 Let thy tongue so excuse thee. How know'st thou  
 That unto mine *his* arm shall not submit ?

His steeds and car to *me* become a spoil ?  
Art thou afraid to meet him ? But, think well :  
For, will not the king's anger 'gainst *thee* rise,  
If I shall say to him, ' Behold, my lord,  
The god of battles to my sword and spear  
Had the arch-rebel given ; but, even then,  
Thy charioteer was fearful, and fled on ;  
And he hath 'scaped us.' Of a truth, the king  
Would send thee to the death. Turn then the car,  
For my lance hotly thirsteth for his blood."

But neither at these words was Dara moved  
That peril to meet ; and sharply he replied ;  
" Unto the king alone the servant I ;  
And of none other will commanded be.  
If Fate, indeed, unto thy spear and sword  
Hath given the Mede,—then from the car descend,  
And go against him ; for thou must prevail :  
But the king's chariot shall not with thee go ;  
For, in the fight too oft have I beheld  
The rebel's might ; and will not tempt it now."

Still Dara spake when, stamping furiously,  
Zimri cried out, " Turn instantly the car,  
Thou soft, white-livered boy ! or, to thy cost,  
Shalt thou be taught, that other might than his,  
And nearer, threats thee. Turn, thou dastard, turn,  
Or I will strike thee dead !"

By those foul words  
To the height incensed, Dara his sword drew forth :  
But, in a moment, Zimri snatched the reins,  
And hurled him to the ground. With heavy shock  
Down fell he, and lay stunned : while, yelling loud,  
Zimri, to make the wheel pass over him,  
The horses strove to guide. But, scared, they fled :  
And when, at length, the madman wheeled them round,  
He saw Arbaces, with his panting steeds,  
Right toward him driving. Instantly, the reins  
Upon the hooks he flung ; and, catching up  
His spear, stood bending backward for the throw.

That seeing, greatly was the Mede rejoiced ;  
For his sore wearied steeds drooped piteously ;

And he had feared the king at last would 'scape.  
Nor, even though now the cars were drawing nigh,  
And dawn was brightening,—would he yet have known  
How he befooled had been, but that, with laugh  
Of bitter mockery, and maniac yell,  
Zimri betrayed himself. Too mad to wait  
Fit moment for the throw, " Ah dog accursed !"  
He bellowed—forward sprang, and hurled his lance.  
Sullenly whirring flew the weapon on ;  
But high above the mark.

Surprised, enraged,  
Arbaces saw that he was foiled, and mocked,  
And his long labor wasted. Ne'ertheless,  
Before him still was one detested wretch,  
Deriding him, and glorying in his fraud.  
Even in the instant when the truth flashed out,  
'Gainst him he hurled his spear. On his right side,  
It struck the foe ; but from the bright steel glanced :  
Yet, such the shock that, backward staggering,  
Down in the car he dropped : and, swift as gust  
Of rain-charged wind, the terrified coursers flew.

Recovering quickly, Zimri caught the reins ;  
And, harshly dragging, strove to turn them back.  
With cooler hand, the Median charioteer  
Soon wheeled his steeds ; and, at a rapid pace,  
'Gainst him impelled them. But the senseless rage  
Of Zimri had ungovernable made  
His horses ; and they would not meet the foe.  
Wide circling, round the chariot of the Mede,  
With strong necks proudly arching, still they flew ;  
Submitting half, but 'gainst the powerful arm  
That would control them, half rebellious still.

Arbaces, that beholding, laughed aloud ;  
And, snatching up his bow, an arrow sent.  
The well-aimed shaft, close underneath the chin  
Of Zimri passed, and grazed his throat. Slight pain  
Felt he ; but, at the laughter, double rage.  
With harsh thick voice he bellowed to the steeds ;  
Smote them : and, backward leaning, at the reins  
Dragged till his eye-balls started. But, out flew

A second shaft ; and, through the mail of steel,  
Though slantwise entering, stung him in the side.

Not deep it pierced, yet cutting was the pang :  
And, when the gibes and laughter of his foes  
Burst forth, his fury to stark madness grew.  
Tearing the arrow out, his axe he seized,—  
Against the headstrong steeds, with all his strength,  
Hurled it,—and, with a maniac's bound, leaped  
forth.

Upon the lifted forehead of a horse,  
The weapon fell ; and smote him to the earth.  
The frontlet of strong brass prevented wound ;  
But, stunned, the noble courser, as if dead,  
Dropped motionless. His fellows, for a space,  
Heavily dragged him on ; then paused, and stood,  
Foaming, and panting ; with erected manes,  
And eye-balls wildly flashing.

But, meantime,  
Zimri, like tiger from the toils broke loose,  
Flew on his enemy. In either hand,  
A spear he grasped ; the sword was on his thigh :  
But, the broad golden buckler of the king,  
In rage had he forgotten ; for all thought,  
Of vengeance solely was ; of self-defence,  
Oblivious quite. Arbaces, him on foot  
Beholding, thus to Jeroboam said :  
“ Alight thou quickly ; and his chariot seize.  
The caitiff hath a noble horse struck down ;  
And now his fellows stir not. With thy sword  
Divide the traces, if the steed be slain ;  
And have all prompt to fly. Then, should I fall,—  
Nay, smile not, for to God the fight belongs,—  
Linger thou not, a vain respect to pay,  
Or useless strife to wage : fly instantly ;  
And to our hosts the glorious trophy bear.  
But, for this miscreant, surely shall he die !”

Thus he, and from the chariot, at a bound,  
Sprang to the earth. The sound of his descent  
Was like the ring and tramp of mailèd steed,  
Starting for battle. On his thigh, the sword ;

In his right hand, a spear : but, in his haste,  
For his own massive buckler, the light shield  
Of Geber he had caught ; and knew it not.  
Yet Zimri, when he saw the Mede approach,  
Nought dreaded,—so all sense in rage was lost.  
Gnashing his teeth, his lips with foam besprent,  
'Gainst him he flew, and, with a madman's strength,  
Hurled forth his lance. Well for Arbaces now  
That even the shield of Geber he had brought :  
Better had been, if his own massive orb  
Had guarded him ; for, toward his forehead right  
Flew the tempestuous weapon ; through the plates  
Of steel and brass, with loud crash tore its way ;  
And 'twixt the eyebrows pierced him.

Slight the wound,

But sharp the sting : from both eyes quickly gushed  
A watery stream, which, with the trickling gore  
Commingleing, filled, and well nigh blinded them.  
With his right hand, in haste he wiped away  
The darkening fluid ; then his spear upraised :  
But, instantly the dimness coming back,  
He cast it not ; for now no other lance  
Remained unto him. With a laugh of scorn  
And mockery, Zimri his confusion saw ;  
And, leaping round, with rapid thrust on thrust,  
Aimed at his back : but, like a moving cloud,  
Dimly Arbaces saw him ; and still turned,  
The stab evading. Round, and round again,  
And to and fro, sprang Zimri ; mocking still,  
And still, with lance protruded, a fell wound  
Aiming to make.

Arbaces, as he might,

Defensive stood ; in that most perilous strait,  
Cool and collected, as no danger were.  
From time to time, with quick hand he wiped off  
The blinding moisture ; then his dreaded lance,  
Threatening, upraised ; but still forbore to throw,  
Till clearer sight should come : and Zimri still,  
When the huge beam uplifted he beheld,

Started away ; yet not less quick returned,  
The harassing strife to wage.

But now, at length,  
Impatient grew the Mede ; for still his eyes  
With blood and tears were dimmed ; and o'er his brain  
Confusion strange, and giddiness, 'gan steal,  
That seemed as earth and sky were reeling round :  
And when, at last,—piercing his leg behind,  
Sharply he felt the spear-point of the foe ;  
And his malicious laughter near him heard,—  
Then, by the upper end, his heavy lance  
Suddenly grasping,—with a backward stroke,  
Chance-driven, he whirled it round. Like wand of ice  
On a rock striking, the strong ashen beam  
Against the steel-cased warrior shivering flew.  
But the thick mail, by that gigantic blow,  
Was crushed, and beaten in. Upon the loins  
Zimri received it ; breathless, blackening, reeled ;  
Sank tottering on his knees ; spread out his hands ;  
Slid forward ; and, face down, lay motionless.

Arbaces, blinded by the trickling blood,  
Saw not, as yet, that his strong foe had fallen ;  
Though well he felt that on no living thing,  
Harmless such blow could light. With hasty hand,  
His eyes he pressed ; drew sword, and glanced around ;  
But nowhere saw his enemy. Not the less,—  
Some cunning wile suspecting,—with quick ear  
He listened, tread of foot to catch, or clink  
Of moving armour. Not a sound was heard,  
Save the dull roaring of the distant fight,  
And a near streamlet's ripple. Once again  
His eyes he cleared ; and, close beside him, saw,  
Face down upon the earth, his enemy stretched ;  
And motionless as death. And, when he stooped,  
Gently to turn him, lo ! from out his mouth  
Ran blood ; the earth around him was dyed red !

Then to the streamlet nigh at hand he walked ;  
From out his eyes the clammy moisture washed ;  
With the cold crystal laved his burning brow,  
Till from the wound no longer oozed the blood :

His hand then cleansed ; and, with the hollowed palm,  
Scooping the water, drank, and was refreshed.

Scarce had he ended, when the royal car  
Drew nigh ; and Jeroboam, with glad voice,  
Upstanding, cried : “ Behold ! the noble steed  
That was struck down, again is vigorous ;  
And all are fresh as stags at early morn,  
When from their lair upspringing, at the cry  
Of dogs, and hunters. Let us then away :  
The sky is brightening fast ; the car, ere long,  
Will from the walls be seen ; and haply then  
By hosts we may be pressed.” To him the Mede ;  
“ Let not that trouble thee ; but follow now.”

That said, toward the fallen Zimri, at swift pace  
Advancing, he a moment stood and gazed.  
As he had left him, lay the caitiff still :  
No limb had moved, nor seemed he to draw breath.  
Down stooping then, Arbaces from him took  
The gem-starred helm, and on his own head placed ;  
The lance caught up, and in the chariot flung :  
Next, his own car approaching,—his great shield,  
Spears, bow, and quiver, darts, and battle-axe,  
Swiftly removed ; and in the royal car  
Orderly placed them : to the gorgeous seat,  
Which erst had borne, but never more should bear  
Assyria’s haughty king,—with light bound then  
Upspringing, caught the reins, and briefly thus.  
“ Haste, Jeroboam ; to my chariot mount ;  
And let us drive together to the field :  
For still the din of battle soundeth loud ;  
And much must yet be done.”

At once to earth  
Leaped Jeroboam, and thus answered him.  
“ Behold, O Prince, thy horses droop the head,  
And sorely wearied are : how then with these,  
Yet fresh, and swift as eagles, may they go ?  
Delay not thou, but to the field make speed ;  
For much thou may’st be needed ; while, meantime,  
Thy steeds and car will I bring after thee.

Or rather—since the reins at once to guide,  
And fight to wage, no safe or pleasant task,—  
Shall I not with thee go ; and leave behind  
Thy chariot ? for the horses, of themselves,  
After brief rest, may, likely, seek the camp.”

To him the Mede : “ Nay, nay, my friend ; not so :  
My steeds are swift, and strong ; and through the fight  
Nobly have borne me : they my comrades are ;  
And from my hands, like playful kids, do feed :  
Nay, I do think they love me. Look thee now :  
They turn their heads, as though thy words they knew,  
And with their eyes besought me. No, my friend ;  
Not for the Assyrian would I leave my car,  
And horses,—to be vaunted as their spoil.  
And, recked I not of that, my faithful steeds  
Shall not, by my consent, to some harsh man  
Become the slaves : but, when their limbs are stiff  
With age, and may no longer cheerfully  
Their toil perform, shall in rich meadows roam,  
Untasked to labor ; save, perchance,—should heaven  
So bless my love,—some rosy boy to bear,  
In easy saunter, by his father's side,  
Through our loved native pastures ; all the while,  
The beauteous mother leaning on my arm,  
And the rich music of her eloquent voice,  
With his soft prattle mingling. Grant me, gods,  
Such bliss to taste ; and all a monarch's pomp  
Freely would I resign ! But ah ! I dream !  
No love, no bliss domestic, may I hope,  
Till weary months, perhaps even lingering years,  
Shall have dragged on. Nay, haply, even then  
May heaven such boon deny : untimely slain,  
My bones may moulder in a foreign land ;  
And my beloved Hamutah never bless  
These long-desiring arms. But, to the gods  
My fate I render : be it as they will !  
Meantime, not love, but battle summons me ;  
And I must haste. Then, Jeroboam, thou  
My car and horses gently to the camp  
Conduct : and fear not but some charioteer,  
Erelong, the reins will guide ; and leave my arm

Free for the combat."

Scarcely had he ceased,  
When, not an arrow-flight away, they saw  
A car advancing rapidly. His spear  
Arbaces seized, and stood prepared to cast :  
But, as it nigher drew, the well known form  
Of Zelek saw, an Arachosian chief.  
*He* also with uplifted lance came on ;  
For, when the royal chariot, and the steeds,  
And jewelled helmet of the king, he saw,—  
Nought doubted he the king himself was there.  
His arm already, eager for the throw,  
Had he drawn backward, when the Mede's clear voice  
Startled, and checked him.

" By Almighty Bel !"  
Cried Zelek, and his lifted lance let drop :  
" Arbaces ? Hast thou, then, the tyrant slain,  
That in his car thou ridest ?"

" Not to me,  
The despot hath been given," replied the Mede ;  
" Nor know I whether he hath fallen, or 'scaped.  
His chariot from the battle I pursued,  
Deeming himself therein ; but, in his place,  
Found Zimri. Him I slew ; and from him took  
The diamond-flashing helmet, and the spear.  
Yonder he lieth : of his other arms,  
If thou would'st spoil him, they are thine. But, say,—  
Why camest thou hither ? and how goes the fight ?"

To him then Zelek ; " Nothing do I know,  
More than thou knowest ; for, in hot pursuit  
Of the king's chariot, close beneath the wall,  
Beholding thee, I flew to aid the chase.  
But, slow to thine my horses ; and " . . .

" Enough,"—

Him interrupting, cried the impatient Mede ;  
" No longer may I talk : my wearied steeds,  
Like thine, need gentle guidance : but the field  
Demands me instantly : mount thou my car,  
And at slow pace return ; thy charioteer,  
Thine may bring after. Jeroboam, thus,  
With me may go, and rule these steeds of fire,

Which, else, small leisure to my arm will give,  
The bow, or spear, to wield."

"So be it then,"

Zelek replied ; and, swiftly on the earth  
Alighting, to Arbaces' chariot climbed.

But Jeroboam to the royal car  
Cheerfully sprang : the reins and scourge caught up,  
And let the horses go. Exultingly,  
On the storm-footed steeds, and gorgeous car,  
The victor gazed ; and burned to plunge in fight.

Not distant from the walls, as they sped on,  
Before a gate awaiting, they beheld  
A low, mean chariot. In dark mail was clad  
The charioteer ; but, on his head, a helm,  
Of gleaming brass he wore. The face of him  
Who at his left hand sat, 'neath helmet black,  
And plumeless, was o'ershadowed. Neck to foot,  
A sable mantle wrapped him. On his breast,  
His head hung heavily ; all strength seemed gone.

Even as Arbaces rapidly shot by,  
The gate was opened, and the car went in.  
They who within it rode, saw not the Mede,—  
For toward the city were their faces turned ;  
Nor knew Arbaces, as they entered there,  
That within spear-reach passed Assyria's king !  
Loud clanged the closing gate ; and to the fight  
Flew on the heroic chief.

Zelek, meantime,  
At slow pace, in the chariot of the Mede,  
Drove after him : but to his charioteer  
His own car left ; that, after respite brief  
For the tired horses, to the camp might he  
Gently conduct them.

When now left alone,  
Adad, the charioteer, the steeds to rest,  
Awhile sat patiently ; his thoughts intent  
On the past conflict ; on what yet might come ;  
And how himself might fare : but, suddenly,  
On Zimri's costly arms, a greedy eye  
He fastened ; and to spoil him was resolved.

At once down leaping from the car, he ran ;

And, stooping, raised him : from his shoulders, first,  
The mantle of the king, with careful hand,  
Removed, and on the earth beside him laid :  
The glittering hawberk next began to unloose,—  
When,—by the hiss of whip, and tramp of hoofs,  
Aroused,—he raised his head ; and, in dismay,  
A youthful form in Zelek's car beheld,  
Urging the wearied horses. Instantly  
On flew he ; and, still running, cried aloud,  
His steeds and car demanding.

But, with lash,  
Loud-stamping foot, and voice encouraging,  
Dara the steeds drove on.

From out the car  
By Zimri cast, long time had he lain stunned,  
As in deep sleep : and when,—recovering sense,  
And cautiously round gazing,—he beheld  
The combat, and its issue,—still he lay,  
Powerless to render aid : but when, at length,  
Arbaces with the chariots twain had gone ;  
And in the car of Zelek now remained  
Adad alone,—then 'gan his thoughts devise,  
How of his chariot to despoil the foe ;  
And to the city bear it. But, alas !  
Nor bow, nor spear, nor shield remained to him !  
His sword alone, brief space away, he saw,  
Crept on ; and seized it. Yet, of what avail !  
How, 'gainst a charioteer full armed, might he,  
With that slight weapon, stand ! Still, not the less,  
Resolved he was to prove it. From the ground  
Rising at once, with noiseless foot he walked ;  
And, as he went, within himself thus said :  
“ The panting of the horses must his ear  
To my soft footsteps deafen. Could I reach,  
Unseen, behind the car ; one sudden spring,  
One rapid downright blow, might finish all.  
But, should he hear, or see me, ere I strike ;  
Or, should the stroke, if given, on his steel casque,  
Or sword-proof mail alight, and harm him not,—  
What waits me then ? I know not : death, perchance !  
Nehushta, thou would'st mourn me : and the king

A sigh might heave : but, 'mid the general doom  
That overhangs us all,—the drowning fly  
In the broad river, not less noticed sinks,  
Than would my little torch of life go out.  
Yet, come what may come, I the event will try."

Within two spear-lengths of the chariot now  
He stood ; and with his eye the distance scanned,  
The perilous leap intending,—when, at once,  
Down to the earth sprang Adad ; nor looked round ;  
But, bent on spoil, to the fallen Zimri ran.

Him, busied with his task, when Dara saw,  
Joy filled his heart ; into the car he leaped ;  
Seized rein and scourge ; wheeled round ; and the tired  
steeds

Sharply urged onward. But their stiffened limbs  
With difficulty moved they : to the lash,  
With groans they answered, and went reeling on.

Far swifter Adad flew ; and to the car  
Well nigh had reached,—when Dara, on the hooks  
Flinging the reins, seized lance, turned round, and hurled.

Furiously running, Adad saw it not,  
So sudden was the throw : his rapid foot  
Seemed his own death to seek ; for, at full speed,  
Against the flying spear, himself flew on ;  
And in his throat, above the collar's rim,  
The glittering point received. Right through it went ;  
The life-vein tore, and started out behind.  
One sinking step he took ; then drooped his head ;  
Drooped every limb ; and, heavy as a clod,  
His armour on the soft grass clanging dull,  
Down fell he, dead.

One moment Dara gazed ;  
Then leaped to earth ; drew from the corse his spear ;  
The radiant armour stripped ; and in the car  
Upflung it ; mounted next ; and, at slow pace,  
No enemy fearing, toward the city moved.

Yet heavy was his soul ; for of the king,  
His loved Nehushta, the majestic queen,  
And of that mighty empire passing by,  
Darkly he pondered. Motionless, at last,  
With cheek upon his palm reclined, he sat ;

Nor the tired steeds urged more ; for they had stayed,  
And from the dewy grass, with outstretched tongue,  
The grateful moisture gathered. " Let them rest,"  
Within himself he said ; " food, drink, and sleep,  
Will all their strength bring back : but, when again  
Shall mighty Nineveh her head uplift,  
Queen of all nations ! when will her fallen king  
The worshipped of the earth again become !  
And, for myself, how now shall I appear  
Before him, if the battle he have 'scaped,  
And in his eye severe excuse myself,  
For that the priceless chariot, and the steeds,  
To me entrusted, are the Median's spoil !  
Ah ! what hath not that frantic madman done !  
Yet he himself hath drunk the bitterness  
Of his own cup ; by his own blow hath fallen !  
And how, with more than life, can man atone !  
Yet life, perchance, may linger in him yet :  
And, if his wound I bind, and to his home  
Can living bear him,—still might he be healed :  
So should a strong arm for the king be saved ;  
And he would witness, even against his will,  
In all I did ; for, if in words he lie,  
Yet would his wounds gainsay him."

Thinking thus,  
He started up, turned round, and backward looked.  
Not far away, soon spying what he sought,—  
He drew the rein, and toward the imaged corse  
Drove anxiously : but when, beside it close,  
He checked the steeds, lo ! Zimri from the earth  
His head uplifted ; and, with haggard eye,  
Looked in his face, and knew him.

From the car  
Sprang Dara ; leaned above him ; on one knee  
Sank hastily ; and, with a tender hand,  
His heavy head sustained. " Alas !" he said,  
" Fate hath dealt hard with thee ! But, tell me now,  
Where is thy wound, that I may bind it up."

Him Zimri answered not ; but, with harsh voice,  
Though feeble, and oft interrupted breath,  
Thus questioned him : " Hast thou, then, slain the Mede,

That in his car thou ridest? Now, if so,  
Lead me, that I may tread upon his neck."

The last words gurgled in his throat: he ceased,  
Choking with blood; and sank again to earth.

Still, with a tender hand, from off the ground,  
Dara his head upheld: and, in a while,  
When better he could listen, answered him.  
"The Mede, alas! hath not in battle fallen;  
Nor in his chariot ride I; but in that  
Of Zelek; for his charioteer I slew;  
And captured it. But, for the rebel chief,  
Even in the chariot of Assyria's king,  
Boasting his spoil, triumphantly rides he."

As if a snake had stung him, at these words  
Through Zimri ran quick shudder. Struggling hard,  
His head he lifted, and with both hands raised  
His body from the earth; but sank again;  
And, with a slow and painful utterance, cried;  
"Loosen my corslet,—let me draw free breath.  
And take the armour quickly from my loins;  
For the crushed steel sore galleth."

Tenderly,

Dara the corslet slackened: from his loins  
The battered mail released. Yet, still displeased,  
Zimri, with peevish voice, by many a groan  
Impeded, and a short and painful breath,  
Ungrateful as he was, upbraided him.

"The easier task thou choosest: safer much,  
The wound to tend, than to prevent the blow:  
To look on, safer than to share the fight.  
Why cam'st thou not to aid me, when thy spear  
Me might have saved, and laid the rebel low?"

So he; yet Dara, at his bitter words,  
Would not be angered; but thus, soothingly;  
"Talk not, I pray thee, now; nor feed the wrath  
That ever burns within thee; for, in truth,  
So would'st thou bleed to death. If in the fight  
I stood not by thee,—whose then was the blame,  
That I lay stunned, and helpless, on the ground?  
If for thy aid my spear was not at hand,—  
Was mine the fault, that unto me remained

Nor spear, nor shield,—which in the chariot thou  
Hadst borne away? Nor even was the sword  
Within my reach; for, when thy friendly arm  
Hurled me to earth, far from my hand it flew.  
And would'st thou, feeble thus, and weaponless,  
That, 'gainst the man most dreaded upon earth,  
I, a slight youth, should stand? When the wild bull  
Before the lion falls, would'st thou the hind  
Should go against him? But of this no more!  
Into the chariot let me help thee now;  
That in the city we may refuge find,  
Ere farther ill befall."

So mildly he;  
Nor Zimri answer made. To climb the car,  
With careful hand, then Dara aided him:  
Rose; took the reins; and, at the slowest pace  
Of the worn steeds,—to Zimri heedful still,—  
Drove toward the nearest gate.

As on they went,—  
High over head, the clanging wings were heard  
Of ravenous vultures; in the reddening dawn,  
To their vast banquet hasting. The stern din  
Of battle, like a distant cataract,  
Unceasing roared: and, as before the gate,  
Named of Semiramis, at length they paused,—  
The clear song of a viewless lark was heard,  
To the rose-tinted clouds upsoaring glad.

Meantime, the havoc and confusion dire  
Of warring nations, to its height had reached.  
For, when Sardanapalus,—terror-crushed,  
At the on-coming of the dreaded Mede,—  
Cowering, had left his chariot,—rose a cry:  
"The king is slain! the gods are with our foes!  
Fly to the city, and make fast the gates!"

Thousands, and tens of thousands, spread the cry:  
O'er all the field it flew; and, like dry dust  
Before the wind, the Assyrians turned, and fled.

From her high tower, with bitterness of soul,  
The queen had marked the diamond-flaming helm,

Smitten to earth ; and that dire cry had heard.  
But, with intent eye gazing, soon again,  
Up to the car she saw a warrior spring,—  
The royal helmet wearing ; on his back  
The gorgeous crimson mantle of the king ;  
And doubted not—for, on the wall below,  
Fires numerous dazzled sight,—that *he* it was,  
From chance-fall risen unhurt. But, by a cloud  
Of foes was he hemmed in ; and, in brief time,  
'Mid the great whirl was lost ! With frantic voice,  
Upon the soldiers, and the chiefs, she called,  
Their king to rescue : with uplifted hands,  
And anguished eyes, on Heaven called out to save.

But, 'mid the ceaseless thunders of the fight,  
No man might hear her ; and the gods, invoked,  
No answer gave. Fate o'er the city lowered !

Vainly did each brave captain of the host  
Upon the soldiers call, to face the foe !  
Vainly themselves, defying all things, leaped  
Amid the torrent of their enemies,  
To conquer, or to fall !

His noble heart,  
With shame, and grief, and anger, nigh to burst,—  
Unceasingly did Salamenes cry,  
The courage of his soldiers to inflame ;  
Their failing arms to nerve. From place to place,  
Frantic he flew : now 'mid the foe dashed deep ;  
Now turned the flying back : exhorted now ;  
Now sued ; now praised ; now promised, and now  
shamed.

Nebaioth, too, and ardent Jerimoth,  
Like running fires were seen about the field :  
And, with their ponderous cars, Jehoshaphat,  
And Michael, strove the dreadful rout to stay.  
Thousands of valiant captains, too, whose fame  
Sleeps with their ashes, nobly struggled then :  
But the dread doom was fixed : in vain their toil ;  
Their blood in vain !

As, by the northern wall,  
So, 'twixt the western, and the Tigris swift,

Hotly the conflict raged. Even as a storm,  
Within a narrow mountain-pass pent up,  
With maddest fury rages,—huge gnarled oaks  
Uprooted fall : rock-pinnacles are rent ;  
And crashing, leaping, thunder down the steep,—  
So, chariots, horse, and foot,—a mingled mass,  
Victors, and vanquished,—rushed the human flood.  
Thousands, borne down, beneath the chariot wheels,  
And foot of man, and steed, were trod, and crushed :  
Into the river thousands, shrieking loud,  
Were irresistibly urged ! In vain, in vain  
They struggle ! By the turbulent stream o'erwhelmed,  
Down to the bottom sink they. Toward the bridge  
Ran myriads : but the spearmen of the Medes,  
A wood of lances pointed at their breasts,—  
Passage denying : and the bowmen stood  
By thousands, with the shaft upon the string,  
Destruction threatening.

Dawned at length the day ;  
And, as the morning brightened, more and more  
Stood out the terrible scene. No longer now  
The Assyrians, from the city issuing, strove  
To turn the hopeless fight. Loud cries went up,  
“ Shut fast the gates, ye men of Nineveh !  
Shut fast the gates ; or we shall perish all ! ”

But, who were they that might those portals close ?  
As up the caverns of the ocean-cliffs,  
When a strong tempest hath upturned the deep,—  
The billows, rapid as a steed in flight,  
Drive roaring, shaking to their base the rocks,—  
So furiously, through every wide-flung gate,  
Chariots, and horse, and foot, by myriads rushed.  
Horribly jammed together, in each pass,  
Thousands were crushed ; the ground was paved with  
dead.

Meantime, the citizens, and the armed men  
Who had the fight escaped,—from the high walls  
Hurled down upon the assailants spears, and stones :  
And from each tower above the gates, poured forth  
Thick flight of arrows, spears, and brazen darts.

But, as dawn reddened, on the northern wall  
A distant cry was heard, "The king ! the king !  
The king of kings in his bright chariot comes ;  
And with him a great force !" Louder, more loud,  
Came on the cry ; and, in a trembling hope,  
Eastward were myriads of wild faces turned.

The queen from her high tower gazed breathlessly ;  
Fell on her knees ; her eyes, and trembling hands,  
To heaven uplifted : on the merciful gods  
For succour called ; sprang up ; and looked again.

Still, on the northern wall, more loud came on  
The voice of multitudes—"The king ! the king !"  
And, as the shouts increased,—from out the gates,  
With hope revived, again the Assyrians poured.

But, backward drew the Medes ; and toward the east,  
Gazed anxiously ;—for, troubled grew their hearts ;  
And, man to man, with countenance blank, they said ;  
"Where is Arbaces ? hath he fallen, then,  
Before the king ? and comes the conqueror  
With a new host to snatch the victory ?"

Still more and more upon the wall ran on  
The exulting cry, "The king ! the king doth come !"  
And still from out the gates the Assyrians poured ;  
The Medes still backward drew. Yet, not a lance  
On either side was cast, nor arrow shot,  
Nor sword uplifted. On the northern plain,  
Battle had ceased to breathe.

But, not the less,  
Along the western wall, and by the bank  
Of arrowy Tigris, raged the conflict still :  
For, there the cry was heard not,—so much more  
Resounded the dire roaring of the fight.  
Still through the gates pressed in the fugitives ;  
Still were they slain, and trampled down ; and still  
The rolling flood with heaps of dead was gorged.

The queen herself, at length, beheld, and cried  
Exultingly, "The king ! the king ! the king !  
I see his chariot, and his milk-white steeds ;  
And the sun-flashing helmet on his head !  
Shout, men of Nineveh ! shout out aloud,

For your deliverance cometh !”

Like the ring

Of a clear-speaking clarion, was her voice  
 Heard on the battlement ; and on the plain ;  
 And up at once was sent a deafening roar  
 From the rejoicing myriads. On the wall,  
 And through the city, like a thunder-peal,  
 Long rolling, echoing, and re-echoing still,—  
 From point to point of the wide-arching heaven,  
 Ran on the glad acclaim.

His burning brow,

Bright inexpressibly, above earth's rim  
 Now 'gan the sun uplift ; but not a hand,  
 And not a voice, to worship him was raised !  
 Upon the coming chariot, and the helm,  
 Fire flinging round, that almost might appear  
 Part of his blazing orb, all eyes were fixed.  
 The hot breath from their nostrils, and the smoke  
 Of the fast flying steeds, as in a mist,  
 The chariot wrapped : and the yet rising sun,  
 Fierce glory poured behind,—so that no eye,  
 Though straining eagerly, might clearly see.  
 But, like a meteor gliding on the earth,  
 Swiftly it came ; and every moment grew,  
 Till to their gaze its bulk enormous seemed ;  
 The-horses like colossal statues, hewn  
 From marble, but with life instinct, appeared ;  
 And he that rode, like to a giant of old,  
 Before the fountains of the deep broke up,  
 To overwhelm the earth.

Among themselves,

Then said the Assyrians ; “ Can this be the king ?”  
 And others whispered ; “ Hath not Nimrod risen,  
 To save his city ?” Many then cried out,  
 “ The god ! the god ! Bel hath himself come down,  
 In his bright arms, and in his car of fire,  
 Our enemies to consume !”

Amazed, confused,

Silent, and motionless, the Medes beheld :  
 For now the chariot all alone advanced,

And who was he that singly dared come on,  
In arms against a host ?

Still more and more  
The marvel grew ; and louder, and more loud  
The clamor on the walls, and on the plain.  
And, as the chariot rapidly shot by,  
And the king's car and horses well were seen,—  
Gate after gate flew wide ; and multitudes  
Poured forth, to follow. Also, from the throng  
Of the Assyrian legions, joyfully,  
To meet it a great multitude went on ;  
Still crying as they went, " Long live the king !  
Long live Sardanapalus, king of kings !"

But, in the void 'twixt both astonished hosts,  
The storm-winged chariot drove : and, like the peal  
Of the loud thunder, over all the din  
Of acclamation, rose the mighty voice  
Of him that therein rode. Within the car  
Upstanding suddenly, toward the Medes he looked ;  
Lifted his spear, and cried triumphantly,  
" Arbaces !"

When that name the Assyrians heard ;  
And when, turned on them now, that countenance dread,  
Too well they saw,—ran through them freezing fear.  
" The king is slain," they cried, " and in his car  
The rebel comes ! Fly to the city, fly !"

The Medes cried also, " Fallen is the king !  
His chariot, and his horses, and his arms,  
Are taken for a spoil ! Speed through the gates."

As, by the breath of the autumnal storm,  
The seared leaves of the forest numberless  
In thick clouds are driven onward,—heap on heap,  
Tossing and whirling, rapidly they fly,—  
Even so, before the onset of their foes,  
Throng upon throng, the Assyrians wildly fled.

But, on the wall, the horrible cry arose,  
And in the city, " Haste, and close the gates !  
Shut fast the gates ! Shut out both foe and friend !  
Else will the Medes be on us ; and our wives  
Be taken for their concubines ; our sons

Become their slaves ; and every agēd man,  
And every child, will perish by the sword !  
Fly, fly, and shut the gates !”

Then were men's hearts  
By terror hardened ; and, with one accord,  
Down from the walls, and from the crowded streets,  
Flew thousands to the work. The hinges groaned ;  
Heavily clashing, rang the brazen gates ;  
And, ere the foremost of the flying throng  
The wall had neared,—bolt, bar, and massive chain,  
Leaped to their place ; and foe, and friend, alike,  
Remorselessly shut out !

Rose then a cry  
Of selfish gladness all along the wall,  
And in the city : but, upon the plain,  
Yells, prayers, and imprecations dread were heard.  
Wildly the routed shrieked ; and, with their arms,  
Struck on the brazen barriers,—screaming out,  
“ Fling wide the gates, or we shall perish all !”

Some, cursing bitterly, their swords, or spears,  
Against the battlement hurled ; some, 'mid the foe,  
In frenzy of despair, plunged—death to seek :  
Myriads to east, or west, fled frantically :  
But most, resolved not unavenged to die,  
Fought bravely to the last ; and, dying, sent  
Their curse upon the city.

Till the sun  
One fourth o'er heaven's broad road his race had sped,  
Sounded the hurly of that mortal strife.  
In vain Arbaces had lift up his voice,—  
For his great heart was sorrowful,—to stay  
The fury of the slaughter : vainly rang  
The signal-trumpets,—in that uproar dire  
Scarce heard, and unregarded,—for revenge  
Maddened the Medes. At dawn had it been seen,—  
And speedily through all the host made known,—  
That, of the myriads who had crossed the bridge,  
By their great leader spared ; and who, to death,  
For them, and for their holy cause, had vowed  
Faithful to stand,—remained not now one man !

Vindictive then, and hard as stone, their hearts !  
Nor even their god-like leader could assuage  
The fierceness of their vengeance. To his voice,  
And to the trumpet-summons, a deaf ear  
Remorselessly they turned ; and still slew on.

At length the foot was wearied, the arm weak,  
The breath was spent : the gasping fugitive,  
Voiceless, cried out no more ; no more the shout  
Of the pursuer sounded : steeds fell down,  
Nor strove again to rise : the sword, and axe,  
Too heavy for the arm, with toil were raised,  
And, falling, wounded not : no strength remained  
The spear to cast ; no hand could draw the bow :  
And, when the trumpet-signals, and the voice  
Of their indignant chief,—still calling out  
To stay the battle,—better could be heard,  
Quickly the struggle ended.

Through the gates,—  
Brief time elapsed,—the Assyrians feebly crept ;  
For friends within had opened stealthily ;  
Nor could their foes prevent.

The outworn Medes,  
Beneath the shade of trees, or by the slope  
Of Tigris' bank, or underneath the wall,—  
Wherever standing when the tempest died,—  
Sank on the earth at once,—for rest and sleep,  
Greedy as famished wretch for savoury food.  
Riders dismounted, and along the ground  
Stretched their tired limbs : their horses bent the knee,  
And rolled beside them : from their cars came down  
The charioteers, and loosed the sinking steeds :  
Then horse and man together pressed the earth.

The Assyrians also, who within the walls  
Had safety found,—by like severe control  
Subdued, sank helpless ; sleep the sovereign good  
Of life, esteeming all.

So, for long hours,  
While the bright god of day his fiery beams  
Poured down,—to life, and joy all things of earth  
Actively stirring,—the sore wearied hosts,  
Forgetful of their strife, slept heavily.

## BOOK THE EIGHTEENTH.

THREE times the glorious god of light, and life,  
Along the sapphire pavement of the sky  
Careering,—through the immense of space, his beams  
Shot, inexpressibly bright; but, on the walls  
Of Nineveh, and on the gory plain,  
No radiance fell: a thick cloud mantled all,  
As though, upon the ghastly piles of dead,  
His pure eye might not look. Three days and nights,  
By compact mutual, did the hostile hosts  
From fight refrain; that, dust to dust, the slain  
Might be to earth committed: and three days  
Was lamentation heard upon the plain,  
And in the fated city. The third night,  
The work was finished; and both sides their dead  
Had numbered. Of the Assyrians, had there fallen  
Full five score thousand men; and, of the Medes,  
Had one score thousand fallen. To the camp,  
And to the city, then the hosts retired;  
For now the truce was o'er; and, with the morn,  
Grim war his hell-dogs might let loose anew.

On the king's soul, meantime, thick darkness hung  
Alone he kept, and unto none would speak:  
Neither unto his children, nor his queen,  
Nor to his captains, nor his concubines.

On the fourth night, with Salamenes sat  
The sorrowing queen; and, after conference brief,  
To council called the captains.

With dark brows,  
Lips close compressed, and sorrow-speaking eyes,

At distance waiting, silently they stood  
Before their pallid queen. With head bowed low,  
Tears rolling down her cheeks, awhile she sat,  
And words found none. The glistening drops, at length,  
Hastily wiping off, she raised her face;  
Her soul re-summoned to the task; and thus,  
With quivering lip, and faltering utterance, spake.

“ Ah! day of woe, unlooked for, and accurs'd!  
A full blown flower this mighty city was,  
The pride of all the earth! but a sharp wind  
Hath withered it, and strown upon the ground  
Its shrivelled leaves, that ne'er shall bloom again!  
How set the fifth sun passed? Upon a host,  
Mighty, and boastful; steeped in revelry  
Unto the lips; a world-defying host;  
Yea heaven-defying: on a powerful king,  
In dazzling splendor throned; and, like a god,  
Worshipped, and hymned, by voices numberless.  
How rose next morn the sun? On that same host,  
Awe-stricken, shrieking, calling on the walls  
To shield them from a foe whom they had mocked,  
Hooted, and hissed at! on a field of dead!  
A hill of clay, which, but few hours before,  
Had been all reckless mirth, and boastfulness!  
On that same monarch, fallen like a tower,  
Stricken, and blackened by the thunderbolt!  
Oh Nineveh, proud queen! thy strength is shorn;  
Thy glory is gone out! Thou art a grave  
For living millions! bodies, soul-bereft!  
Animate corpses! creatures that have lost  
The life of life,—the noble front of man;  
The daring spirit, and the action free,—  
And now, with haggard cheek, and downcast eye,  
Oh, grief and shame! like fettered bondsmen crawl,  
Where once they stood supreme!”

She faltered; stopped;  
Her hands in anguish clasped; again bowed down  
Her beauteous face, and wept. But, rising soon,  
“ Enough of this,” she said; “ if thought, or act,

May yet give hope,—let not an hour be lost.  
Speak then who can, and boldly. On *you* now,  
Sage men, and valiant, hangs this tottering state;  
On you alone: for, ah! the mind, and arm,  
That should direct, and lead,—are, as the dead,  
Powerless, and lost! Belovèd brother, thou,—  
For yet hope shineth on thy distant view,  
Though all at hand is darkness,—do thou, first,  
Thy thoughts propound; and, afterwards, each man,  
Approving, or opposing, freely speak."

She ceased; and Salamenes for reply  
Addressed himself: but, with an angry look,  
Even by that lofty presence ill controlled,—  
Hastily stepping, Jerimoth stood forth;  
Bowed low, and spake.

"Thy royal state, O queen!

All reverence claimeth: but thy virtues more  
Subdue the hearts of men; for thy great soul  
Might fill a hero's bosom; and the faults  
And follies of thy sex, thou knowest not.  
Grief, double grief, then, sinks the brave man's heart,  
To see thee, like to one of common mould,  
Fall to despair; and melt away in tears,  
Useless, and weak. Forgive me, gracious queen,  
If I o'er bluntly speak: my heart is charged;  
And must have vent, or burst. We have been weak,  
Foolish, or heedless,—call it what you will,—  
And have been beaten, vanquished utterly.  
I grant the worst that any man can say:  
Our dead alone, if called to life again,  
Were army for a king: our wounded men,  
If healed, might prop a fallen nation up:  
All, all I grant: but, what the remedy?  
Could tears, though like the flooded Tigris poured,  
Call to our ranks again one single sword  
Of all that host thus lost? Could poor despair  
Strengthen our arms; or make our enemy quail?  
No! we were foolish,—let us now be wise;  
*That* is our remedy: were heedless once,—

Let us now watch like dragons, with the eye  
Still open, even in sleep. Our ranks are mowed,  
As with a scythe;—call then new harvest up.  
Sprinkle but gold enough,—and arm'd men  
Will rise, like mist when the hot sun looks down.  
Such is our remedy; nor long the time  
Ere the full crop may ripen. Rather far  
Than sit despairing,—would I strike a light,  
A spark at least of hope, even now when gloom  
Hangs heaviest on us. What if from our foe  
We lesson take; and, as on us they fell,  
Unlooked for,—so on them, even in their hour  
Of sleep, and lapt in full security,  
Pour out our myriads. We have rested now,—  
From arms at least, have rested,—full four days;  
And every soldier must for vengeance thirst.  
Ere midnight, thrice a hundred thousand swords  
Might rouse a tempest in yon slumbering camp :  
And who may say, how many there with morn  
Would waken? or whose banner highest fly? . . .

“ Ye shake the head, and think my words are rash.  
So be they then : yet better the worst freak  
Of very madness,—be there daring in it,  
And manly action,—than this grave-like gloom ;  
This damp, cold vapour, creeping through our veins,  
And stagnating our blood. Rather I'd strike  
My hand off, with one quick and resolute blow,  
Than see it slowly rotting from my arm.  
Such is my choice. I counsel watchfulness,  
Prudence, and caution, great as you desire ;  
But action ever; war unto the last.  
No downcast hearts, and corpse-like visages ;  
No shrinking back, as from a gaping grave ;  
But bold, free march, with firm foot, and strong arm,  
And eyes that will see nought but victory.

“ My thoughts are spoken : pardoned may I be,  
My gracious queen, if over rough the shell  
That wraps a wholesome kernel. On the earth  
Breathes not the man who, more than I, would feel  
Heart-pangs for every grief he caused to thee.

Nor liveth he, who truer homage pays  
 To thy bright virtues, and right noble mind :  
 But, thee to see cast down, who all the rest  
 Should'st, with thy strength superior, well uphold,—  
 That keenly galleth : and, as men in pain,  
 Do sometimes strike at those whom best they love,—  
 So my sharp anguish, to my words, perchance,  
 Hath given a sting, which, where I least would wound,  
 Hath shot its venom."

Bending as he stood,  
 Abashed, and grieved, and, with a faltering tongue,  
 Excuses pleading,—him the queen, well pleased,  
 Warmly thus answered.

" True, and valiant man !  
 In nought hast thou offended. A smooth word,  
 And supple knee, the veriest knave may bring :  
 Little costs that, when much 'tis meant to gain :  
 But thy rough, forthright speech, though causing  
 smart,—

Like medicine by a kind physician given,  
 At thine own peril is administered,  
 And all for others' good. Take, then, my thanks,  
 Not censure : though, perchance, thy caustic words  
 Not all deserved by me. Tears, ay of blood,  
 Our fallen state might draw ; nor shame the eyes  
 Of manliest weeper. Tears are no disgrace,  
 If from pure fountain flowing. 'Twas for all,  
 As for myself, I wept : for you, for him,  
 The wretched king,—for this great Nineveh,  
 Haughty, and valiant once, the queen of earth ;  
 Now seeming like a place of sepulchre.  
 No foolish sorrow this : but, rise ye now  
 To strength, and manly action,—then no more  
 For woman's weakness shall ye censure me."

So she ; and o'er her countenance divine  
 Flashed a quick light, as when, amid the storm,  
 A sudden sunshine breaks. With look of love,  
 And high approval, Salamenes heard ;  
 Promptly stepped forward ; on one knee bent down ;  
 Kissed her fair hand, and, rising, thus replied.

“ My queen, and sister, loved, and honored, both !  
Thy tears not less become thee, than thy words,  
Stirring to noblest deeds. The gods themselves,  
Though to all ills impregnable, may yet  
At sight of human misery drop a tear;  
Nor dim their glory.—But, of this enough.  
The time portentous our best counsel asks,  
And noblest conduct : nor in action more,  
Than in endurance. Who the broad, smooth path  
Of victory walks,—may, to the right or left,  
As ease or pleasure prompts, the straight road quit,  
Yet safely reach the goal : but, with defeat  
Still scowling on his face,—who the sharp ridge  
Precipitous climbs, may, by one heedless step,  
Be hurled to the abyss. Not now the hour  
For daring act offensive 'gainst the foe,  
But for calm prudence. When his strength is gone,  
The man must rest, would he new vigour gain ;  
And his exhausted nature, with all means  
That wisdom prompts, restore. Let then the sword,  
For a brief season,—as perforce it must,—  
Sleep in the scabbard. Our eternal walls  
All siege defy : here safely may we rest,  
And laugh the Mede to scorn : till, stronger grown,—  
As soon we shall be—with glad hearts again  
We may fling wide our gates ; our banners wave ;  
Face to face meet the vaunting enemy,—  
And once more bring him low. To every land,  
Both far and near, that owns Assyria's rule,  
Swift messengers already take their way,  
Succour to gain : large are the offers made,—  
Gold, honors, spoil,—to all who with the king  
Their strength join instantly : but, unto them  
Who hold aloof, or to the rebel give  
Counsel, or aid,—are threatened, bonds, and shame,  
Scourgings, and death, and utter overthrow.  
Already, from the distant hills and plains,  
Are many come ; and unto every man  
Hath treasure been given freely. Every day  
Our strength will wax : our walls with food, and wine,

For years are stored : while,—with long watching worn,  
And of provision scant,—the enemy  
Each day will weaker, and less numerous grow.  
TIME for us fights ; Time, whose resistless hand  
Shall drain the deep seas, and shall crumble down  
Earth's loftiest mountains,—Time for us doth fight.  
But, slow, as irresistible, his course ;  
For his own hour he chooseth : nor may man,  
Even for one moment, hasten on his step :  
Though oft, insanely fretful, he waits not  
The good that Time would bring ; but, in its place,  
Some smiling evil hugs. Be we, then, wise,  
Patient, and prudent ; and, our duties done,  
To heaven commit the event."

These words, to most,  
Well pleasing were : nor better counsel found  
The doubtful few. With aspects clouded still,  
But hearts less downcast, the assembly then  
Dissolved ; and every captain his own home,  
Deep pondering, sought.

Within Arbaces' tent,  
In council also, sat the Median chiefs.  
Rabsaris, and the Arabian king, all hot  
For instant onset, urged to force the gates ;  
Or, with tall ladders, scale the battlement.  
But them Arbaces, with majestic mien,  
And words well weighed, and calm, to wiser thoughts  
Subdued ; thus summing up the long debate.

" Since, then, too rash, and hopeless, were the attempt  
The walls to climb, or burst the brazen gates,—  
What course have we, save patiently to 'bide,—  
Like hunters watching till from out his lair  
The wild beast issue. Every day will men  
Flock to our banners ; for our messengers  
To north, and south, to east, and west make speed :  
The long down-trodden nations will with joy  
Our triumph learn ; shake off their chains ; and haste,  
To speed the accursed tyrant's overthrow.  
Why, then, with weak impatience should we fret ?  
The power that thrice five hundred years hath stood,

Ye cannot hope, in one short month, to cast  
From its broad base,—like to an infant's toy,  
Which the first breath blows down. All greatest things  
Do slowest move. The mountain rivulet runs,  
Rapid and sparkling down; from stone to stone  
Playfully bounding, like a sportive kid;  
Then at the bottom rests,—a quiet pool:  
But the great ocean's tide, as though asleep,  
Moves ponderously, yet shakes the solid rock.  
Be we the ocean, not the playful brook:  
We would not scatter pebbles, as in sport,  
But this great scourge of all the east cast down,—  
The deep foundations of whose tyranny  
Stand fixed, and mighty, as that ocean's cliffs.  
Be patient, then, and wait the appointed hour;  
For surely will it come. Of food, and wine,  
Enough we have; nay, luxuries beside;  
And, in our rich spoil, wealth to purchase more.  
With nought to fear, and everything to hope,  
Why should we, then, by poor impatience, risk  
The certain, for the doubtful? Though the walls  
Yet stand awhile,—the tyranny hath fallen,  
That made them dreaded. All is in our reach:  
But, snatch not ere the time, lest all be lost."

He ended, and sat down: nor after him  
Rose any man to speak; for with one voice,  
His counsel was applauded. To their tents  
Then all repaired; and, in profound repose,  
Erelong the city, and the camp, were wrapped.

But, to Assyria's king, no slumber came:  
In storm and darkness was his spirit plunged.  
Four days alone and speechless had he sat;  
By his great grief, as by a heavy flood,  
Borne down, and stunned. But, on that night, brief  
speech  
With Salamenes had he held; and learned—  
Then first had learned—of that disastrous fight,  
The dreadful whole. And, when the tale was told,

How, even in their last extremity,—  
Hearing that he, their king, afar was seen,  
In his bright chariot coming to their aid,—  
His routed host bravely had turned again,—  
And how, when, in his stead, the dreadful Mede,  
Fierce as a whirling rock, upon them broke,—  
Their hearts again had sunk ; and utter rout,  
And slaughter, driven them shrieking to the gates,—  
Then did the frantic king his garments rend ;  
Pluck from the roots his hair ; and on the floor  
Recklessly dash himself. Unsated still,  
After a while, the number of the slain  
Fearfully asked he ; and, when he had heard,  
Again like maniac raved. When all was told,  
Alone once more he sat. Remorse, and shame,  
Despair, and fury, like to savage beasts,  
By turns his bosom tore. His robes again  
He rent ; again with both hands plucked his hair ;  
With glaring eyes, now, as a stone, stood fixed ;  
Now, stamped upon the floor ; and to and fro,  
Like a caged tiger, strode ; and then, anon,  
Bursting in tears, and sobbing like a child,  
Covered his face, and sank upon the ground.

But, as the midnight came, by slow degrees,  
The storm passed off ; and, in its stead, remained  
A deep and horrible darkness. All alone  
In the vast banquet-hall—one single lamp  
Casting sepulchral light—with marble face,  
And staring eye, he sat. Beside his couch,  
Upon the golden table, near him lay  
A dagger, dunly gleaming. 'Twas of death  
That now he pondered,—death by his own hand !  
Before him, like a picture moving slow,  
His whole past life appeared : his tyranny,  
His joys, his splendor,—all a phantasm now :  
And, in its place, the dread reality  
Of the dark present,—the more dark to-come.  
The past portrayed him throned, with kings around,  
Submissly minist'ring ; the future showed  
A dungeon, chains and darkness ; or, less dread,

A public death, and a dishonored grave.  
For his luxurious banquets, he beheld  
The scant, unsavour'd meal; for flattery, heard  
The rebels' mocking laugh. On the bright past  
He looked,—and saw himself most like a God;  
On the drear future,—and beheld a worm.  
What now had life become!—a curse, a thrall;  
One blow would end it! Thinking thus, he raised  
The dagger; and his throbbing bosom bared.

Why, moveless, stays his hand? why, at the last,  
Drops on the table, corpse-like? A new pang  
The first expels: how would his foes rejoice!  
How would his children, and his stately queen,  
He dying, be left desolate! perchance  
Reviled, tasked, spit upon! the scorn of slaves!  
Never! with life was hope: while yet one man  
Should dare to stand in fight, would he resist.  
Assyria still into the clouds should lift  
Her crown'd head; and earth, as heretofore,  
Should crouch beneath her feet.

Brief, airy dream!

Shorn of her strength, bowed down, and humbled now,  
His cooler thought beheld the earthly queen:  
And, on her faded glory as he looked,  
The cause, the damning cause, *himself*, he saw;  
*His* guilt, *his* folly, his blind arrogance,  
The poison that had crept into her veins,  
And choked her breath of life!

Then came again,

Stinging like adders newly waked to life,  
The black thoughts that had slept; and his cold hand  
Once more the dagger grasped. With glaring eye  
Staring on vacancy; with his whole frame  
Stiffened to stone, he sat; his lips compressed,  
His nostrils spread, his face like marble fixed.  
Silence intense was in that festive hall,  
As in a sepulchre: the wretched king  
Breathed not; and felt not: even his heart stood still.

At length the trance was broken: one deep sigh  
Came forth; then dropped his head; his eye-lids closed;

From his relaxing hand, with tinkling sound,  
The dagger fell ; and down his pallid cheeks  
Large tear-drops trickled. But, as sense returned,  
New thoughts arose, which, as they gathered strength,  
Strange horror brought.

“ 'Twas in this very hall,”

He whispered, gazing fearfully around,  
“ The pale-browed prophet stood, and bade beware.  
Ha ! is it so ? My arm refused to strike,  
When death I wished for ! Is it then decreed  
That thus I shall not die, nor in this hour ?  
Five woes he threatened,—banquet, drenched with  
gore—

Flood—earthquake—fire—destruction ! Fearfully  
Hath one upon me fallen : what mean the rest ?  
They speak a future to me : and, perchance,  
Chained to the years to come, I *cannot* die !  
Abhorred thought ! Is the air peopled, then,  
With fleshless beings, that around us wait,  
To unstring our nerves, and force us to our doom ?  
And *he*, perchance, *he* mocking at me stands,  
Boneless, and bloodless ; an invisible,  
Yet powerful tyrant, to compel me on  
To my fixed fate. There—on that very spot—  
He stood, and threatened : there, with madman's hand,  
I seized, and dashed him headlong !—I see now  
The glaring eyes turned on me ; the gaunt frame,  
In the death-quiver !”

Shuddering, he shrank back :

An icy tremor through his body ran ;  
Quick came his breath ; his heart beat audibly :  
And lo ! before him in the darkness stood  
The Spirit of the seer ! The form was dim ;  
The countenance was wan, and terrible.  
The air grew cold around the king : his locks  
Stiffened ; his joints were strengthless ; his jaw fell ;  
His eye-balls from their sockets seemed to burst.

To heaven the phantom raised its arm, and spake.  
The voice was like the moan of wintry wind  
At midnight, when, upon the mountain's top,

It sweeps the lonely cedar.

“ Ruthless king !

Thy realm is passing from thee, like a dream ;  
Thy glory, like a cloud ! Thy countenance,—  
Fair to the eye of woman,—shall be black,  
And loathsome : and the voice that they have loved,  
Shall never more be heard ! Upon thy throne,  
Thine enemy shall sit ; and on his head  
Thy crown shall wear. But, as for thee, behold,  
Thy kingdom is the pit ! Thy name shall be  
A mockery, and a hissing among men !  
The banquet prophesied, hath come to pass :  
Flood—earthquake—fire—destruction, are at hand !

“ King of Assyria ! ponder on thy doom ;  
And, ere too late, turn from thy wickedness.  
So, though thy kingdom be for ever lost,  
Even yet thy soul may live !”

Thus having said,

The vision looked upon him, and was gone.

Amazed, and horrified, the king arose :  
His hair stood up ; from head to foot he quaked.

But, in brief time, he bade magicians come ;  
And told them what had been. Till night was spent,  
In low talk sat they ; nor, till high in heaven  
Stood the bright sun, did he in feverish sleep  
His trouble lose.

Deeper and deeper fell  
The darkness on his soul : the song, or harp,  
For days was heard not in his lonely halls :  
And not a man before him dared to come,—  
So stern his countenance, and terrible.

## BOOK THE NINETEENTH.

ON the next morrow, to the spacious plain  
South of the city, Salamenes led  
The Assyrian army,—for no foe was there,—  
And numbered them. By thousands they passed on.  
Four times a hundred thousand was their strength.

To every soldier then, a piece of gold,  
Food plentiful, and generous wines, were given,  
Their hearts to gladden. In her chariot rode  
The queen among them ; to the captains spake,  
And to the soldiers,—all encouraging,  
That they cried out aloud, “ Long live the queen !  
Long live the king ! The king shall triumph yet ;  
And put his enemies beneath his feet ! ”

That day, to aid them, many thousands came ;  
Horsemen, and charioteers, and men on foot ;  
For the king’s gold allured them. With the first,  
Came Gilgath, a huge giant ! Cubits six  
His stature was ; his spear ten cubits long.  
Loudly he boasted, saying, “ Let the Medes  
Send forth their champion,—face to face, ’gainst me,  
In single fight to stand : and let the event  
Determine, if the city shall be theirs,  
Or they our bondslaves be.”

The boaster charmed  
And, of the soldiers, many cried aloud,  
Admiring, and approving. But all mute  
The captains stood ; for inwardly they feared

Lest that Arbaces should himself come forth,  
In answer to the challenge. As the eve  
Drew on, into the city all retired ;  
And lighter grew the heart of every man.

On that same day, their numbers also told  
The Medes,—eight hundred thousand fighting men.  
And, when it was proclaimed, a joyful shout  
From all the host went up. To them, not less,  
On that same morning came, of horse, and foot,  
And chariots, not a few : and, with one voice,  
The army sang ; “ Behold, the mighty one  
Shall be cast down, and shall oppress no more !  
Then every man 'neath his own vine shall sit ;  
Of his own fig-tree eat : our sons no more  
Shall for their slaves be taken ; nor our wives,  
And beauteous daughters, for their concubines.”

Within the blazing chariot of the king,  
Drawn by the wind-swift steeds, amid them all  
Arbaces rode : and, as he passed along,  
Each soldier bared the head, and cried aloud,  
“ Long live Arbaces ! On his fathers' throne  
Long may he sit ! for he the oppressor hath  
From his high place struck down ! Long live the king !”

Then, after they had sacrificed,—the host,  
Orb within orb, close standing,—in the midst  
Belesis knelt, and prayed. Like his, at once  
All knees were bent ; all heads bowed reverently.

But, when they had arisen, and all again  
In silence stood,—he took the golden crown,  
Burning with gems, which, on his haughty brow,  
Assyria's lord had worn ; and on the head  
Of their great leader placing it, cried out,  
“ King of the Medes, long may Arbaces live !”  
But when, with eager voice, the multitude  
His words had echoed, louder still he cried,  
“ Long live Arbaces, KING OF KINGS long live !”

Rose then such shouts exultant, that all air,  
From earth to cloud-vault quivered : yet again,  
Again, again, like thunder-peals they rolled  
Above the city ; and great wonder grew.

But, from his head Arbaces took the crown ;  
The helm replaced ; and, reverently, thus ;  
“ Let us not boast before the time be come :  
The race not always to the swift is given,  
Nor battle to the strong. When mightier far  
The enemy than we,—upon them came  
Total defeat : let *us* not glory, then,  
Lest that our pride be humbled. In God’s hand  
The fate of nations is ; before His breath,  
Armies are but as dust.”

As thus he spake,  
Far off a trumpet sounded ; and, ere long,  
Appeared a herald. When, at length, he stood  
In presence of Arbaces, and the chiefs,  
A challenge to the bravest of the host  
Out-spake he,—face to face, in single fight,  
Gilgath to meet ; “ And let the event decide,  
If the eternal city shall be yours,  
Or ye our bondslaves be.”

With a great laugh,  
The boast was answered. “ To Assyria’s king,  
Thus, from Arbaces, say : ‘ If, by the gods,  
By earth, and sea, and by the realms beneath,  
In presence of his people he will swear,  
That on the issue of this fight shall rest  
Assyria’s doom, and ours,—then let him name  
The day, the place of combat ; and be sure  
Our champion shall go forth.’ But idle this :  
Thy monarch nought of such poor message knows ;  
Nor in his name thou speakest. Get thee back ;  
And the huge boaster tell, if over hot  
His valour,—when the battle shall awake,  
Soon may he cool it.”

With this taunt, retired  
The angry herald ; and the sound of mirth  
Far on pursued him. Till the evening closed,  
The army at their temperate feast remained ;  
Then kindled watch-fires, and retired to rest.

But, in his tent, alone, in solemn mood,  
Arbaces sat ; and, of the mighty things

Which had been ; of the greater yet to be,  
Earnestly pondered. Gentle thoughts, at last,  
Stirring within him, happier vision came :  
Home, mother, sister,—and, bright crown of all,  
His own beloved Hamutah. At that hour  
Of cool breeze and sweet perfume, well he knew  
That in her garden 'twas her wont to walk,  
Pensively musing. Even as rose the thought,  
Distinct as in the life, he saw her there :  
That face soul-beaming ; grandly beautiful ;  
That form majestic, with ineffable grace,  
Like a deep, gentle river, silently,  
Serenely gliding on.

Anon, she stops ;  
Across her full-orbed bosom folds her arms,  
As if embracing. Of whom thinks she, then ?  
Perchance of him,—beside what river's bank,  
On what rich plain, or near what city, now,  
With his rejoicing army wending home  
From year of hateful service,—he lies camped.  
Alas ! she knows not that the gentle Peace  
By horrid War is slain ! that months, nay years,  
May drag along, ere to his heart once more  
May he compress her !

But again she moves ;  
And now with lighter step ; she clasps her hands ;  
Looks up toward heaven ; speaks low, and lovingly.

Her voice was music ; fragrance round her breathed ;  
Her presence was a sunlight. O'er his soul,  
Came balmy softness, such as gentle rain  
Bringeth at eve in spring time, when the earth  
Is parched, and every herb and flower doth droop.

Then from his harp, with tender touch, he drew  
Harmonious breathings ; and, with mellow voice,  
Subdued and plaintive, sang. The song was one  
That she well loved ; and oft, in summer eve  
Of happier days, had listed. As he sang,  
His heart within him melted ; and his eyes  
With tears were filled. Then lay he down, and slept ;  
And, in his dreams, through groves, and by the banks

Of whispering brooks, with her walked lovingly ;  
And thought no more of battles, or of thrones,  
Till from his slumber, by the trumpet's blare,  
Awakened, and the voice of multitudes,  
That to the rising sun their matins hymned.

Then swiftly from the tent he issued forth ;  
And to the glorious light bowed down, and prayed.  
But, ere he ceased, beneath thick clouds again  
The sun was hidden ; and all day shone not.  
Five days, beneath black clouds, from mortal sight  
His splendor had been veiled : and gloomy thoughts  
In minds of many wakened ; for, as yet,  
The season of the rains was not at hand.

But, when some days had passed, and still the sun  
Was hidden,—more and more the minds of men  
Distempered grew. Then, when Arbaces heard  
How they were troubled,—with a smiling face,  
He went among them ; and with cheering words  
Their hearts revived. But to his tent he called  
The captains ; and thus spake.

“ This idle time  
Unwholesome thoughts engendereth. Though the god  
From us hath veiled his glory,—to our foe  
As little hath he shown it : wherefore, then,  
To us more evil omen ? Yet not thus  
Thinks the rude soldier. Would the enemy  
Blow out his trumpets, and his banners shake,  
Inviting battle,—of but small account  
Would our rough warriors deem it, that the sun  
Scorched not their faces. But, of this no hope :  
Behind the shelter of their walls, long time  
Will they remain : and here must we abide,  
Their pleasure waiting. Then, to cheer the minds  
Of those down-cast, who, else, may to the rest  
Become infectious,—let it be proclaimed  
That, every day of this enforced peace,  
Throughout the camp shall sports and pastimes be ;  
Trials of strength, and swiftness, both on foot,  
And in the race of chariots. Nor shall we,  
The captains, and the leaders, hold aloof.”

These words pleased all ; and heralds instantly  
Rode forth, and made proclaim.

That day again  
An insolent challenge from the giant came :  
And, as before, was mocked at. But, at once,  
Arbaces, his own heralds summoning,  
Thus, in the presence of his captains, spake.  
“ Go ye, and stand before Assyria’s king ;  
Before his rulers, and his men of war ;  
And say aloud. ‘ Twice hath a boaster sent,  
Daring our bravest, in the mortal fight,  
Singly to meet him ; thereby to decide,  
If the eternal city shall be ours,  
Or we your bondslaves be. If thou, O king,  
And ye, the lords, and rulers of the land,  
Will, in the presence of your people, swear  
A solemn oath, by earth, and sea, and sky,  
By gods above, and the dark realms below,—  
Upon the issue of this fight to rest  
Your doom, and ours,—then name the day, the place,  
And send your champion forth ; nor fearful be  
Lest ours may shun him. If ye like not this,  
Then to the field with all your strength come forth,  
To try the battle ; and thus surer prove,  
Whether to you the mastery belongs,  
Or whether unto us.’ ”

Thus having said,  
Upon his captains calmly he looked round,  
Their voice awaiting. Great was their applause.  
The heralds then bowed down ; and took their way.

But when, in presence of Assyria’s queen,—  
With lords, and chiefs, in sudden council met,—  
Boldly the heralds spake—in every breast,  
Wrath, and amazement rose. From her rich throne  
Upstarting—with a countenance of flame,  
Fearful, yet beauteous ; fire from out her eyes,  
As from two sapphires kindled by the sun,  
Intensely flashing,—the majestic queen,—  
Like angry goddess,—with inflated chest,  
And arm of rose-tinged ivory out-stretched,

Proudly thus made reply.

“ Begone, old men !  
 Reverend in years,—but, in your look, and tone,  
 And bold, bad message, most irreverent !  
 Assyria's king obeys not yet the call  
 Of impious rebels. But, ere long, be sure,—  
 For them perchance too soon,—the avenging hand  
 Will be put forth, and crush them in the dust !  
 Bid your imperious masters not o'er-loud  
 To vent their arrogance ; for still the gods  
 Are over all things ; and will vindicate,  
 Though late, the insulted majesty of kings.  
 Begone ! nor with more insolence taint the air !”

The heralds, as before an angry god,  
 Rather than aught of human mould,—with awe  
 Stood trembling, and were mute. The voice, though  
 sweet

As richest stop of organ, like a burst  
 Of thunder made their very hearts to quake.  
 A moment thus they stood ; nor dared look up,—  
 So dread the aspect of that beauteous brow,  
 So withering the lightning of that eye,—  
 Then turned, and went their way. Down sank at once  
 The o'er-wrought queen ; and, covering up her face,  
 Wept bitterly.

That spectacle, unmoved,  
 Who might behold ? The discontented brow,  
 The muttering lip, were seen ; yet none, at first,  
 His thoughts dared speak : till Jerimoth, at length,  
 His pent-up anger scorning all control,  
 Thus boldly questioned.

“ Will the king, then, see  
 His queen insulted, and his nobles mocked,  
 And send no chastisement ? Where slumbereth he ?  
 And wherefore, in this moment perilous,  
 And shameful, from his people doth he hide ?”

To him, with gentle tone, Nebaioth spake,  
 Admonishing ; and Salamenes placed  
 His hand upon the fiery warrior's breast,  
 Patience imploring. But his dangerous speech

The queen had heard; and, [while her eyes dropped  
tears,

Turned, and thus spake.

“Ye murmur that the king  
Cometh not forth among you : would he might !  
Not now in feasting, laughter, dance, and song,  
He revelleth : but, with a mighty grief  
Borne down, and with thick darkness round him cast,  
Looks like a body which the soul hath left,  
While life yet lingereth. Have ye never heard  
That, sometimes, in the living human form,  
Demons have entered ; and the whole man ruled  
By their own hellish will ? Was not that king  
Of Israel, Saul, by Foul Things thus possessed ;  
And to their bidding bowed ? Alas ! Alas !  
Even so, I fear me, is Assyria's king  
By demons entered ; for his wretchedness  
Passeth belief : and would to tears more move,  
Could ye behold him, than to words of wrath.  
Alone he dwelleth, and no face will see,  
Nor voice will listen : neither food, nor drink,  
For two days hath he tasted : all distraught  
His looks are ; and his hue as of a corpse.  
But, as to Saul of old did David go,  
And with sweet music from his spirit drive  
The Things of darkness,—so, unto the king,  
Do thou, young Dara, speed. Without the door,  
Take thou thy place ; and, gently, from the harp,  
Draw forth soft harmony. If not dismissed,  
Then enter ; and, with louder symphony,  
Prelude a strain of battle. Should he stir,  
Nor yet command thee go,—then, raise thy voice,  
And pour a song heroic, of the deeds  
Of Ninus ; or of Nimrod ; or of her,  
The warrior-queen, Semiramis : perchance,  
So may the gloomy demon from his heart  
Be chased ; and with new vigour may he rise.”

Thus having spoken, to the lords she bowed,  
The council ending.

Bearing in his hand

A golden lyre, then Dara to the door  
Of the king's chamber went : but, issuing thence,  
Beheld Azubah. In one hand, she held  
A dulcimer ; and, with the other, stanch'd  
Fast flowing tears.

“ Oh ! go not in,” she said :  
“ Wroth that from bonds I had my father loosed,  
Me with most harsh rebuke hath he dismissed ;  
And no man's face will see.”

Then Dara knew  
His errand vain ; and mournfully retired.

On the next morning also, and each morn,  
Gilgath his boastful challenge sent again ;  
And still with words more arrogant : for now,  
When he beheld that no man answered him,  
So swelled his pride that, singly, for them all,  
He deemed himself sufficient.

Every day,  
Arbaces also, with his cars and horse,  
Nigh to the city rode ; and bade blow out  
The trumpets ; and the heralds cry aloud :  
“ When will the king come forth ? why tarrieth he  
Why comes he not to battle ?”

Gilgath then,  
When he beheld them, with enormous stride,  
Upon the battlement stalked to and fro ;  
Shaking his spear, uplifting high his shield,  
And bellowing forth defiance. But, with mocks  
Still was he answered.

To the Medes, each day,  
Came thousands ; chariots, horse, and infantry :  
But, to the city, tens of thousands went :  
For gold to every man was freely given ;  
And a rich spoil was promised.

All this time,  
Through sea of ponderous cloud, the god of light  
Gloomily travelled ; nor his getting-up,  
Nor his down-setting, was beheld at all :  
So that in both the hosts was marvel great,  
And fearful looking forth for what should come.

All this time, also, on Assyria's king  
Hung a thick darkness : neither with his queen,  
Nor with his children, nor his concubines,  
Nor with his captains spake he ; but alone  
With wizards, and astrologers conferred.

But, when the day of the new moon had come,  
To the south plain once more the Assyrian host  
Went forth ; and Salamenes numbered them.  
Six times a hundred thousand was their strength.

Then were their hearts made glad : and, when she saw  
That from his torpor still the king stirred not,  
The queen to council summoned the great chiefs,  
And battle was resolved on.

That same day,  
His legions also did Arbaces sum.  
Eight hundred, three score thousand fighting men,  
Their number was : and, for the combat, all  
Ardently thirsted. Then, when eve drew nigh,  
Unto his tent the captains he convened,  
And thus began.

“ The men, ye see, are hot  
For conflict ; but our enemies come not forth.  
How then may they be stirred ? Still, day by day,  
Thousands to us ; but unto them do come,—  
So boast they,—tens of thousands ; and their strength  
Must now be great : yet in their walls they lie  
Secure, and will not meet us. Nor can we  
Greatly prevent the aid that reaches them :  
For, if to round the walls, and bar access,  
Our armies we divide,—soon may they fall  
With 'vantage on us ; and some triumph win.”

Belesis then, uprising, thus replied.

“ Have thou no fear, Arbaces : in brief time,  
Full surely will they issue. Now some days  
Have passed, since they with patience 'gan receive  
Our daring to come forth. When they were weak,  
Quickly incensed, too, were they. Without wrath,  
The taunt to bear, gives proof of conscious strength.  
Erelong, then, look to see the gates wide flung ;  
And streaming banners pour upon the plain,—

Though, by the help of God, in humbler show  
Doomed to return. So, patiently await."

He scarce had ceased, when, rising hastily,  
The Arabian king came forward, and thus spake.

"O'er hot ye oft have deemed me; more inclined  
By strength to overthrow, than by device  
Trip up,—and I confess ye judge me right:  
And, rather than thus linger here,—like dogs  
Around a fox's hole close crouched, to wait  
His coming out,—would I beat down the gates,  
If that might be; or, with long ladders, try  
The walls to climb. But, hear me patiently;  
And ye shall find that, when occasion fits,  
I can be subtle also. What if now,  
Instead of bursting, I a way devise,  
By stealth to ope yon gates, and let you in? . . .

"Ye smile;—but, listen first; and, afterwards,  
Perchance ye still may smile; yet not as now,  
But with the hope of swift, and sure success.  
Hear then my thoughts; not on the heat struck out;  
But, during days and nights, well wrought and shaped.

"Each day into the city thousands pass,—  
Freely received, no doubt, and questioned not.  
Let, then, a hundred of our choicest men,—  
By night departing,—at some eastern gate,  
With dawn present themselves;—though not at once,  
Nor in one body,—but in separate groups,  
As chance-met strangers. They will be received;  
Welcomed as friends; paid, fed, with arms equipped;  
And fitly lodged. Nigh on the mid-hour, then,  
Of the first night,—when all the city sleeps,—  
Let each man, walking silently and slow,  
As if no thing of moment called him forth,  
Hie toward the gate of Nisroch. When in force  
Assembled there,—but in deep silence still,—  
Let them the watchers seize;—and, under pain  
Of death immediate, bid wide open fling.

Meantime, be ready, close without the gate,  
In darkness couched, a band of chosen men,  
Well armed, and numerous, who may pass within.

That done,—three torches, waving in a line  
Upon the battlement, might signal be  
For all our host,—massed opposite each gate,—  
At swiftest to advance : but, first, of horse  
Some thousands, who, awaiting not far off,  
May rush within ; then, skirting close the wall,  
East, west, fly on ; and every other gate  
That fronts the camp, throw open. Like a flood,  
Thus may we altogether on them burst ;  
And with an utter ruin overwhelm.  
If, afterwards, we should the city keep ;  
With fire destroy ; or raze unto the ground ;  
Be food for later thought."

While thus he spake,—  
With faces kindling, and bright flashing eyes,  
From man to man the eager captains looked ;  
Each seeking if, by them, as by himself,  
The scheme was relished. When the monarch ceased,  
A burst of warm applause rose instantly ;  
And every man, upstarting from his seat,  
Essayed to speak. All, then, with one accord,  
Their places quitting, mingled in the midst ;  
Thronging, and crossing, as, from man to man,  
With lifted voice, and gesture vehement,  
Sharply they moved,—that, suddenly, the tent,  
Rather like scene for some wild dance appeared,—  
Mazy and intricate,—than ordered place  
For solemn council.

One alone stood still,  
Nor spake at all,—Arbaces : yet his eye,  
And features eloquent, not less delight  
Told visibly, than did the loudest tongue.  
Nor spake Belesis much : but, when the din  
In part had settled, he his hand uplift,  
Bespeaking silence : then, when to their seats  
All had returned,—to Abdolonimus, first,  
Thus he began.

" How well thy scheme is liked,  
Needs not to tell thee ; for the general voice  
Loudly proclaims it. Aspect bright and fair

Truly it hath ; and such its quality,  
That, once propounded, marvel it appears  
To every man, that he so rich a gem,  
Open and clear to view, should have o'erlooked.  
Yet, 'twixt the first conception of an act,  
And its full execution, oft arise  
Unthought-of difficulties, which, at length,  
Blast the fair promise. Not to damp your zeal,  
Thus speak I ; but to teach a wary tread  
On even the smoothest path ; lest pitfalls lurk,  
Unseen, undreamed of. When the shaft is shot,  
Ye cannot stop it midway in its flight,  
Or turn aside—though seeing it must pierce  
The heart of wife, or child. Then, ere we draw—  
For still in darkness must frail mortals shoot,  
When at the future aiming—let all eyes,  
At utmost stretch of vision, forward look,  
To spy if, 'twixt the arrow, and the mark,  
Stand aught to arrest it, or to turn aside.  
So, with calm mind, let every man well scan  
The object, and the means : and, when our best  
In thought, and act, we faithfully have done,  
With Heaven be left the event. To me, I own,  
Right fair, and hopeful doth, at present, seem  
The stratagem,—so, in the acting on't,  
Be care, and honesty. In this sole thing,  
Aught new do I advise. One hour ere dawn,  
Rather than midnight,—so to me appears,—  
Were for our action best. The watchers then  
Will be outworn, and sleepy ; and their ears  
Less quick to catch the sound of hoof and wheel.  
Nor, at that hour, will less the amazement be,  
And terror in the city ; while, for us,  
The coming light a powerful aid will lend ;  
And guide us on to victory."

In few words,

The Arabian king, approving, made reply :  
Then, when he saw that no man stirred to speak,  
Arbaces rose, and said : " Belesis, thou  
My thoughts hast uttered. Till the morrow's eve,

Let each man on this purpose ponder well :  
Then, when we meet again, if any doubt  
Perplex his mind ; or any thought have risen,  
Pregnant with promise,—let him freely speak.  
To thee, brave Abdolonimus, the thanks  
Of all are due ; and warmly are they given,  
Be what may be the event : for wisest thoughts,  
The gods not favoring, may bad issue bring,  
Even as the foolish.”

To their tents then went  
The captains ; flushed with hope ; yet, not the less,  
Deeply forecasting of the means, and end.

At eve of the next day, when they had met ;  
And no man aught of counsel new proposed,—  
Ten captains over hundreds were called in ;  
And thus Arbaces spake.

“ Go now ; and choose,  
Each from the hundred over which he rules,  
Ten valiant men ; and worthiest of your trust.  
Discreet, as valiant, look you that they be,  
Else evil may arise. Now take your way :  
And, when the men are chosen, bring them here,  
That we may speak with them.”

The captains bowed,  
And straight retired. In silence sat the chiefs,—  
As men, on some great thing resolved, are wont :  
Nor seemed it, for a time, that any man  
Would break the stillness. But Arbaces soon  
Arose ; and bade to place before the chiefs,  
Dried fruits, and wine ; and, like a courteous host,  
From one to the other went,—in light discourse  
Mingling, by turns, with all.

But when, at length,  
The captains, with the hundred chosen men,  
Were ready at the door, they all went forth,—  
For room enough within the tent was not :  
And, when the men, in one compact array,  
Attentive stood, then first the Arabian king,—  
Not claiming precedence, but honored so,  
Both by Arbaces, and the general voice,—

To their astonished ears, the bold design,  
At large unfolded : all the action's course,  
Step after step, went o'er,—repeating oft,  
And often questioning, that he might know  
If all, by all, were rightly understood.

Then, when it seemed that every man well knew ;  
He cheered them to their task ; and bade to think  
Of honors, and rewards awaiting them,  
That glorious thing achieved. In every face,  
Save one, shone hope and gladness : and when, last,  
He questioned them, if, with a willing mind,  
They girt them to the enterprise,—“ We do,”  
As from one voice, came forth the prompt reply.

Arbaces then, with some few parting words,  
Dismissed them : and the leaders to their tents,  
With joyful hearts, retired.

When midnight came,—  
All warlike show laid by ; in humble guise  
Of hunters, or of husbandmen, arrayed ;  
The hundred chosen men,—with wine, and food,  
Refreshed and strong, and full of hope,—set forth.

Far eastward from the city having gone,  
Awhile they rested : but, when dawn was nigh,  
In separate groups, as each to the other strange,  
They parted wide. Welcomed, and questioned not,  
Through different eastern gates, erelong, all passed.

But, like a snake amid fair flowers concealed,  
Among these valiant men one traitor lurked.  
When, for his falsehood, and his treachery,  
Stripped of his arms, and driven from out the camp,  
With scorn and hissing,—Nahor, filled with rage  
And rancour 'gainst the Mede, and Azareel,  
Resolved a deep revenge. Their blood alone  
His malice could appease. By open stroke,  
Not to be dared,—yet, in some secret way,  
Vengeance might reach them. Reckless at what cost  
This bad end might be gained,—to mean disguise  
His pride he stooped : his dark luxuriant locks  
First shorn he off : his beard, of lordly trim,  
To peasant's fashion cut : his eye-brows plucked :

His fair complexion, to a dingy hue,  
With villanous mixture, stained : then, in the garb  
Of husbandman, and under borrowed name,  
Returned, and joined the host. His size, and strength,  
And bold demeanour, marked him out as one  
Well fitted for all daring enterprise :  
And, therefore, of the hundred chosen men,  
Among the first was he.

Before the tent,  
When with the rest he stood ; and saw come forth  
The two whom on the earth he hated most,—  
Arbaces, and the faithful Azareel,—  
Heart-sickness came upon him : with teeth set,  
And hands hard clenched, he stood—longing to strike.

But, when the Arabian king, the whole design  
Had well unfolded,—like the sudden flash  
Of lightning in the darkness, through his soul  
Shot gleams of coming vengeance. What recked he,  
Though with the Medes he stood, if, unto them,  
Or to their foe, should fall the victory ?  
He for himself lived solely : and, to him,  
The cup of life no drop so sweet could give,  
As satisfied revenge. What though to death,  
His noble comrades in that bold design,  
He must give up ;—what though the general host,  
His countrymen, his friends, his sworn allies,  
Might fall by myriads,—yet Arbaces, too,  
Who had disgraced him ; Azareel, who held  
The seat from which himself had been cast down,  
Must also feel the blow ;—and, them to crush,  
Through blood of thousands gladly had he trod,  
As through a summer-brook.

Yet not alone  
Revenge invited him : fame, honor, power,  
And riches, by the king to be bestowed,  
A fit reward for that great treachery,—  
He saw awaiting him. When, therefore, he  
The gate had passed,—for singly he went in,—  
Earnestly prayed he that, without delay,  
Into the presence of Assyria's king

Might he be led,—things dark and perilous  
To unfold before him. That bold prayer refused,  
To Salamenes forthwith hasted he :  
Him found a willing listener : and at once,—  
In the munificence of the king of kings,  
For recompense humbly trusting,—the whole scheme,  
From first to last revealed.

Before the queen,—  
A loathed pollution,—was the traitor brought.  
Again the tale was told : a council prompt  
Was summoned : messengers to every chief  
In haste dismissed : all preparation made,  
The enemy in his own toils to take :  
Then, when they everything had ordered well,—  
The queen, and Salamenes,—hoping now,  
By these great tidings, from his lethargy  
The downcast king to rouse,—his chamber sought.

Alone, in melancholy mood, sat he :  
His robes disordered ; his once shining locks  
Of curling gold, all dull and drooping now :  
His countenance, once radiant as the blush  
Of summer's dawn,—now wan, cadaverous,  
Like his who in the dungeon's atmosphere  
Long years has breathed : so was the mighty fallen !

When it was told him that, with matters deep,  
Strange and portentous, charged,—the queen herself,  
With Salamenes, instant audience sued,—  
Wonder, and fear, shame, and vexation, mixed,  
Lighted with hectic flush his pallid cheek ;  
And kindled his dull eye. Irresolute,  
Awhile he sat, and spake not : then the sign  
Permissive made ; and, with contracted brow,  
And look of stern impatience, their approach  
Sullenly waited.

When the haggard king  
She first beheld,—shocked by his ghastly look,  
The queen stood speechless : but, recovering soon,  
Went, kissed his hand, and said. " How fares my lord ?  
Thy look is sad, and sickly. Wherefore thus,  
In solitude, and grief, thy health consume ?

The past is past : the future calls thee now :  
Action invites thee forth : thy people cry,  
' Where is the king ? and wherefore, in this strait,  
Doth he abandon us ? ' Then, my dread lord,  
Be once again thyself : let cowards lie  
Despairing, when o'erthrown ; but let the brave,  
Against the shock of fate stand manfully ;  
And, though successless, yet deserve success.  
Fate holds a balance, wherein doom of man,  
For good, or ill, is weighed : as sways the beam,  
There is a moment,—be it seized aright,—  
When man his own hand in the scale may throw ;  
And bring down good. King of Assyria, *now*,  
For thee that moment is. This night the foe  
Will gather by the wall ; in hope, at dawn,  
The gates to enter. All their plan is known  
The lions will be taken in a net ;  
The cunning men in their own trap be caught :  
And, if the king but rise to aid us now,  
Haply may ne'er escape."

While thus she spake,  
The frown that had the monarch's face obscured,—  
Like a thick cloud when 'gins the sun to shine,  
To cheerful radiance changed. His listless limbs,  
With sudden strength seemed filled ; his eyes grew  
bright ;  
His chest expanded ; and deep breath he drew,  
Like one who for the race prepares himself.  
Starting from off the couch, aloud he said,  
And raised his hands toward heaven, " Then once again  
Will I go forth to battle : and, oh gods !  
Whoe'er ye be, that rule man's destiny,—  
Give me to trample down that foe accursed ;  
And hecatombs shall on your altars lie ;  
And with their fragrant smoke your thrones enfold,  
As clouds the mountain's top ! But now, with speed,  
Do thou, my brother, and best counsellor,  
This thing in full declare : what wile the foe  
Hath plotted ; and what sager counterstroke  
Ye have to crush him."

Salamenes then,—

The king permitting,—to his presence, first,  
The treacherous Nahor brought ; and, by his mouth,  
The whole design made known. Dismissing soon  
The trembling wretch,—for, like to fiery darts,  
Went to the caitiff's breast the keen stern looks  
Of those who, using, loathed him,—thus, in brief,  
Spake Salamenes.

“ The whole deep design  
Of our most subtle foe thus known to thee,—  
Hear now, dread monarch, by what counterstroke  
We aim to foil him : and, if overbold  
Perchance it seem that, not consulting first  
Assyria's lord, thy queen and brother dared  
Council to summon ; and the instant means  
Devise to save thy city,—let the need  
Excuse the daring. Thus, then, have we done.

“ The hundred Medes first captured,—man by man,  
Sternly were questioned, till the whole stood clear.  
The enemy in his own toils to take,  
Thus next was ordered. When the sun hath set,—  
Chariots and horsemen, two score thousand strong,  
Silently moving, will the city leave,  
And take wide compass ; to the eastward half,  
Half toward the west : but when, ere dawn, the Medes  
With their whole force move onward from the camp,  
Behind them will they close.

“ On either flank  
Of the exulting rebels, marching on,—  
Horse, chariots, twice ten thousand ; infantry  
Twice fifty thousand,—ambushed warily,  
Will wait the sign : and, from the Nisroch gate  
At distance fit, wide stretching, east and west,—  
In the death-hug so best to grapple them,—  
Of infantry, a hundred thousand strong,  
Thrice told. But in the city, near the gates,—  
All prompt to act as may occasion call,—  
Will stand the rest. Then, when at dawn the Medes  
Before the gate of Nisroch come, and strike,—  
It shall be opened. They will mount the wall,

And show the sign,—three torches, waved abreast,—  
For all their host to march. But, when the sound  
Of the on-coming shall be heard—behold !  
A thousand trumpets on the battlement  
Shall signal give ; a universal shout  
From all our armies answer ; and, at once,  
Behind, before, on either flank, shall fall  
Destruction on them. Retribution fit !  
So the great gods smile on us, and assist !”

Well pleased, the monarch listened ; all approved ;  
And once again, to highest heaven of hope  
His soul was lifted. But, when left alone,  
With solitude despairing thoughts returned ;  
And with his heart thus darkly he communed.

“ All hope is vain ! Fate hath our fall decreed !  
Why should I toil, and vainly vex myself ?  
What *will* be, *will* be ; and no mortal power  
Can stay the doom ! The banquet was foretold,—  
It came ; and this great empire to its base,  
Was shaken. Tempest — Flood — Earthquake — and  
Fire,  
Are next decreed ;—and then the Final Fall !  
At what time hence, I know not : all is dark ;  
Dark as the grave !—The grave ? foul thought ! Shall  
worms

Prey on the body of the king of kings,  
As on a dog, by the wayside cast out,  
At which the passing beggar stops the nose,  
Turning aside with loathing !——But, away !  
Black thoughts away ! Still lives Assyria's king ;  
Still king of kings he lives, and lord of lords :  
And, though the leper on his corpse may spit ;  
Yet, living, shall the mightiest of the earth  
Tremble, and bow before him. And that wretch,  
The doubly miscreant, who his monarch first,  
In his great need abandoned ; and now comes,  
Faithless to those he served,—for sordid gold,  
To sell the lives of myriads,—he, even now,  
Shall feel my power ; and know that, if I use  
The traitor's counsel, in my inmost heart  
I do abhor the traitor.”

Starting up,  
Aloud he called ; and, when the attendants came,  
Thus ordered :

“ To the captain of the guard  
Make speed. Command him straightway to lead forth  
The Arachosian, Nahor : hand and foot,  
Bind him with cords : then from the battlement  
Fling him down headlong ! So shall it be seen  
How the king loveth traitors.”

Mutely bowed  
The attendants, and retired. A gloomy joy  
Burning within him, as at some great act  
Of stern, reluctant justice,—on his couch  
Again the monarch sank : but, in brief time,  
Dark fears returning, he before him called  
Magicians, and astrologers, who now  
Within the palace dwelt, that nigh at hand  
They might await his bidding ; and thus said :

“ Upon the morrow will the armies meet  
In a great conflict. Search, and, by your art,  
Foretell to me the issue.”

Lowly bowed  
The cunning men, and went. But when, at length,  
Before the cheerless king again they stood,  
Downcast their faces were ; and, for a time,  
No man among them spake.

Then thus the king :  
“ Have ye no answer ? Wherefore stand ye mute ?  
Shall we be victors, or again o'erthrown ?  
And shall the king himself the battle lead,  
Or to his brother trust it ?”

Stepping then  
Before his fellows, Mophis bowed, and said.  
“ O king of kings ! let not thy soul be wroth  
With thy poor servants, if the thing they speak  
Ill pleasing to thee be. So darkly show  
The auguries ; that, whether good, or ill,  
Upon the morrow wait thee,—with sure eye  
Can none of us foresee. Yet, unto one,  
Thus is it shadowed. For Assyria's lot,

Evil, and Good, with balanced force contend;  
And the dread issue, Fate alone doth know.  
But, let the king a solemn sacrifice  
To the gods offer; and they, now incensed,  
May be appeased, and grant the victory.  
And this the manner of the sacrifice.  
Let him beside the altar-stone bind safe  
A virgin, nobly born, and beautiful  
As flowers of summer. If the battle, then,  
Go with the king,—the gods demand her not;  
And she may live: but, if against him hold  
The tide of conflict,—then may he be sure  
That wrathful are they still; and do require  
The atoning incense of the sacrifice.  
Then, let her blood steam upward from the ground;  
And on the altar-fire her limbs be spread;  
Till in thick curling clouds of fragrant smoke  
Her form be melted, and to heaven go up,—  
Their wrath appeasing. So the flood of war  
Shall, at the smile of the approving gods,  
Turn back; and bear the king to victory."

Well pleased, the monarch heard. Dismissing then  
The augurs, he his youthful charioteer  
Summoned, and thus: "To Salamenes haste.  
Say—'on the morrow doth the king intend  
A solemn sacrifice, the gods to soothe,  
And goeth not to battle: therefore thou  
His armies lead: and look for victory.'"

Lowly bowed Dara, and with speed withdrew;  
But sorrowing; for he knew the word had flown  
Throughout the armies, that the king himself  
Would lead his hosts to combat; and much now  
He feared, lest in the soldiers should arise  
Disheartening thoughts. To Salamenes soon  
He bore the unwelcome message.

Shame, wrath, grief,  
And terror racking her when this she heard,  
At once the queen set forth; even on her knees  
Resolved to fall, from his ill-boding end,  
The fickle king to turn. But, unassured

Of welcome ; and misdoubting, lest more hard  
His bosom should be hardened at her prayer,—  
Her daughter first she sought ; and thus, with tears  
Dimming her lustrous eyes, in haste began.

“Nehushta, thou, of those whom most he loves,  
Art to thy father dearest : to thy voice  
Oft hath he listed, when, to all beside,  
Deaf as the rock. Oh ! may he hear thee now,  
And grant thy prayer ; else, will a crushing ill  
Fall on us, and Assyria may be lost !  
He promised, with to-morrow's dawn, once more  
To lead his armies 'gainst the rebel crew,—  
And glad thereat, and strong, was every heart :  
But he revoketh now the word ; and saith,  
A solemn sacrifice he hath to make ;  
And, in his place, must Salamenes lead ;  
And look for victory.—That fatal word  
Made known unto the soldiers,—half their strength,  
And their whole heart will melt like mist away.  
Go then, my daughter : fall before his feet :  
Embrace his knees ; and pour out all thy soul  
In prayer and tears,—from this ill-boding course  
To turn him back : else, may the day of joy  
That dawneth on us, change to one long night  
Of weeping, lamentation, and despair.”

Nehushta heard, and trembled : to the arms  
Of her loved mother, with a fond embrace,  
Sprang hastily ; a duteous daughter's kiss  
Pressed on her cheek ; then, with a fluttering heart,  
But soul resolved, went forth.

The king, meantime,  
Alone and gloomy sat : but thus, at length,  
In words, to thought gave shape. “Auspicious most  
The occasion seems. Well every snare is set,  
The enemy to take ; and surely now  
Ruin should seize them : yet, when I would look  
On a bright future, I behold it not ;  
But, in its place, a cloud that covers all,  
As with a grave-cloth. Equal in their strength,  
For, and against me, Good, and Evil, fight ;—

So say the wizards,—and the final end  
Their art shows not : but, with this sacrifice,  
If I the gods appease, then shall the Good  
Vanquish the Evil ; and the king shall stand  
For aye triumphant o'er his enemies.  
So they : but not as these the prophet spake ;  
Both in the flesh, and when before mine eyes,  
On that dread night, his bloodless spectre came :  
No conquest promised he ; but, tempest,—flood,—  
Fire,—earthquake, threatened ; and the utter fall  
Of me, and mine, and this great Nineveh !  
If he the truth, then have they uttered lies :  
If they the truth, then are his threatenings false.  
How may I know ? I read not from the book  
In which man's fate is written ; nor have proof  
That any rightly read,—or read at all,  
Save in their own imaginings. Too well,  
One evil did the Israelitish seer  
Predict to me : but, have not also they,  
Chaldea's prophets, oft of good forewarned,  
And evil, which the time hath brought to pass ?  
Why, therefore, unto them, as unto him,  
Credence should I not give ?—since, by the event,  
Have both alike been proved. Come then what may,  
The issue will I try. As they have said,  
So everything shall be. Beneath the rule  
Of Salamenes shall the host go forth :  
The victim, bound, shall by the altar sit ;  
And wait the gods' disposal. If with us  
The battle go, then shall her bonds be loosed :  
If with our foes, then shall her blood be shed ;  
Her body on the altar-fire be burned :  
And I, even I myself, will single forth  
The victim for the offering. Yet not I,  
But heaven, shall choose her."

On his knees he fell,  
And lifted up his hands.

"Hear, all ye gods  
Who rule man's destiny ! By you I swear ;

By earth, and sea, and sky ! by heaven above,  
 And by the realms below ! by all that is,  
 All that hath been, and all that yet shall be !  
 By these I swear !——the virgin, nobly born,  
 Youthful, and chaste, on whom I first shall look ;—  
 Be she the sister, or the one loved child  
 Of lord, or chief, or prince, who to my heart  
 Is dearest upon earth,—yet, as your choice,  
 Almighty Powers ! her will I single forth  
 Her solely, irredeemably : her limbs  
 Beside the altar-stone the priest shall bind :  
 Thereon, demanded, shall her blood pour forth ;  
 Her body utterly consume with fire !  
 So may the sacrifice accepted be !  
 And, if I falsely swear, then, ye great gods,  
 Strike down my throne ! the eternal walls throw down !  
 Make me a mock and hissing unto men !  
 Let the brute rebel spit upon my corse !  
 Give to me not the honored sepulture  
 Of a long line of kings ; but let foul birds  
 Devour my flesh, and wild dogs gnaw my bones !”

He ended ; bowed, sank down,—his trembling hands  
 Touching the floor, as though beneath a load  
 Of fate mysterious crushed : for now he felt,  
 A chain invisible had girt him round,  
 From which was no escape. At length, he rose ;  
 And, with white face, and sharply quivering lip,  
 Sat silently ; as in a fearful dream  
 Brooding on what should come.

But, suddenly,—

For he the opening door, the advancing steps,  
 So deep his musing, heard not,—at his feet  
 A veiled woman knelt. Some concubine  
 He judged her, who, leave asking not, had come,  
 In hope to soothe him ; or some boon, perchance,  
 Intent to beg ; and angrily exclaimed :  
 “ Rise, woman ! Wherefore hast thou thus presumed ?  
 Hence—vex me not.”

But, lifting up her veil,

With tremulous tone she murmured, "Oh forgive!  
Forgive me, my dear father!"

Like the cry  
Of tortured maniac, from the king burst forth  
A long, loud yell of anguish. From his knee,  
Madly he thrust her; sprang upon his feet;  
Tore out his hair; his teeth gnashed; stamped the  
floor,

And rent his garments. In a wild affright,—  
Deeming her father by a frenzy seized,—  
Nehushta shrieked; ran forth, and called for aid.

The king, meantime, like to a caged-up beast,  
To and fro bounded: and, when, terror-struck,  
His servants entered,—with a fierce rebuke,  
Drove them before him: the strong silver bolt  
Shot in the staple; and to bitterest woe,  
Rage, and remorse, gave way!

"Oh horrible!  
Most horrible!" he cried. "Blood-loving gods!  
Is this the vietim, then, that ye demand?  
My child? my dearest child? If such your will,  
Demons, not gods, ye be! I brave you then!  
I do defy you! I revoke my vow!  
Inflict your worst; flood, earthquake, fire, and death;  
I will endure them all, before one hair  
Of that fair child, the bloody priest shall touch!

"Magicians cursed! ye knew the victim then!  
Ye willed the father, in the daughter's blood,  
To dip his hands! But, cry now on the gods,  
The demons whom ye serve; and see if they  
Your own foul blood can save."

Wide flew the door:  
He called. A captain of the household guard  
Before him trembling stood. Like coals of fire,  
Glowed his large eyes, his lips were thick with foam,  
As thus,—word choking word,—his fury burst.

"Treason is here! The accursed magicians! Fly!  
Strike off their heads! Fool! stare not,—but away!  
Slay all! Dost hear me? Leave but one alive,

And in his room thou diest ! Off every head !  
Fling their vile bodies from the battlement,  
A prey to dogs, and vultures ! When 'tis done,  
Appear, and tell me. Hence ! I cannot breathe  
While they pollute the air."

All horror-struck,  
Yet dreading to delay, the captain went ;  
And saw the doom performed : with heavy heart,  
Then to the king returned, and told their fate.

A savage joy the tyrant's breast inflamed :  
Deeply he breathed, like one who hath his thirst  
Well satisfied : then to his chamber went ;  
The massive bolts shot to ; a goblet huge  
Of wine quaffed off ; and on the gorgeous bed,  
His outworn body stretched, to seek repose.

Heavily slept he soon : but hideous dreams  
Brought torture. Now, of Nahor, from the wall  
Headlong cast down, he thought ; his death-shriek  
heard ;

Saw the wild gleaming of his anguished eye ;  
And felt the dull jar, as the body struck  
Upon the trembling ground : anon, behold !  
He stood beside his daughter at the pile :  
He saw her bosom pierced ; her blood poured forth ;  
Her beauteous corpse upon the altar-fire,  
In lurid clouds exhaling : yet, from high,  
Faces of angry gods upon him looked :  
Corpse-like, yet living, the slain prophets mocked ;  
And bade him to the fight.

At set of sun,  
From thrice a hundred gates that faced the camp—  
Like deep streams flowing noiselessly, went forth  
Horse, chariots, foot,—four mighty armaments :  
Half eastward, westward half, across the plain,—  
By the fresh kindled watch-fires of the foe  
Directed,—their appointed stations sought ;  
And formed array for onset. On his steed,

The rider motionless,—the charioteer,  
With reins in hand, and scourge,—like gloomy ranks  
Of ghostly warriors, dark and silent all,  
Sat waiting the gray dawn.

At later hour,  
Went forth, of foot, three hundred thousand strong :  
Eastward, and westward,—from the central gate,  
At distance fit,—in broad, deep lines, that front  
And flank alike should threaten,—formed at last ;  
And, as commanded, on bare earth, lay down,  
Slumber to seek,—ere earliest tint of day,  
That they might rise for combat. Yet, long time,—  
Fired by expectance of the coming morn,—  
Hearts throbbing, eyes wide open, did they lie,  
Visioning battle. But dark night, at length,  
And the dead stillness, like a magic spell,  
Wrought on their senses : gently closed the lids ;  
Slow came the breath ; and imperceptibly,  
Like cool dew sinking in a parched-up soil,  
O'er all the ardent host soft slumber stole.

'Twas midnight : silent as the solitude  
On the broad ocean, when all winds are dead,  
And on the glassy deep the stars shine clear  
As in the sky,—the wondrous city lay.

But Salamenes,—watchful till the last,  
Upon the battlement, above the gate  
Of Nisroch, took his stand ; and earnestly  
Across the plain looked forth. No motion there.  
The myriad watch-fires of the Medes flared high ;  
Their deep soft moaning, like a mother's song,  
Lulling the drowsy night. Less distance off,  
Toward east, and west, where couched the ambushed foot,  
His eyes then cast he. All in darkness lay,  
And silent as the grave.

No bed, that night,  
The anxious leader sought ; but, armed complete,  
His weary frame within a lion's hide  
Enfolded ; and, along the battlement,  
Above the gate lay down, and sank to rest.

Throughout the Median camp, not less, was all  
For combat ordered. Ready to the hand,  
Spear, sword, shield, axe, dart, bow, and quiver lay.  
In even ranks the brazen chariots stood,  
Silent and dreadful,—as with life instinct,  
Longing to thunder. O'er his fragrant corn,  
Snorted the war-horse; or, with ears erect,  
Listed his rider's coming,—for he knew  
The battle was at hand: and, as he lay,  
The steel-clothed warrior, sleeping or awake,  
Beheld the mighty city's overthrow.

## BOOK THE TWENTIETH.

To anxious thousands on the northern wall,—  
With head outstretched above the battlement,  
Looking, and listening,—eager the first sign  
Of stirring foe to catch,—at slow pace dragged  
The wheels of Night's black chariot. Dense the gloom :  
The watch-fires of the Medes, unfed, had died ;  
And through the solid canopy of cloud,  
No star-light glimmered.

Two hours yet of dawn  
Were wanting, when their sharpened ears the sound  
Of war approaching caught,—the march of hosts,  
The tread of horses, and the gentle roll  
Of wheels on the soft herbage. Still long time  
They waited, ere the slow and cautious step  
Of men at hand was heard. More nigh drew they :  
Stood still at last ; and, on the wicket gate,  
Struck the soft signal. They who watched within,  
Heard, and made haste to answer. As by stealth,  
The massive bolts were drawn ; the ponderous bars  
Were lifted ; moaned the hinges, as they bore,  
Slowly, and steadily, their brazen load ;  
And the great gate stood open. Silently,  
The Medes went in : with quick, and noiseless tread,  
Mounted the battlement ; and showed the sign,—  
Three torches, waved abreast.

At once the earth  
Gave forth a sound as of a distant flood ;  
Trembling and murmuring 'neath the hurried march

Of multitudes ; the roll of chariot wheels,  
And tramp of fiery steeds.

Above the gate,—  
Like one who watchful waits the destined time  
A mine to fire that, as with earthquake-shock,  
Shall whelm a city,—Salamenes stood ;  
The moment seized, and spake. The startling blast  
Of a trumpet followed : in a moment more,  
The air was shivered by ten thousand tubes,  
Loud blaring, and the clamors of the host,  
Upstarting from their ambush. On the wall,  
As if by magic kindled, flared at once  
Unnumbered fires ; and, on the lofty mound  
Of Ninus, like volcano newly waked,  
A blaze terrific suddenly shot up,  
That the black arch of cloud turned bloody red,  
And washed with fire the plain. The astonished  
Medes,

To east, west, south, the blare of trumpets heard,  
And armies shouting : and behind them, too,  
Voices, and trumpets, and the coming-on  
Of steeds, and chariots ; so that all around  
By foes they seemed encompassed. On them then  
Fell withering terror.

As when, nigh the shore,  
Before the furious storm, some goodly ship  
Impetuously is driven,—amid the roar  
Of winds, the groan and crash of rending masts,—  
The fiend-like howlings, and the thunder-strokes  
Of giant billows bursting on the rocks,—  
Vainly the anxious pilot lifts his voice ;  
Few hear, none understand : the affrighted crew  
Shrink cowering from the storm ; or, with wild haste,  
Hither, and thither run,—all order lost,  
All rule o'erthrown,—even such confusion dire  
Fell on the astounded Medes ; even so in vain  
His mighty voice Arbaces lifted up ;  
Bade them be men, and soldiers. Motionless  
Stood some, aghast, like men who in the dark  
Behold a spirit : some, their arms flung down,

To run—they knew not whither: even the best,  
And bravest, felt a sinking of the heart,  
A failing of the strength.

As when the tide  
Against a strong wind strives to make its way,—  
Heavily rock and roll the laboring waves;  
Now this way sweep, now that; advancing now,  
And now recoiling, to advance again,—  
Even so, ere long, the mortal counterfloods,  
With hideous uproar, to and fro were borne.  
But still the Assyrians, flushed with hope, and strong,  
For conquest fought; the Medes, as yet, confused,  
Astonished, struck not, save in self defence;  
With life to escape, content. So, darkling, fought,  
On either side, the hosts; and thousands fell.

But when, though through an ocean of thick cloud,  
The day-god, rising, on the plain looked down,  
And showed distinct the battle,—then, too well,  
The Medes beheld, how, by the fiery foe,  
On all sides they were compassed; and their hearts  
Sank utterly; for, to himself each said,  
“Surely a mighty army hath been brought  
To aid the city! lo, from north, and south,  
From east, and west, they come.”

All order lost,  
All rule unheeded, backward from the foe,  
On every side they fell; and, in the midst,  
A formless mass, dense wedged, together crushed.  
Shoulder to shoulder, breast to breast, and back  
’Gainst back hard driven,—they rocked, and rolled, and  
reeled.

None which way knew to fly; or, frantically,  
All save the few, the dauntless few, had fled.

In vain the valiant captains on them called;  
Their valour all in vain; for, by the throng  
Hemmed in, as by a wall, the bravest stood,  
Even as the coward, powerless. Mail-clad steed,  
Or ponderous chariot, to the battle’s front  
Strove vainly to advance,—so dense the mass  
Of myriads round them thronging. They alone

Who on the edge of conflict stood, perforce,  
And madly, fought; of life despairing all,  
Yet all athirst, ere they were slain, to slay.

Then, in the hearts of the Assyrian chiefs,  
To the height rose hope. Upon their soldiers they  
Unceasingly called out, and urged them on;  
“For this day shall your shame be all redeemed:  
The insolent rebel shall again bow down,  
And own his conqueror.” On the hard-wedged mass  
Of shrinking Medes, the clouds of thundering horse  
Poured on impetuous,—hurling, trampling down:  
And, skirting on the outer edge of fight,  
Whirled heavy war-cars, with their brazen wheels,  
As with a scythe, shearing the battle's edge.

High in a splendid chariot of the king,  
And by his matchless horses rapt along,  
Rode Salamenes,—with heroic deed,  
And ceaseless exhortation, to the work  
Ardently stirring. Onward as he flew,  
Still was his cry; “All glory to the brave!  
Unto the coward, loathing! Better far  
Is death than shame. Oh now, Assyrians, now  
Put forth your strength! Charge on! The day is ours!  
Heaven fights for us!”

Along the battlement,  
Myriads, and tens of myriads, crowding, gazed;  
And, with unceasing outcries, to the task  
Their friends exhorted. Salamenes, them  
Beholding, pointed with his glittering spear,  
And cried aloud, “Look up, Assyrians—See—  
Your sons, your mothers, and your aged sires,  
Your daughters, and your wives, and maids betrothed,  
All witness what ye do. On, on! the brave  
They love and honor; but the coward hate.”

With like encouragement, did every chief  
His soldiers urge to combat. By the din  
Of rout, and onset, the cloud-canopy  
Was shaken; and the ground was heaped with slain.

But, on the Median night, at length rose dawn,  
And, soon, a mid-day splendor. In the midst,

Even in the very heart of that dense throng,  
Amid the crush of frightened myriads,  
Long time Arbaces stood ; and, all in vain,  
His voice uplifted ; and his matchless strength  
In vain put forth,—that human mound to move,  
And to the battle's front clear passage make.  
Like to a man against a torrent stream  
Striving to force his way,—who, if a step  
With labor hard one moment he hath gained,  
Even in the next, is, by the furious flood  
Forced back, or turned aside,—with labor such,  
And such repulse, the godlike leader toiled.  
With hands extended, right and left he thrust,  
Forcing his way ; but, a brief opening won,  
Again the boiling waves of men drove in,  
Barring his passage. Nathless, on he moved,—  
Though like to one amid a quagmire deep  
Entangled,—slowly, and with labor great.

But now at length, nor more than spear-cast thence,  
A rising ground he saw ; and, half way up,  
A throng of trumpeters, and those who bore  
That mighty ensign, which himself the first  
Had planted,—symbol of the great revolt  
That should set free the nations. But, not now,  
That banner—mute, yet myriad-voiced, to fire  
Souls of the brave—its thrilling summons waved :  
Not now, the ringing trumpets, with fierce clang,  
Stormed at the hearts of men,—to do, or die !  
Close furled upon its staff, and slanting low,  
Seemed as that flag, dishonored, stooped its head,  
Fearing the contest ; and the martial tubes  
Hung silent by the pale-faced trumpeters,  
As they no more dared sound.

That sight, at once,

To fury irrepressible stirred up  
The Mede's long suffering mind. Till then,—by grief  
And pity for his well-tried followers moved,  
In that so sudden strait,—his matchless strength,  
With patience, and with kindness, had he used ;

Each moment hoping, that to nobler thoughts  
They would awaken : but no longer, now,  
With gentle force he strove a path to win :  
Fired by that abject spectacle,—at once,  
His lofty shoulder stooping, and one foot  
Behind him planting,—with resistless might,—  
Even as a ploughshare through a heavy soil  
Stiffly bears on,—to this side, and to that,  
Thrusting the rent-up ground,—so, through the  
press,—

His shield advanced,—his great, heart-shaking voice  
Calling to make clear room,—to right, to left,  
Thrusting, o'erthrowing,—on he ploughed his way.

Arrived at last, the banner-staff he seized ;  
Flew up, and, on the summit of the mound,  
The ensign shaking loose,—with giant strength,  
Round and round whirled it ; and sent far and wide  
His spirit-stirring voice. Like a vast flame  
Shaken by tempest, roared the quivering flag :  
Again, and yet again, to every side  
He turned, and waved it, and his voice sent forth :  
Then, deep in earth drove down the mast-like staff ;  
His sword drew forth ; and, calling to his side  
The now all-eager trumpeters, bade blow  
Signal of onset, strife unto the death.

“ Here stand ye all the day, till turns the fight :  
Blow out continually : into the brass  
Pour all your souls : thousands of arms, now weak,  
At every martial clang will gather strength ;  
Thousands of feet will onward. Sound aloud,  
Till the arched heaven give echo.”

At the word,  
Pealed forth, as with one breath, a mighty blast,  
Far spreading, that the hearts of myriads fired,  
As lightning fires the darkness. Looking up  
To the mound's top,—o'er all high eminent,  
The sun-like ensign, streaming in the wind,  
They saw ; and, by its side, in dazzling arms,  
As 'twere a god alighted to their aid,  
Their victory-bringing chief. His glittering sword

Forward he pointed, motioning advance :  
North, south, and east, and west, he signed them on.  
The rapid thrust, more eloquent than words ;  
The fiercely stamping foot, said,—“ On ! away !  
Bear them before you ! sweep them like a flood !”

As when, at night, heaven's vault with rocky clouds  
Thickly is covered ; motionless they hang,  
Silent, and gloomy, as a funeral train  
Around an open grave ;—if then the bolt  
From Jove's dread arm is hurled,—a sudden blaze  
Fires the whole ebon concave : a great voice  
Startles the dreaming Night : o'er all the sky,  
Cloud after cloud takes up, and passes on,  
The grand alarum ; till, on utmost verge  
Of the huge arch, in murmurs dies away  
The long resounding roar,——even such the change  
That o'er that lifeless and despairing host  
Came suddenly, when, like a gleam from heaven,  
Within the darkness of their souls was shot  
The spirit of their chief. Up went at once  
The human thunder ; far and wide it ran ;  
Peal after peal leaped forth, and bounded on ;  
And called again ; and, from the farthest line,  
Again was echoed. Over all the field  
Banners sprang up, and shook their glittering plumes ;  
Blared the fierce trumpets, and the cymbals rang,  
Firing to onset.

As a northern sea,  
Long frost prevailing, silent lies and dead ;  
A mass of hard-locked ice : the hapless bark,  
Fixed as in iron, stands ; and, o'er its side,  
The pallid seamen look, and think of home  
Far distant, and the happy fire-side group,  
Children, and wife, whom they no more shall see,—  
That ship their grave !——so, by an icy fear,  
Of strength and spirit bereft,—eyes dim, ears deaf,  
Brain stunned, limbs motionless, had stood the host.

But, as on that dead adamantine deep,  
When once the joyous spirits of the air,  
From the bright sun-fields of the south are come ;

Bringing the summer gale from burning sands  
Of Afric, and the ever-steaming deep  
Around the equator,——then, with long, slow roll,  
Great ocean heaves ; with thunderous crashings rent,  
Wide parts the icy plain : the dead is touched  
With a new life ; the motionless is stirred :  
Up rise the joyous waves, and clap their hands,  
And lift their voices, dashing to and fro :  
From out its prison starts the gladdened ship :  
The sails spring upward : like a loosened steed,  
It paws the waters,—from its strong-ribbed sides,  
Scattering the broken fetters ; while, aloft,  
The seaman's cheerful voice again is heard ;  
And life and action spring as from the dead,——  
Even so that sea of men, by terror locked,  
A hard-wedged mass, immoveable, and cold,—  
Before the tempest of their leader's voice,  
The ardor of his spirit, burst at once  
The icy chains ; and, with resistless heave,  
Wave after wave, against the startled foe  
Advanced, and broke, and gathered up again,  
And onward swept anew.

And now, behold !

As if with gladness on them looking down,  
From the thick shrine of cloud, where long had lain  
Its glory hidden,—the great eye of heaven  
Poured in a flood its golden beams intense  
On that awakened host. On them alone  
Came down the glory : on the Assyrians, still,  
The city, and the vast horizon's bound,  
Dark shadow lowered. Intensely bright gleamed out  
The burnished armour, and the glittering sword,  
The star-like spear-point, and the tossing shield,  
The brazen chariot, and the mail-clad horse.  
High in the midst, the mighty gonfalon,  
And, far and wide, a thousand smaller flags,  
Their fiery pennons flapped.

Rejoicing now,  
Like a young war-horse at the trumpet's sound,  
Up to his blazing chariot sprang the Mede ;

And through the quickly opening space rode on,  
Nigh to the press of battle. But, as yet,  
Himself in fight mixed not; the wiser part  
Esteeming now, throughout the host to go,  
Directing, and exhorting. On he rode,  
Circling the rear of contest. At his voice,  
All hearts were cheered; all arms invincible seemed.

Like a strong rising tide, which rapidly  
O'er the low sands doth gather,—every wave  
The face of ocean widening, till, at length,  
Even at the rock-base do the billows burst,—  
So, forward pressing, ever flowing on,  
The tide of Medes on the Assyrian banks  
Higher and higher drove; behind them still  
A widening area leaving. In the midst,  
A dread reserve,—like the still-sleeping bolts,  
Waiting Jove's arm,—thousands of chariots stood,  
And clouds of restless horse,—all anxiously  
Biding the moment when the clear-eyed chief  
Should hurl them on the foe. He, with calm mien,  
Still round and round his rapid passage took;  
And still his trumpet-voice into the hearts  
Of his brave soldiers sent.

From out his car,  
At length, down leaping, up the mound he flew;  
And, on the summit standing, far and wide  
Along the plain his eagle glances shot,  
And thence disposed the battle. His commands,  
Riders on wind-swift steeds stood prompt to bear.  
Like arrows from the bow, now here, now there,  
He sent them forth; and ever with them flew  
The spirit of their chief. Alone stood he:  
None questioned him: unbidden, none approached:  
The princes, and the captains, all in fight  
Were hotly mingled: he alone remained,  
To watch the storm, and point the thunder-bolts:  
His own arm still reserving, till one blow  
Might strike the key-stone of the trembling arch,  
And bring it down in ruin. For long hours

So toiled the hosts ; nor victory, as yet,  
For either side proclaimed.

Since dawn, the queen,  
From a high tower had overlooked the field :  
And, when she marked that still encroaching flood,  
On every side, too quickly making way,—  
Step after step, the Assyrians driving back,  
And more and more, at each recoil, their ranks  
Thinning, and weakening,—in her heart she said ;  
“ The storm, I fear, is gathering, that, ere long,  
Will overwhelm us ! Like a frozen snake,  
Long time the enemy lay ; but now he rears,  
With double strength, his horrid crest ; and shakes  
Fire from his baleful eyes. Like pestilence  
The breath he vomits : from before him shrink  
Our erst victorious ranks, as though a spell  
Of magic ruled them ; and, if suddenly  
New soul be not infused, this day, perchance,  
Will set upon Assyria’s overthrow ! ”

To Dara then, who near her stood, she turned :  
By the arm grasped him ; with bright, anxious eye,  
Gazed in his face, and hurriedly began :  
“ Fly to the palace, Dara, swift as wind.  
The moody king, by some chimera bound,  
Avoids the field : but, prostrate at his feet  
Fall thou ; implore, conjure him, instantly,  
No moment lost, with every fighting man  
That yet the city holds, to issue forth.  
Tell him, so trembling stands the balance now,  
That, on the revolution of an hour,  
May hang this empire’s doom ! Oh, bid him think,  
How many myriads now for him do look,  
As seamen for the pole-star. Say, his throne,  
His children, queen, his kingdom, and his life,  
All on this day depend. If still he pause,  
Tell him that I, even I, unarmed and weak,  
Will dare the fight he shuns ; and rather die  
Than see this battle lost. My strength is nought ;  
My arm is woman’s : but a daring soul

Knoweth not sex ; and, in the feeblest frame,  
More than the mightiest, shines and animates.  
When woman leads, man dares not lag behind !  
Then, if he falter, tell him, on the field,  
The mother of his children shall be found,  
A victor, or a corpse. Away,—and plead  
As for thy life ; nay, for the lives of all."

A low obeisance made the graceful youth,  
And instantly was gone. "And may thy tongue,"  
Inly she said, "drop words like burning coals  
Upon the frozen heart of that strange man !  
What if he come not ! Of a surety then  
Will I go forth ; though never to return,  
Save for the sepulchre. What then ! what loss !  
Who would not perish in a country's cause !  
My life is but a breath, a wreath of mist,  
Which soon must pass away : and, when 'tis gone,  
None will take note : the sun, as heretofore,  
Will shine upon a bright, and gladsome earth :  
But oh ! thou great and glorious Nineveh !  
Thou sun of all this world ! if thou should'st fall,  
Darkness will come upon the race of man :  
And never more, on splendor like to thine,  
Will the glad heavens look down !"

Some pearly drops  
Stealthily wiping off,—her great soul then,  
The worst to meet, she summoned ; and once more,  
On the dread field looked forth.

The king, meantime,  
From slumber by first din of battle roused,  
Within a lofty chamber long had sat,  
Watching the altered strife. Dark now his face ;  
His lips compressed ; his eyes were wild, and stern.  
In gloomy silence all alone he sat ;  
And none had dared approach. No thought had he  
Of arming for the fight : his hideous dreams,  
The spectres of the wizards, that still seemed  
To mock, and threaten,—bowed his spirit down.  
He felt as underneath the iron hand  
Of a vindictive Fate, 'gainst which to strive,

Were hopeless folly. Keenly now he rued  
 That rash tyrannic act which, at one blow,  
 Seemed from the dusky future to have shut  
 Glance, or conjecture. If the gods, indeed,  
 For that terrific sacrifice had called,  
 And by the mouths of prophets made it known,—  
 What guilt were his, what vengeance might he  
 dread,

Who their selected ministers had sent  
 To quick and shameful death ; their only crime,  
 The utterance of heaven's will ! Thus, darkly rapt,  
 Sat he, his fate awaiting ; while his eyes  
 Upon the dreadful face of war were chained,  
 As by a basilisk's gaze. At length he called ;  
 And Tartan, captain of the royal guard,—  
 Not summoned, but awaiting anxiously  
 A time to enter,—hurriedly came in :  
 Dropped on his knee : uplifted trembling hands,  
 Tear-glistening eyes, and cried, " Oh, most dread lord !  
 Hear, I implore, thy faithful soldiers' prayer !  
 As dying men for water, they call out,  
 In their dire anguish, for their absent king !  
 Dawn promised victory,—ruin threatens them now !  
 Hark to the din. The very ground, even here,  
 'Neath the death-struggle of the maddened hosts,  
 Horse-trampling, and the thunder of the wheels,  
 Jars as with throb of earthquake ! Oh, dread lord,  
 Canst thou look on, and see all perishing !  
 Arm, arm, and save them !"

But his earnest prayer,  
 The king, displeased, broke off : " Rash youth, forbear !  
 O'ermuch thou dost presume. Though in thy veins,  
 As mine, flows royal blood,—bethink thee yet,  
 How great the difference 'twixt even noblest branch,  
 And the great trunk. Within one state can reign  
 One monarch only. Mine it is to rule,  
 Thine to obey. My counsels are mine own :  
 That which I will, I will ; and let none seek  
 To sway my purpose. Answer not, but go :  
 And let the wise physician instantly

Appear before me."

Mute, but with a heart

By grief and anger laden, Tartan went :  
And, in brief time, the hoary-headed leech  
Before the monarch stood ; and silently  
His will awaited. On his reverend face  
The king a moment turned a vacant eye,  
As though the organ, to the mind distraught,  
No sense conveyed ; but, soon recovering, thus :

"Peresh, the man thou know'st, who, when cast down  
In that last fatal conflict,—from the ground  
In his own chariot raised, and through the press  
In safety bore me. With a royal hand,  
The service was repaid : gold, ay and gems,  
A satrap's ransom, were bestowed on him,  
In quittance of the act : yet was that man  
Offensive to my sight. By gratitude  
Untouched,—though that I heed not,—by my power,  
And regal state unawed,—even at the throne,  
And in the presence of the king of kings,  
Erect, and proud, and unabashed, he stood,  
As with his equal fronted : and, when I,  
Ill pleased, admonished him, and so dismissed,  
Nought humbled heard he, but with ominous look  
Thus answered : ' In thine hour of danger, once,  
King of Assyria, did I stretch the hand  
And save thee : in thy trouble, yet again  
Upon me wilt thou call ; and I shall come !'

"Alas ! that trouble is already here !  
Look on yon threatening field, which, at the dawn,  
Great victory promised : ere the sun go down,  
Ruin may cover it ! The man I loathe,  
Yet must I use him. In an evil hour,  
The seers in whom I trusted, were cut off :  
He only, but the mightiest far, remains.  
Bitter the draught ; yet, nathless, must be drunk.  
Seek the proud Barak, then : with utmost speed,  
Bring him before me."

Bowing reverently,

The agéd leech withdrew : and on the plain  
 Again, with troubled look, the monarch gazed.  
 Still as a statue, gloomy as the grave,  
 There sat he : hard and stern his countenance ;  
 His thoughts all blackness. But, at length, the door  
 Softly was opened ; and Azubah came ;  
 Knelt down before him, and, in piteous tones,  
 Besought him : “ Hear, oh hear, most gracious lord,  
 The prayer of thy poor people ! Still they cry,  
 ‘ Where is the king ? Why, in this dreadful hour,  
 Hides he his face, and comes not forth to save ?’  
 Lord of Assyria, hearken to them now !  
 Go in the terrors of thy majesty :  
 Show but thy face upon the battle-field,  
 And every heart will have a lion’s rage,  
 Each arm a giant’s strength. Oh ! hear, and save !”

So she, with radiant face, and tearful eye,  
 The king imploring : but, with head avert,  
 And hand repellant, he her prayer denied :  
 “ Thou know’st not what thou say’st. Away—away !  
 Arise, thou wilt incense me !”

While he spake,  
 With rapid step, and face by terror blanched,  
 Came Dara,—on the knee before him dropped,—  
 Uplifted quivering hands,—and hurriedly,  
 With tone impassioned, thus. “ O king of kings !  
 Sent by Assyria’s weeping queen I come,  
 An humble suppliant. Not a moment lost,—  
 With every fighting man the city holds,  
 She prays, implores, conjures thee to go forth,  
 And save thy people ! else, will she herself,  
 Weak as she is, even in her woman’s garb,  
 Unarmed, unshielded, fly into the field,  
 And cheer the soldiers. ‘ Tell the king,’ she said,  
 ‘ If now he falter,—on the battle-plain  
 The mother of his children shall be found,  
 A victor, or a corpse !’ Oh ! king of kings !  
 Let not thy noble queen in vain implore !  
 Danger with every moment direr grows :

Assyria's doom, thy power, thy throne, thy life,  
On this one hour depend !”

Not all unmoved,  
The monarch heard ; but, by despair bowed down,  
In tone of sadness, more than anger, thus,  
With gentle interruption, answered him.

“ Enough, enough. Not for slight cause, be sure,  
On this momentous day I hold aloof.

The queen, nor thou, nor any mortal man,  
My thoughts can know. If yet I may go forth,  
Hid in the future lies ; nor I myself  
Aright can see. With this be thou content.

But, for the queen, on pain of my full wrath,  
I charge her from her purpose to desist.

The sphere of woman is not in the field,  
Where men like wild beasts rage. Her presence there,  
Indecent were, as useless ; and would clog,  
Rather than oil, the wheels of victory.

This let her know. And, now, retire ye both ;  
Ye have your answer. Rise, and speak no more.”

With sorrowing hearts, Azubah, and the youth  
Then rose, and went their way.

Brief time had passed,

When once again upon its golden hinge  
The lofty portal turned ; and a gaunt form,  
Of height gigantic, and of port erect,  
Proudly stalked in. The face was wan, and dark ;  
Stern as a watchful lion's. 'Neath black brows,  
And massive, glowed, as in two darksome caves,  
Eyes, bright as coals of fire. His wiry hair,  
Of midnight blackness, round his ghastly head,  
Like to a wind-swept cedar o'er a tomb,  
Streamed wild, and ragged. In an ample robe,  
Of ebon hue, that to the ankle fell,  
His form was wrapped : the strong right arm alone,  
Bare from the shoulder, sallow as a corpse,  
Hairy and fleshless, by his side hung down,  
A huge anatomy. Slight reverence made,  
Before the king he stood ; and fixed on him,

His stern, soul-piercing eyes. The king on him,  
 As sternly gazed again ; and, for a time,  
 Was silence in the chamber. But, at length,  
 Raising his bony arm, and toward the plain  
 The lean forefinger pointing,—with a voice  
 Hollow and deep as echo in a vault,  
 Thus the dark wizard spake.

“ Remember'st thou,  
 King of Assyria,—when with angry words  
 Thou didst rebuke me,—how I answered thee ?  
 ‘ Once, in thy peril, did I stretch my hand,  
 And save thee : in thy trouble, yet again  
 Upon me wilt thou call, and I shall come.’

“ Perchance my words were mocked at,—but, behold !  
 That hour of trouble is already here :  
 Upon me thou *hast* called ; and I *am* come.  
 Think'st thou that from these prescient eyes, even then,  
 Yon gory field was hidden ? No ! I saw  
 Where, on one hand, an altar-stone was raised ;  
 The faces of the gods, from out the clouds,  
 Looking benignant. On the other hand,  
 A spacious plain I saw. The pall of night  
 Hung o'er it ; yet I marked where cars and horse,  
 And countless foot, in breathless ambush lay,  
 Waiting a coming foe. Day dawned ; and lo !  
 Contending hosts, as on an earthquake's bed,  
 Rocking and heaving ! Victory, as yet,  
 To neither side was given. The gods looked down,  
 Their doom suspending ; for the sacrifice  
 Long waiting : but the victim was refused.  
 Stern grew their faces then : from their dread eyes  
 They shot down lightnings ; and, anon, like waves  
 Before the tempest driven, in headlong flight  
 Ran those on whom they thundered : in pursuit,  
 Legions, whose swords seemed flame.

“ Soon then again  
 Thick darkness fell, and curtained all from sight.  
 But, from a city nigh at hand, I heard  
 The sounds of lamentation, and of dread ;

The shriek of women, for their husbands slain ;  
The cry of children, for their fathers fallen :  
And, from the dark vault of the starless sky,  
I heard the voices of the angry gods,  
Threatening yet heavier doom. In this, O king !  
Behold the shadowing of thy destiny !  
The choice, even yet, is thine ; the sacrifice  
By heaven required, and hope of victory ;  
Or disobedience, and sure overthrow.  
What if the child be dear to thee as life ;  
Were not her blood cheap purchase for the breath  
Of myriads, who must, else, this fatal day,  
Gasp out their last ? What though her eyes are  
bright,

Her lips are ruddy,—brighter are the gems,  
And ruddier, on the crown thou else wilt lose.  
When myriads die for thee, may not thy one  
Die for the myriads ? Thinkest thou her blood" . . . .

Still was he speaking, when, from off his couch,  
Like a struck tiger, sprang the furious king :  
His leaping sword made lightning : his teeth gnashed :  
Death-white his lips : his eyes were living fire !

" Wretch ! cursed of men and gods !" madly he  
cried,

And shook the quivering blade ; " a sacrifice  
The gods *shall* have ; *thy* blood, thou toad ! thou asp !  
Vulture ! hyena ! Oh for serpents' tongues  
To hiss the hate, the loathing of my soul !  
Down to the pit ! go down !"

While yet he spake,  
His vengeful arm 'gan fall. Amid that storm,  
No word the seer replied. With look unchanged,  
And limbs unstirred, cold and unmoved he stood,  
As some grim statue, chiselled from the rock,  
Stands in the beating tempest. But, when now  
The sword was falling, one swift step he made,—  
His arm thrust forth ; and, with an iron grasp,  
The wrist compressing of the astonished king,  
Motionless held it, as if, suddenly,  
The flesh were turned to stone. An instant thus

He stood ; and on the monarch's countenance  
His eye appalling fixed : loosed then his hold ;  
A pace retired ; and, gathering up his robe,  
Fearless, and cool, spake out.

“ I dread thee not,  
King of Assyria ; for thy doom I know,  
And know my own. Our time not yet is come.  
Think'st thou, had I, like other men been weak,  
That, at thy summons, hither I had sped,  
When even now, beneath the northern wall,  
Twelve headless trunks, the victims of thy rage,  
A bloody warning give ? For punishment  
On thee, their slayer, do their ghosts cry out.  
Their death was murder ! Not from their own  
thoughts,

But as instructed, spake they. When in vain  
They strove to read thy destiny,—on me,  
In their perplexity, they called ; and I,  
I only, read that sealed-up page of Fate,  
For uttering which they died. Yea, king, 'twas I,  
Barak,—who read it. They are dead ! and he  
Who taught them, now before their slayer stands,  
And fears him not : for, know, earth-ruling king !  
Thy life with mine is knit : our day of doom,  
One and the same. The hour that sees me fall,  
Sees, ere its close, the king of kings a clod.  
If of thy life aweared then,—take mine :  
If thou would'st live, and have the victory,  
Obey the gods ; but swiftly, lest too late  
Thou may repent. And now, O king, farewell.  
My task is ended ; soon must thine begin.  
But well I see that, with yet heavier hand,  
The gods must smite thee, ere thy spirit bow.  
Again on me thou'lt call ; again I'll come ;  
Though yet again in vain.”

Confounded quite,  
Bewildered utterly,—the king, like one  
Who knows not well if yet he is awake,  
Or in a dream,—stood still, nor spake a word.  
With a wild eye he watched the parting steps

Of that strange being ; on his own limbs looked,  
As doubting if aright he knew himself ;  
Then, groaning heavily, upon the couch  
Sank backward ; and, by bitterest thoughts devoured,  
In moody silence lay. Now, all wrapped up  
In visions of a dark and dread to-come,  
Seemed as no sense he had to present ills,  
No life but in that future : eye, nor ear,  
Told to the spirit aught : as though deep night  
And silence girt him round, unmoved he lay,  
Dead to the world without ! But, suddenly,  
Some hideous battle-cry, from his deep trance  
Would startle him ; and, springing from the couch,  
With haggard face, and wildly wandering eye,  
Would he look forth awhile ; then sink again,  
Buried in blackest musings. So fared he :  
Nor, of the millions who to him were slaves,  
Might have been found that day one wretch so steeped  
In misery, as he, the lord of all.

Meantime, along the sapphire bridge of heaven,  
Far, far beyond the canopy of cloud  
That mantled earth,—the day-god's lightning steeds,  
Through the pure ether rapt his chariot-wheels,  
Sounding celestial thunder. To the height  
They had ascended ; and the steep decline  
Half way had measured ; yet the hard-fought field  
Still was contested : for, like men resolved  
On that one day-to peril all to come ;  
To die perchance, but never to submit,  
The Assyrian captains strove ; and, with like fire,  
Their soldiers' hearts inflamed. Aid, too, had come,  
Chariots, and horse, and foot,—who, when the scale,  
Charged with Assyria's doom, was sinking fast,  
Twice had its fall arrested. Once again,  
When seemed that utter ruin hovered nigh,  
The chariot of Assyria's beauteous queen,  
From rank to rank flew on : and, seeing her,  
The warrior's breasts, as with new soul infused,  
Like beacons freshly kindled, burst at once  
In flame intensest. Shieldless, and unhelmed ;

Her ebon hair loose flying in the wind,—  
She raised aloft her arms, her voice uplift,  
And bade them on to glory. As the star  
Of morning, while the sun yet sleeps below,  
And the gray mist is on the dewy earth,—  
Her face was pale, and radiant. Like a Shape  
From heaven descended, and to mortal harm  
Impassive,—gloriously, and fearlessly,  
Through the death-laden air she flew along.  
Her spirit fired the host: with deafening shouts,  
Onward they bore; and backward, for a time,  
Though slowly, drove their enemy.

On the mound  
Still stood Arbaces; over all the field  
Serenely looking, and disposing all.  
That day, as yet, from the close battle-clash  
Himself had kept aloof; but, when he saw  
How, suddenly, with strength and rage renewed,  
The foe pressed onward, and the Medes retired,—  
Down to the plain he strode; and, with a bound,  
Into his blazing chariot springing light,  
The reins caught up; and, toward the gleaming throng  
Of horse and cars, that restlessly yet stood,  
His word awaiting, drove; and to their chief,  
The hot Arabian king, thus briefly spake.

“ Like thine own mettled steeds, my gallant friend,  
I see with this long waiting thou art chafed:  
But yet a little bear it; ere the end  
Well breathed shall we be all. But, hear me now:  
And mark me well. Assyria's royal dame  
Is in the field: the king, perchance, abed,  
Or revelling with his concubines. Right well,  
From the mound's top I saw her, in her car  
Flying from rank to rank; and, as she passed,—  
Even as a strong wind, sweeping o'er a waste  
Of half burned forest, blows it into flame,—  
So, with her breath, did she the soldiers' hearts  
Kindle to heat intense; that now, behold,  
They bear us backward; and, unchecked, perchance,  
Some vantage may obtain; or, if nought else,

Defeat may stay, till darkness shelter them.  
This go I to prevent : but, most of all,  
If fortune favor, would I, in the toils,  
Yon beauteous Mischief take,—a prize indeed  
Worth half their host ; for her great soul alone  
Is now their sun ; and, wanting her, were they  
In utter darkness buried. Heed me then :  
Climb thou the mound ; and, with a watchful eye,  
Observe my course. If through the hostile ranks  
Thou see me break,—then, rush on instantly,  
With all thy chariots, and thy cavalry,  
And sweep them from the plain. But, chiefly, note,  
In the instant ere descending, where to find  
The warrior-queen ; that, with unerring swoop,  
Ye may encompass her. Yet, not a hair  
Of that most noble head must meet with harm ;  
No hand must touch her ; not a word be breathed,  
To wrong, or grieve her. My own life I'd lose  
Rather than see her perish ; for, in sooth,  
Though wife of him whom most we do abhor,—  
A creature is she whom the gods themselves  
Might proudly throne beside them. Now, these things,  
Among the horse and charioteers make known ;  
Then to the mound ; and, with an eagle's eye,  
Pierce through the conflict." Having spoken thus,  
He touched the coursers, and the car flew on.

Arriving soon where still, before the strength  
Of the now vaunting foe, the Medes gave way,—  
His voice he sent afar ; and in their hearts  
New courage kindled, and a stern resolve.  
Up went a thunder-peal of welcome glad ;  
And man on man called out, as once again,  
With strength revived, they turned.

Within his car

Upstanding for a space,—along the front  
Of battle looked the Mede, and soon beheld  
Where, towering over all, the monstrous bulk  
Of Gilgath moved ; before him driving still,  
With the fell sweep of his colossal arm,

A crowd of shrinking soldiers. Armed complete  
In mail of ponderous brass, against him flew  
Arrow, or dart, or spear, as 'gainst a wall  
Of adamant. Behind his back immense,  
His moon-like shield was slung; upon his thigh,—  
A burthen for a man of common mould,—  
Clanged his huge sword; but in its brazen sheath  
Still sleeping; while, sole weapon now, but dread,  
With force of both gigantic arms, he swung  
An iron-headed club. All ward, or guard,  
Against the stroke terrific, vain appeared  
As infant's breath to turn the hurricane :  
Helmet, or breast-plate, of what strength soe'er,  
Yielding as wax. From side to side flew on  
The monstrous engine; and, where'er it fell,  
Crushed utterly. With sweat, and foam, and dust,  
The huge dark face was grimed: his blood-red eyes  
Savagely glared; his nostrils were spread out;  
His mouth gaped wide; his huge chest rose and fell,  
Breathing laboriously. Yet still he toiled;  
Step after step, at every ponderous swing,  
Advancing still; and through the shrinking mass,  
Forcing a gory way.

Arbaces saw,  
And toward him drove the steeds. The giant paused,—  
For the far-flashing chariot caught his eye,—  
And bellowed forth defiance. With a smile,  
Arbaces heard; and, to his charioteer  
The reins committing, bade him there abide :  
His battle-axe then took; and, to the ground  
Lightly outspringing, with deliberate step  
Advanced; and through the swiftly opening ranks,  
Moved to confront the foe. No word he spake;  
But on the giant fixed his steady eye,  
Keen as a sun-break from an opening cloud,  
And toward him still advanced. A space all round,  
On either side, the hosts from fight refrained;  
In silence, and in wonder looking on.

As when the wild bull, in his frenzied rage,  
Tears up the ground, and with his bellowing fills

The echoing forest;—fire from out his eyes  
He scatters; on his bulky flanks resounds  
His fiercely lashing tail; now here, now there,  
His sanguine balls he rolls, athirst to gore,  
And seems all might of living thing to scorn;—  
If, suddenly, the lion's voice he hears,  
Or scents him in the wind,—at once is hushed  
His stormy roar; the tearing foot stands fixed;  
The huge bulk trembles; and the bounding heart  
Flutters and stops,—even so, as nigher drew  
The dreaded Mede, upon the giant came  
A fear, and quaking. O'er his burning face  
A pallor 'gan to steal; his blood-red eyes  
Dilated, and the rolling orbs were fixed,  
As by a spell. With lifted club he stood,  
Prepared to strike; yet seemed that all his rage,  
And half his strength were gone: his foamy lip  
Hung quivering; and his huge knees 'gan to shake.

Within three paces now, the Mede stood still:  
With air of one who marvels, but nought fears,  
Fixed on the human tower a searching eye,  
And, head to foot, surveyed him. Loosely held,  
As not for stroke immediate, the great axe  
Gleamed in his terrible hand. The glorious form  
Stood all at rest,—like to a youthful god  
Newly descended, with the light of heaven  
Still shining from him, on some prodigy  
Of earthly mould to gaze. The axe, at length,  
Gently he grounded; on the handle leaned  
His ample palm,—even as a traveller,  
Who, journeying far, and meeting by the way  
A fellow pilgrim, on his staff doth rest,  
Brief colloquy to hold,—and, with a smile  
Gathering about his lips, thus playfully  
The marvelling foe addressed.

“ Ere now, methinks,  
Better should we have each the other known;  
For message not unfrequent, to and fro,  
Hath passed between us; and, in closer ties  
To bind ourselves,—nay as the arbiters

Of two great nations' destinies,—hast thou  
 A conference oft invited. Shame to me,  
 That, to thy friendly greeting, a slow ear  
 Still have I turned ! But gentle fortune now  
 Befriends me ; and, my fault o'erlooking, gives  
 The boon which justly had been forfeited.  
 Here, then, at last we meet ; and now may well  
 These great contending empires knit in peace ;  
 Resolving, as the reasons stronger prove,  
 If the eternal city shall be ours,  
 Or we your bondslaves be. But not at ease  
 Thou seemest ; and that iron club, methinks,  
 So long uplifted, even to arm like thine,  
 Must be a burthen. Rest thee then a space,  
 Ere thou reply ; for truly is thy breath  
 Laborious ; and thy sinews seem unstrung,  
 As by great toil : meantime, be well assured,  
 No vantage shall be taken cunningly  
 To do thee wrong."

The last word from his lips  
 Not yet had parted, when, outstriding wide,  
 On came the monster,—like a thunderbolt,  
 Driving his hideous engine ; at one blow  
 Resolved, like worm to crush him.

Swifter far  
 Sprang on the Mede ;—a lightning glance—a crash,—  
 Wide flew the loosened club,—one staggering step  
 Recoiled the bulk,—one moment tottering stood,  
 Corpse-like, with eye-balls turning inwardly,  
 And dropping jaw ; then, with a heavy squelch,  
 And clang of battered armour, in a heap,  
 Sank, like a crumbling ruin, thunder-struck.

Through the thick breast-plate driven, deep in his  
 chest  
 The axe was buried ; bringing with it death,  
 Immediate, and scarce felt.

An instant gazed,  
 In silence and strange awe, the breathless throngs ;  
 Then a wild clamor raised ; a double din,  
 Of triumph, and of fear. A second look

On their fallen champion, no Assyrian eye  
Lingered to give: with faces terror-struck,  
In headlong haste they fled. The exulting Medes  
Pealed forth loud cries of victory; and, with hearts  
Burning as with a fire just shot from heaven,  
Again flew on to battle.

From the corpse,  
His axe Arbaces drew; then, to his car  
Swiftly returning, sprang, and stood on high,  
And sent his voice abroad. The moment now,  
Long waited, had arrived. One backward glance  
Toward the mound's top he cast; his arm upflung;  
Then headlong on the foe, with shout on shout  
Urging assault, his fiery horses drove  
Deep in the midst.

With keen eye looking forth,  
That signal the Arabian king beheld:  
Flew to his car,—sprang up,—his lance waved high,—  
With clear voice crying onset, rent the air,—  
And instantly, beneath thick clouds of horse,  
Terribly thundering; and the roll and jar  
Of wheels rebounding, the firm champaign shook.

As when a mountain torrent, at the gorge  
Of hill-girt dell, sole outlet, is dammed up  
By the fallen glacier,—swollen by heavy rains,  
And the quick melting of an age's snows,  
All the deep basin of the vale it fills;  
Till, far beneath the flood, even loftiest trees,  
Like some gigantic sea-weed, upright stand;  
And, with the ponderous weight of waters, groans  
The frozen barrier. Yet still down, down, down,  
The impetuous torrent shoots: still more and more  
The mountain cauldron deepens. Night to day,  
And day to night, and week to week succeeds;—  
Yet still with gathering volume pours the stream;  
With stronger heave, against their prison gate,  
The piled-up waters thrust. The whole huge bulk  
Of ice-cliff, base to summit, yields at last:  
With noise as when the earthquake grinds his jaws,  
Is forced from its hard grip. Inch after inch,

Tottering, it drags along,—hill-sides, and ground,  
 Like Titan harrow tearing ; till, at once,  
 Loosed altogether,—as from precipice hurled,  
 Crashing, and shattering, headlong down it goes ;  
 And with stupendous, and appalling burst,—  
 As when the fountains of the deep broke up,  
 To drown the world,—forth leaps the roaring flood !  
 Swift as the arrow's flight, it shoots along,—  
 Thunder, and foam ! As when, from hell-gates 'scaped,  
 Millions of Spirits, fierce and terrible,  
 With clang of arms, and God-defying shouts,  
 Leagues off made Chaos tremble,—such the din  
 As on its way that watery hell doth hold !  
 Flocks, men, trees, houses, rocks, like withered boughs  
 Before the hurricane, it whirls along ;  
 And the green fertile vale, at one fell swoop,  
 Becomes a torn and ghastly wilderness ;—  
 Even with such uproar, such o'erwhelming force,  
 The long chained myriads of the Median host,  
 Chariots, and horse, in the same moment loosed,  
 Pealed thunder o'er the plain : and, where they passed,  
 Such havoc, and dire ruin, left behind !

Nebaioth, who the rushing deluge saw,  
 And knew destruction coming,—from his steed  
 Hastily leaping, to the horses sprang,  
 Of the queen's chariot ; wheeled them round, and cried,  
 " Back through the gate ! a flood is coming on  
 That will o'erwhelm us ! " To the charioteer,  
 With eye of fire, and clarion voice, thus he ;  
 But, in an angry tone, the heroic queen,  
 Upstanding, said, " False soldier ! loose the reins ;  
 I will not fly."

" On ! on ! 'tis madness all ! "

Frantically cried he ; " Oh ! most royal dame,  
 'Tis for Assyria, as for thee, I plead,—  
 Forgive me, but thou *shalt* not" . . . . .

Suddenly dumb,

And horror-struck, there stopped he ; for the queen  
 Staggered, and backward sank : in her fair neck,  
 A shaft had glanced ; and the bright crimson stream

Stained her pure ivory skin. No word she spake ;  
No cry sent forth : her eye a moment gleamed ;  
Her countenance paled ; a faintness loosed her joints ;  
But, ere Nebaioth to the chariot sprang,  
Her garment she had torn, and, with firm hand,  
Pressed to the wound. Her face again was bright,  
Though wild and anxious. Turning quickly then  
To the young warrior, who, with eager spring,  
Beside her stood, and his broad shield thrust forth,  
'Gainst farther harm to guard her,—thus she spake :  
“ Pardon, Nebaioth, my intemperate words,  
Ungrateful, and unjust. But now no time  
For useless speech. The wound is but skin-deep ;  
I fear it not, scarce feel : yet the red stream  
Shows ghastly ; and the sight might more disturb,  
Than could my presence cheer the soldiers now.  
Though all unwilling, then, I quit the field,  
And seek the king. Perchance his bleeding queen  
May stir, or shame him to the fight even yet.  
But thou, Nebaioth, art an arm of strength :  
Thy place is in the front of battle now ;  
Not by a woman's side : at once then go :  
Go—I conjure, command thee.”

As she spake,  
Behind them, nor far distant, the dire cloud  
Of Median thunder o'er the Assyrians broke.

On the pale countenance of the shuddering queen,  
One moment, with wild eye, Nebaioth looked ;  
One glance upon the hell of war shot back ;  
Then seized her garment's hem ; unto his lips  
Fervently pressed it ; from the chariot sprang,  
And plunged into the fight.

At rapid speed  
Flew on the royal car,—shot through the gate ;  
And gained the palace.

Horror-struck, the king  
His bleeding queen beheld. The word was given ;  
His arms were donned ; his chariot was brought forth ;  
His guard was summoned ; every fighting man  
Within the walls, that might to battle go :

And, all for vengeance burning, to the field,  
Furiously on they rode.

His coming forth  
Was seen, and noised abroad ; and through his host  
New soul was wakened. Desperately, like men  
Who value life at nought,—while yet their strength  
Upheld them, firm they stood, and wound for wound  
Deemed blest exchange ; nay, death itself cheap price  
For death of enemy. On, from rank to rank,  
Flew on the frenzied king ; with arm, and voice,  
With loud command, encouragement, and threat,  
Promise of spoil, and honor, and renown,  
Impelling to the combat.

But, too late  
His tardy coming ; and too strong the foe !  
Day waned ; and darkness gathered over head,  
While backward still his wearied troops were driven,  
And still the Medes pressed on.

Wide stood the gates ;  
The routed myriads poured like torrents in.  
Thicker the darkness grew ; that friend from foe  
Might scanty be distinguished. Struck with fear,  
The king retired. The Median trumpets blew  
The signal of recall. No answering blast  
The Assyrians sounded ; but, with jaded step,  
Speechless and panting, thronged into the walls.

Deeper, and deeper fell the Stygian night :  
The sky was blotted out ; the solid earth  
Was black, and formless. Not a breath of air  
Fanned the hot gloom ; no freshening rain-drop fell ;  
But they who nigh the river's margin stood,  
Heard the dark waters, with unwonted force,  
As at a flood's commencement, hurrying on.

By slow degrees, the silence of the night  
Fell on the city, and the gory plain.  
A solitary torch moved here and there,  
Seeking the slain, or wounded.

Rapidly,  
The watch-fires in the Median camp burst forth :  
And, soon, the broad red blaze to heaven's dusk vault

Upshooting,—on it darkly quivering hung,  
Like to a blood-stained curtain o'er the dead.

Midnight—and all was hushed : the untended fires  
To dark red embers smouldered, and went out ;  
The watchers were asleep : nor aught was heard  
Beneath heaven's canopy, save one low sound,  
O'er plain and city rising,—the deep groan  
Of dying thousands, and the mourner's wail !

## BOOK THE TWENTY-FIRST.

ALL night funereal darkness pall'd the earth ;  
The worn-out soldiers slumbered heavily :  
The anxious chiefs themselves, in grave-like sleep,  
Till morn lay locked ; nor dreamed of victory,  
Or of defeat. But a yet thicker gloom  
Hung o'er the spirit of Assyria's king :  
His strength again was gone ; his eyes closed not ;  
The fearful *present*, in yet worse *to-come*,  
As in a black, inevitable gulf,  
Seemed hurrying on to plunge him. To and fro,  
His restless limbs he tossed ; oft rose, and trod,  
With quick and anxious step, the velvet floor :  
Anon would stop ; with wild and haggard look,  
Glare out on vacancy ; then to his couch  
Again sink down ; and, vainly as before,  
Invoke oblivious sleep.

As restlessly,  
The wounded queen her fragrant pillow pressed ;  
But not in like despair. Her eye was bright ;  
Her breathing quick ; her heart with fever throbbed.  
High were her hopes, and cheerful was her voice,  
As, to her listening dames, all eagerly,  
She visioned things to come. At length she rose ;  
Round her majestic person a rich robe  
Of crimson silk, with gold embroidered, threw ;  
Her beauteous feet in silken slippers shod ;  
And to the chamber of the restless king,

With light firm step, advanced. Him; wrapped in  
gloom,

From out the window looking toward the plain,  
She found; and, with a gay and hopeful voice,  
Essayed to cheer him.

“Wherefore now cast down,  
O king,” she said; and on his shoulder placed  
Her fair, but burning hand: “lo! all the day,  
With numbers fewer far, against the foe  
Thy hosts have stood; and have not utterly,  
Even so, been vanquished: then, dear lord, take heart;  
And, on the morrow, let thine arms again  
Blaze forth, and wither them. The gods, be sure,  
Will give thee now the victory.”

In her face,  
With sorrow looked he; marked her florid cheek,  
Her brightly beaming eye, her hurried speech;  
Felt her dry, burning hand; and knew, too well,  
That fever fired her. With a solemn voice,  
Then thus he answered.

“To thy bed return.  
The leech hath warned thee that, by sleep unsoothed,  
Thy wound may rancorous grow. Speak then no more:  
Yet bid thy handmaids give thee cooling drinks;  
For thy blood boileth in thee; and thy thoughts  
Are all disordered.”

Saying thus, he rose;  
Clasped her reluctant hand, and on her cheek  
A kiss of pity pressed. Nought answered she,—  
By those cold words displeased,—but turned and went.  
The downcast king again his chamber paced,  
And heavy sighs breathed forth.

But soon, once more,  
Gently the door was opened. In her hand  
Bearing a dulcimer, Azubah stood,—  
Her anxious face enquiring timidly  
If she might enter. Silently awhile  
She waited; then, with soft, beseeching voice,  
“May I not sing to thee, O king,” she said,

"And pour into thy sorrowing heart the balm  
Of music, and sweet poesy?"

But her

Thus answered he: "Not now: to every sound  
That once could comfort bring, mine ears are deaf:  
My thoughts are troubled, and my heart is sad.  
Then leave me: I would be alone."—He paused;  
Upon her loving face gazed mournfully;  
Then thus, with pitying accent, spake again.  
"But who to thee, alas! shall comfort bring,  
When the king's hour hath passed! and unto whom  
Wilt thou for refuge fly!"

With hurried words,  
And quivering lip, she answered. "Unto none!  
Whither thou go'st, there also will I go;  
And to none else will I for comfort seek."  
He kissed her cheek, but spake not; and she went.

Then fell upon him a yet darker gloom;  
And hastily he sent forth messengers,  
Commanding wizards, and Chaldean seers,  
To come before him. But afraid were all,  
And hid themselves. Some bade their servants say,  
"Our master in a grievous sickness lies;"  
And some, "Behold our lord is this day dead!"  
So that not one among them might be found.

Perplexed and wrathful grew the despot then:  
But, his rage curbing, once more he sent forth,  
And Barak summoned. Nought afeard was *he*;  
But rose at once; his sable vestments donned;  
And soon, erect and proud, before the king,  
Waiting his bidding, stood.

"Thou tremblest not;"

After long pause, while with a fiery glance,  
From head to foot he scanned the audacious priest,  
The king displeased began. "Fearest thou not then?  
Hast thou forgotten how, when last we spake,  
Thy hateful life, too justly forfeited,  
Hung as on gossamer thread? What hinders now  
That I bid cut the line, and let thee sink

Down to the hell thou'rt doomed to? Answer, priest;  
Say, wherefore should'st thou live."

A gloomy smile  
Curled the pale prophet's lip, as, all unmoved,  
Thus answered he. "My life, O king, by heaven,  
Not man, may be commanded. At thy word,  
Might the frail thread be severed, of a truth,  
Ere now the worms had gnawed me. But I stand  
Unfearing; for my time not yet is come;  
Nor darest thou speed it. Once again, O king,  
I warn thee,—thine, and mine, one hour to die;  
By Fate irrevocably so decreed;  
So by the gods pronounced; nor, by man's might,  
One moment to be changed. While I shall live,  
Thou shalt live also: slay me,—and, that hour,  
Thy grave will open."

While he spake, the king  
An inward shudder felt; yet, proud of heart,  
Affected scorn, and promptly thus replied.  
"O'er much the gods then honor thee. Methinks  
A monarch's death should stand alone in the year,  
Like to some great eclipse; that all the world  
Him solely might lament. But, cunning seer,  
If so far in the future thou canst look,—  
Lapse of long years, I trust,—deign, then, to gaze  
Upon to-morrow's birth; and tell the event  
Just coming into life. What if again,  
With the next dawn, I lead my army forth,—  
Shall we be victors? Answer—if thou darest:  
But, first, bethink thee;—for, as true, or false,  
Thou speakest now, so shalt thou live, or die.  
And, may the gods, in my extremest need,  
Aid, or destroy me, as this vow I keep!  
If false thy prophecy, ere the next day's sun  
Rise o'er the mountains, thou shalt die the death!  
Then, ere thou answer, pause."

While yet he spake,  
The prompt reply began. "No need for pause,  
Forethought, or caution. Mighty as thou art,  
King of Assyria, mightier are the gods.

Their doom thou canst not alter ; their command  
 Hast heard, and disobeyed. Yet, once again,  
 Thus I proclaim it. Lead thine armies forth ;  
 But, ere one step they move,—within thy court  
 Be the pile ready ; and the victim sure.  
 If, then, the day go with thee,—as the Powers,  
 Approving, may decree,—it shall be well ;  
 And still thy child may live. But, if the foe  
 Till noon prevail,—then surely may'st thou know  
 The gods are wroth with thee, and do require  
 The blood of expiation. Let the steam  
 Of sacrifice then to their nostrils mount ;  
 And they, well pleased, may turn the face of wrath  
 Upon thine enemies : on thy side may fight ;  
 And utterly destroy them from the earth.

But, if 'gainst heaven thou harden still thy heart,  
 Still do deny the sacrifice,—behold !  
 Thy kingdom shall pass from thee evermore !  
 Upon thy throne thine enemy shall sit,  
 And banquet in thy palaces ! Thy queen,  
 Thy daughter, shall they take for concubines !  
 Thy sons shall put to death ! thy cities seize,  
 Thy treasures, for a spoil. And thou, O king !  
 Unto thine enemies shalt be a sport,  
 A hissing, and a mockery ! and, last,  
 Shalt ignominiously be put to death !"

With deep and awful tone the wizard spake ;  
 Nor could the king reply ; for wrath, and pride,  
 By supernatural dread were mastered quite,  
 That even his soul felt shudder. A brief space  
 The prophet stood ; fixed on him his stern eye ;  
 Then turned, and went his way.

Down sank the king,  
 Grief-smitten, to his couch : and all the night  
 Moaned, and wept bitterly. Three days and nights,  
 With eyes scarce closing, did he weep and groan :  
 To neither man, nor woman, would he speak ;  
 Nor would be comforted.

But, when the morn  
 Of the fourth day was come, again he bade,

And Barak stood before him. Till the noon;  
Sat they in conference ; and the monarch's face,  
Like a dusk cloud by quivering lightning touched,  
With ghastly light 'gan glimmer. Not the less,  
On the gaunt prophet's brow, as he retired,  
Hung the dark frown ; for he the despot knew  
Uncertain as the wind. The king saw not,  
But, with a feverish gaiety, sent forth,  
And Salamenes summoned.

When the prince  
Before him came,—the monarch, with bright eye,  
And eager utterance, questioned of the host,  
Their numbers, and their spirit. Marvelling much  
At that so sudden kindling, with sad tone,  
Thus Salamenes answered.

“ Most dread lord !  
The words that I must speak, are bitterness :  
Yet be not angered with me. Of the force  
That late so joyously and strong went forth,  
Full two score thousand sleep ! Dejection dark,  
Silence, and terror, o'er the living hang.  
Within the city, restless prophets roam,  
Predicting dire events : and, nigh the walls,  
Each night the howl of desert beasts is heard.  
Strange Things, 'tis said, in darkness walk the earth,  
And flit along the air. No sun by day  
Now gladdens us ; but a dense roof of cloud,  
Tomb-like, o'ervaults the earth. Some cry aloud,  
' The king is with the dead, or surely now  
Unto his people had he shown himself :'  
And some, disheartened, stealthily have fled,  
And with the rebel leagued. Oh, mighty lord !  
If thou in this extremity rise not  
To strengthen us, Assyria will be lost !”

Him, with flushed look, the impatient monarch heard ;  
And hastily replied : “ Dreamers, and fools,  
Have all the rest infected,—ay, even thee ;  
For, like the wind in hollow sepulchre,  
Soundeth thy voice ; and corpse-like is thy hue.  
But wild beasts to their deserts shall return ;  
False prophets be made silent ; graves shall hold

Their tenants back ; and once again the sun  
Shall shine upon imperial Nineveh.  
I will arise : I will go forth again ;  
And trample down mine enemies. But now,  
Haste thou away : take from my treasures gold ;  
And largely unto every soldier give :  
Then, on the morrow, ere the dawn shall peep,  
Lead thou the host in silence from the walls ;  
And pour destruction on the enemy.  
And let the heralds everywhere proclaim,  
' Thus saith the king : be joyful, and be bold :  
Now shall ye surely triumph ; for the gods,  
That have been wroth with us, will be appeased ;  
And give the audacious rebel to your swords.'  
Let them cry also, ' Be ye not cast down,  
For that the king to battle goeth not :  
He a great sacrifice doth offer up,—  
So by heaven willed,—and may not lead you on :  
But toward the field still will his eye be turned ;  
And he the brave will honor.' ”

With firm voice,  
These words he spake ; and greatly was the heart  
Of Salamenes gladdened. Forth he went ;  
The princes, and the captains, summoned all ;  
And the king's words made known. Gold then he took ;  
That unto every soldier might be given,  
With liberal measure ; and the monarch's will  
Throughout the camp proclaimed. So was the host  
Made joyful ; and, with strength and courage new,  
Did every man for battle nerve himself.

But, when the night was come, thick gloom again  
Fell on the spirit of Assyria's lord.  
Throughout the palace had the word been sent,  
That, on the morrow, Barak, as himself,  
By all should be obeyed,—what act soe'er  
Might be by him commanded. Like to one  
Who by a precipice's brink doth stand,  
Waiting the sign he dare not disobey,  
To leap down headlong,—even so strength-bereft,

So by an iron destiny o'erruled,  
Felt earth's proud master now ! With strong desire,  
Yet vainly, 'gainst the future did he strive  
His thoughts to barrier : vainly did he long  
In grave-like sleep to shut out consciousness  
Of life and misery. To wine, at length,  
For aid he flew ; and deeply did he quaff,  
To bring oblivion : yet his eyes closed not ;  
And wilder grew his thoughts. At length he called,  
And bade that Dara, with the harp, should come,  
To sing and play before him.

In brief time,  
The minstrel entered. Glad was then the king ;  
And said ; " Strike now with vigorous hand the lyre ;  
And pour a song of battle ; for my heart  
Is heavy, and dark thoughts oppress my soul."

So Dara, with a hand of fire, o'erswept  
The ringing chords ; and lifted up his voice.

Deeply, the while, Sardanapalus drank  
The cheering nectar ; and said inwardly,  
" Heart, be thou joyful : what hast thou to fear ?"

But, as the moon, through dense clouds laboring,  
When winds are loud, and heavy is the rain,—  
One moment, with clear disk looks joyously  
From her deep cave ; but, in the next, again  
Is by the rolling sea of vapour quenched,—  
So, o'er the monarch's soul, if, for a while,  
A glad light broke,—did blacker thoughts again  
Sweep o'er, and bury it in thicker night.

At length, he bade to hush the harp awhile ;  
But, when the strings were silent, from without,  
A sound was heard ; and wrathfully he cried ;  
" What noise is that ? Who of his wretched life  
So weary is, that thus he dares disturb,  
With his vile din, the slumber of the king ?  
Go, and command a silence."

Bowing low,  
Thus Dara answered : " Gracious lord ! the sound  
Is of artificers who build the pile  
Of sacrifice. As through the northern court  
Hither I came, I saw, and questioned them.

Through all the night must they their labor ply,—  
So answered they,—for, at the hour of noon,  
The offering will be made."

A bitter pang  
Shot through the monarch, as these words he heard;  
And hastily he spake: "Touch then again  
The harp; but gently now; and with such airs  
As may invite to slumber. Let the tones  
Steal dream-like through the air; and make no pause  
Till sleep come o'er me. Then, when thou shalt see,  
That a deep slumber wraps me,—go thou forth;  
And, unto them who wait without, thus say;  
'Let no man, on the peril of his life,  
Dare to approach the chamber of the king,  
Till thither summoned; neither through the night,  
Nor on the morrow: whoso disobeys,  
At once shall die the death.'" Thus having said,  
A mighty goblet he drained hastily;  
Sank on his couch; and closed his eyes for sleep.

Dara, with hand untiring, from the harp  
Called breathing tones, and maze-like harmonies;  
Such as a quiet spirit might have lapped  
In dreams elysian. Now, they seemed to float,  
Like some ethereal choir, in upper air;  
Now, murmured like the moaning of the wind  
In the dim forest: now, again came on,  
Stealthily creeping, like a streamlet's voice  
Borne on a gentle breeze; and, now, died off,  
As from their own excess of sweetness faint.

But, to the monarch slumber came not soon.  
Twice, when oblivion o'er his sense 'gan steal,  
Suddenly up he sprang, with look like his  
Who sees some horrible Shadow. From the cup  
Again, as with a thirst unquenchable,  
Then deeply drank he; and again outstretched  
His trembling limbs for sleep. His eyes, at length,  
Closed heavily: the world was all shut out.  
The external perished; but the mind within,  
Like to a buried fire, still hotly burned.  
The tortured soul, her earthly organs still

Moved, though unconsciously ; his hands, outspread,  
Trembled, and clutched, as at some fearful thing ;  
His body shook ; his breath was hard and quick ;  
His face with sweat bedewed ; his quivering lips  
Low muttered words gave forth.

But, more and more,  
Sleep gained the mastery ; till, as with a chain,  
Fast bound the body lay. Yet Dara feared  
O'ersoon to leave him ; lest the warring mind  
Should break the fetter ; and his wrath should rise,  
To find himself alone. So, hushed as death,  
Long time he waited ; on the monarch's face  
Anxiously gazing.

Nought marked he, at first,  
The tremulous words that from him 'gan to come :  
But, starting soon, his face like marble grew :  
His eyes stood wide ; his slackening jaw fell down :  
With arms extended, and one foot advanced,  
Breathless he stood, as though, from crown to heel,  
His body were all ear. The last death-spasm  
More rigid scarce had made him ; but alas !  
Far less had tortured, than those dreadful words  
Which had his soul transpierced. The hideous truth  
Stood bare before him ! Piecemeal was it told ;  
Yet clear, as if by sunbeams written down,  
Stood the black whole revealed. He knew, at last,—  
And the great horror seemed to stop his heart ;  
Curdle his blood, and dry his marrow up,—  
He knew the victim for the sacrifice !

Stiffened like stone, long stood he ; but, at length,  
Desperately resolute, toward the tyrant stole :  
Watched anxiously, till the relaxing hand,  
And slower breathing, marked a heavier sleep ;  
Then from the finger, with a cautious touch,  
The signet-ring drew off ; and, with a step  
Noiseless, and slow, as panther's when he glides  
To spring upon his prey, the chamber left.

The charge he gave without, on pain of death,  
That none, unsummoned, either on that night,  
Or on the morrow, should the threshold cross,

Of the king's chamber: with a quick foot then,  
And quicker beating heart, the victim sought,—  
The royal maiden, of her hideous doom  
Unconscious, as the kid that blithely skips  
Within the tiger's spring.

Her, all alone,  
And wakeful, found he,—to the dulcimer  
Singing a gentle hymn, ere, for the night,  
Should close her tender lids. With face like death,  
But gleaming eyes, and words of passionate fire,  
The fearful tale he told: upon his knee  
Sank trembling; and, while tears in torrents poured,  
Conjured her instantly those fatal walls  
To leave behind; and, in the sheltering arms  
Of her loved mother's sister, far away,  
Find sure repose, and safety.

Horror-struck,  
Nehushta paled, and shuddered; and, awhile,  
Speechless and strengthless stood. "Abide thou here,  
Belovèd friend," at length, with tremulous lip,  
She whispered: "Thy dread words the queen must hear:  
She will in all direct me."

Tremblingly,  
She took her way.—The mother o'er her child  
Wept bitter tears.

At midnight, through a gate  
That faced the south, a small, but chosen band  
Of mail-clad horsemen went: and, in the midst,  
Two roomy chariots. They who rode within,  
Were veiled women, all in dark array.  
No word was spoken. With dejected heads  
They sat; and, ever and anon, a sob,  
Ill stifled, might be heard. Their going forth,  
No man opposed: the magic signet-ring,  
Token of delegated power supreme,  
None dared to question. With a beating heart,  
But voice and look imperative, that sign  
Still Dara showed; and every man obeyed.

The watchers at the gate, amazed beheld;  
But bowed the head, and flung the portal wide.

Forth passed the train : again the hinges moaned  
'Neath their huge load ; the massive bolts again  
Shot in their staples. Onward went the troop,  
Slowly, and steadily.

Long their horse-tread,  
Still lessening, from the battlement was heard ;  
And great the marvel was, how, through that gloom,  
Might path be found. At length the trampling ceased ;  
And they who marked it, to each other said,  
“ They stop perforce : the darkness shuts them in,  
Like a black curtain ; and turn back they must,  
Or tarry till the day-break.” But a ray  
Of red light, as they thus debating stood,—  
As 'twere an earth-star, far upon the plain,—  
Gleamed suddenly ; another rose ; a third ;  
And yet a fourth appeared. Then came again,  
But soft and faint as dropping of the rain  
On the young grass of spring, the sound of hoofs,  
Leisurely treading ; and the listeners said,  
“ No,—they have kindled torches, and go on.  
Strange hour for travel ! But the king's command  
Waits not the morning, if he wills the night.”

And then again they marvelled, guessing each  
What might the cause of that strange journey be :  
And, as they talked, still on the four red lights,  
Slowly progressing, did they fix their eyes ;  
Till, as the distance lengthened, into one  
The four converged ; one dim and fading beam,  
Like an expiring star. It sank at length,  
In that deep sea of darkness swallowed up :  
And the long silent gazers turned away,  
And sighed, they knew not wherefore.

All this time,  
Racked by terrific dreams, the monarch lay ;  
In few hours seeming to live months of woe.  
But, toward the morning, pleasant visions came.  
The Israelitish seer, whom he had slain,  
Appeared before him ; and, with smiling face,  
And gentle voice, thus seemed to speak to him.

"Arise; lead forth thy hosts,—for now is heaven  
At thy obedience pleased; and it may be  
The child shall not be asked for at thy hands."

Thus having spoken, the pale prophet passed;  
And, with gay voice, and cheerful countenance,  
Nehushta came, and said, "Belovéd sire!  
Go forth, and scatter all thine enemies:  
For, when thy daughter on the altar-stone  
Shall lie, a willing victim,—then, behold!  
The gods shall make thee terrible as Death;  
That all shall sink before thee."

Having said,

She also vanished: and another shade,  
The spirit of his mother, stood and spake.  
"The glory of this mighty Nineveh  
Shall not yet perish. Get thee up, my son;  
Gird on thy sword, and take thy spear and shield,  
And in thy chariot drive against thy foes.  
Like reeds before the mammoth, shall they fall  
At thy on-coming: and the beauteous child,  
Untouched, shall, from the stone of sacrifice,  
Be given into thine arms."

The lofty brow

Of the pale spectre-queen shone luminous,  
While thus she spake; and in the monarch's breast  
Seemed its own fire to pour. In vision then,  
Forth went he; and his enemies, like dust  
Before the whirlwind, scattered. With his lance,  
Right through the heart Belesis he transfixed;  
And with his falchion, even from crown to breast,  
Clove the terrific Mede. Then did he shout  
Exultingly; and all his myriads raised  
Clamors of triumph, peal succeeding peal,  
That, with the deafening uproar, he awoke.

But, when clear sense returned, behold! the sword  
Was in his hand; and on his feet he stood,  
Facing the field of battle. Giddiness, then,  
At that strange wonder, seized upon his brain;  
Till, like to one intoxicate, he reeled,  
And sank upon the couch. But, in a while,  
It passed away; and on his dream he thought,

And much was comforted. Then cheerfully  
He called ; and, when his servants entered, said ;  
“ Command ye that my chariot be prepared ;  
My bow, and quiver, and spears numerous :  
Bring hither armour, helmet, sword, and shield ;  
For, ere the day shall dawn, will I go forth,  
And scatter all mine enemies. Yet, first,  
To Salamenes a swift messenger  
Send instantly,—and let him say, ‘ Arise,  
For the king calleth on thee.’ ”

But the prince,  
No summons needing, entered as he spake ;  
And, seeing him, well pleased, the monarch thus.  
“ Brave soldier ! ever watchful ; and most brave,  
When peril threatens most ! Thy mind had I,  
Long since yon rebels had to deserts fled,  
Or rotted in their graves. But now, with speed,  
Arouse the host, ere yet the night be spent ;  
And lead them to the plain ; but, silently,—  
That, all unlooked for as a thunder-stone  
From clear sky, we may strike. And let the word  
To all be passed, ‘ This day the king himself  
Will lead you on to victory ; for so,  
In visions of the night, by heaven sent down,  
Hath it been shown to him. The gods themselves  
Have chosen a victim for the sacrifice :  
But, ere the smoke shall to their nostrils mount,  
From out the clouds will their right hands be seen,  
Hurling destruction on our enemies.’ ”

Even while he spake, impatiently he ‘gan  
His radiant arms to don : his countenance  
With fire unnatural flamed ; and his full eyes  
Gleamed lamp-like. Salamenes, wonder-struck  
At that so sudden kindling, gladly thus.  
“ Thy armies, mighty king ! upon the plain  
Already are assembled ; and but wait  
The coming of thy servant : for I said  
To the chief captains, ere they led them forth,  
‘ When ye have ranked your soldiers on the field,  
Tarry in silence till I come to you.

"Tis to the presence of the king I go ;  
For, haply, even yet may he arise,  
And lead us in the battle : so the hearts  
Of all shall gather courage, and our arms  
With double vigour strike.' "

" Well hast thou done ! "

Replied the monarch ; " Speed thou then away ;  
And cry, ' The king comes forth ; and Victory  
Within his chariot rideth.' "

Glad at heart,

Went Salamenes ; and more hastily  
The monarch armed himself. Anon came some,  
Who said, " The royal chariot is at hand ;  
But no where may be found the charioteer.  
Perchance prince Dara, deeming that the king  
This day would rest, hath to the field gone forth."

" Presumptuous boy ! " exclaimed the indignant  
king ;

" But now no time for question ; he shall rue  
This over-boldness. Meantime, send in haste,  
And summon the chief captain of my guard,  
Prince Tartan : he this day shall rule the steeds.  
Send also on the instant, and command  
That Barak come before me."

In brief space,

The priest appeared ; and, when they stood alone,  
Him thus the king addressed. " To thee full power  
Have I this day appointed : as mine own,  
Will thy command o'er all hold sway supreme.  
But hearken now : and, as the morrow's dawn  
Thou would'st behold, obey. If but one hair  
Of that fair child, unbidden, thou shalt harm,—  
So speed me heaven, as I thy hateful limbs  
Will stretch, yet living, on the altar-fire,  
And burn thee piecemeal. For the hour of noon  
Let all be ready : but, though direr rout  
Than ever yet o'er battle-field hath swept,  
Shall drive us,—yet, till thou the signal see,  
Touch not the victim. Now, be this the sign :  
Mark, and remember. If, above the tower

Of Nisroch thou behold a blood-red flag,—  
Then seat the child beside the altar-stone :  
But, after—mark me,—see thou touch her not,  
Till one hour farther on his downward way  
The sun hath journeyed. If thou then behold,—  
As surely wilt thou, else the heavens have lied,—  
That for our side the battle 'gins to turn ;  
Then, let the maiden forthwith be set free,  
And with all honor to her chamber led.  
There will she wait her conquering sire's return :  
And there will he, with love, and gratitude,  
Boundless as ocean overflowing, seek  
How best he may requite her. Little fear  
That she o'ermuch may ask. So let her know."

"Thy will, most mighty king," the priest replied,  
"In all shall be obeyed. But, if thy hope  
Be thwarted ; if the gods be still displeased ;  
And, though the victim by the altar sit,  
Turn not the day against thine enemy,—  
Demanding still the sacrifice complete" . . . . .

"Curs'd priest! thou seek'st in vain to torture me!"  
Fire flashing from his eyes, roared out the king ;  
"Demons, not gods, were they, so to demand.  
It is impossible ; and heaven were hell,  
If this could be ! Harm her,—and thou shalt lie  
Ten years a dying ! But no more. My will  
Exactly know'st thou ; strictly be it done."

Thus having sternly spoken, he went forth ;  
And through the Nisroch gate drove rapidly.

As yet was but faint twilight. At slow pace,  
And silently, the mighty mass of men  
Cloud-like moved onward.

In dark shadow lay  
The Median camp,—the watch-fires all burnt out,—  
And joyful was the spirit of the king ;  
Of victory assured, and full revenge,

## BOOK THE TWENTY-SECOND.

BUT not all unprepared were found the Medes.  
With restless foot, Belesis through the night,  
Still to and fro had trodden,—toward the vault  
Opaque, with anxious eye oft looking up,—  
And still his thought had been; “Bright ministers!  
How have we sinned against you, that thus long  
Ye hide the glory of your brows divine!”

But, toward the middle watch, in the deep hush  
Of earth and heaven, to his quick ear there came,  
Distant and faint, a sound like march of hosts;  
Horse-tramp, and hollow roll of chariot-wheels,  
Cautiously moving. Straightway, to the tent  
Where slept Arbaces, swiftly then he walked;  
Unbidden entered; touched him on the breast,  
And said, “Arise; a sound far off is heard  
Of wheels, and trampling feet.”

At once upsprang  
The ever-ready Mede; and from the tent  
Went forth to listen. In a moment then,  
Smiting his thigh, “Away! Away!” he said;  
“For, of a surety, do they gather now  
To fall upon us. Speed from tent to tent,  
And rouse the captains; and let every man  
That is awakened, instantly arise,  
And wake his fellows; but in silence all.  
Surely the gods this day into our hands  
Will give our enemies; in their own trap

The subtle ones will fall !”

While yet he spake,  
Came sound of horse approaching. Soon to earth  
The riders leaped, and to Arbaces thus.  
“The watchers on the outskirt of the camp  
Hear, from the walls, a sound of numerous feet,  
Horse-tramp, and roll of wheels. Perchance the foe  
Gathers for onset.” Others also came,  
The self-same message bearing ; and to all  
Was given command, with caution to arouse,  
And with hushed voice, the sleeping soldiery.  
So, at the first gray dawn, in full array  
Of battle stood the host ; and silently  
’Gan toward the city move.

With rapid foot  
Light climbed the heavens ; so that, when little way  
They had advanced, behold ! the Assyrian force,  
Like a dark deluge spread o’er all the plain,  
Against them swiftly moving.

The same beam,  
To the Assyrians showed the coming on  
Of their too watchful foe : yet, undismayed,  
Sardanapalus,—who with proudest state,  
In a right gorgeous chariot throned on high,  
Rode in the front,—stood up ; and with a tone  
Cheering and strong, cried out ; “Assyrians, stay ;  
And, ere the battle join, let us uplift  
Our voices in a loud triumphant hymn :  
For this day surely shall our enemies  
Perish before us.”

At sign given, stood still  
The human deluge : and, with powerful voice  
Himself began the song ; the whole vast host  
Sang with him joyfully ; and every heart  
Burned to begin the combat.

At that sound,  
Astonished were the Medes ; and man to man  
In whisper ’gan to speak ; “What may this mean ?  
Hath then the enemy gathered sudden strength,  
That, like a giant glorying in his might,

Thus he comes forth rejoicing?" With that thought,  
Came fear in hearts of many. But, at once,  
Arbaces in his lofty chariot stood,  
And sent abroad his voice. Like to the sound  
Of a great trumpet on a high tower blown,  
Far round it spread : and, like a sunbeam shot  
On a dark lake, even so it brightened up  
The lowering brow, and warmed the pallid cheek.  
With the proud enemy joining, as in scorn,  
He that same ardent hymn of battle sang :  
And, fired by sudden gladness, every voice  
Of all his myriads caught the martial strain,  
And fervently out-poured it. So, erelong,  
Both hosts together pealed the warlike song ;  
Filling with sound, as with a mighty flood  
Of water,—earth, and air, and heaven's rotund.

A long day's journey distant, 'mid the hills,  
Stood shepherds, with their flocks : the wondrous sound  
Awe-struck they heard ; and, gazing upward, said,  
" Surely the heavens are opened ; and the voice  
Of choiring gods comes down !"

When ceased the hymn,  
The Assyrian monarch shook aloft his spear,  
And cried vehemently, " Away ! away !  
Leap on your foes, and tread them as the dust !  
Unto the coward everlasting shame !  
To the brave eternal glory."

His strong voice,  
And ardent look, like an electric fire,  
Glanced through the hearts of the impatient host :  
And fiercely they sprang on. The chariots first,  
And horse, awoke the thunder. Them to oppose,  
Came horse, and chariots ; and, in middle field,  
Met, as with earthquake crash.

The men on foot,  
On either side, meantime, at swiftest speed,  
Like two fierce hurricanes encountering, flew ;  
And up at once the enormous tumult went,  
Storming heaven's peaceful gates.

As two vast rocks,

From counter hills, by earthquake throes dislodged,—  
With every moment of their downward course,  
Still gather fury, crashing, tearing up,—  
Crag on crag shattering,—bounding, leaping on,—  
Smoking, and scattering fire,—till in the vale,  
Midway, with noise of loudest thunder-clang,  
Hard front to front they meet ; and in a cloud  
Of sulphurous fume, flame, dust, and fragments lie,—  
Even with such frenzy, and such ruin, now,  
Host 'gainst host shocked. The ground was strewed  
with dead ;

With blood was deluged. Still, insatiate,  
As though, to die, were better life to gain,  
Man against man, with headlong violence flew ;  
Chariot 'gainst chariot dashed, and horse 'gainst horse.

Three hours, in fiery contest, thus they strove ;  
And greatly was Assyria's monarch then  
Among the best distinguished. Like bright star  
'Mid smaller lights, shone Salamenes too :  
Still in the front of battle was he seen,  
Cheering his soldiers' hearts, and leading on.

But Fate had marked him ! Standing in his car,  
With lance uplifted, aiming for the cast,—  
An arrow, by a powerful arm impelled,  
Rang on his cuirass ; through the strong steel burst,  
And in his side pierced deep. Down dropped his arm ;  
His flushed face paled ; he sank into the car.  
But, quickly, up he sat,—the hateful shaft  
With both hands grasped ; and, breath held, teeth close  
set,

Drew to uproot it. But, beneath the bone  
The barb was locked. The mortal agony  
Quelled soul, and strength ; and, groaning, he fell back.

Again he rose ; the arrow seized ; broke short  
The cumbering wood ; and, once more standing up,  
Cheered on the battle. But, with every word,  
Keener the torture grew : his eye 'gan dim,  
His breath to shorten, and his limbs to fail.  
Again he sank ; and, while unto the gods

For aid against the foe he mutely called,  
A faintness, as of death, came over him ;  
And to the bottom of the roomy car,  
A senseless mass, he fell.

With careful hand,  
Again into the seat was he upraised :  
But life seemed fled. Two sorrowing captains then  
Supporting him, the chariot was wheeled round,  
And toward the city driven. But many saw  
The much-loved prince,—so oft their strength and stay  
In hardest trials ; and their souls grew sad,  
Hope 'gan to fail them. Also of the Medes,  
Saw many the great leader's fall ; but them  
Joy filled thereat, and more their ardor burned.

Nought knew, as yet, Assyria's frantic king  
Of that dire loss. Fierce as a raging fire,  
Storm-driven athwart a reedy wilderness,  
In thickest fight he mixed ; nor found the arm  
That might control him. Dark Rabsaris met,  
But fell before him,—by his furious spear  
Down-smitten, senseless ; nor with life had 'scaped,  
But that the Bactrian, Ahab, in his car  
Came toward them hotly driving. Him at once  
The monarch knew ; and, greedy for revenge,  
The smaller prize disdained. Of all the host  
Insurgent, him most bitterly did he hate ;  
For that, though aid unto Assyria's lord,  
Faith, and submission, he had deeply vowed,—  
Yet, in the valley of Melchisedek,  
With rebels had he leagued ; and on his king  
Brought thus that dread night-onset, and foul rout.  
Burning with vengeance then, a lance he raised,  
And, while the Bactrian, bending for the throw,  
Came onward, fiercely cast it. Through the air,  
In the same moment, sang both stormy spears.  
Struck on the breast, the king a moment reeled,  
And was himself again ; but Ahab fell,  
As by the lightning smitten ; nor to sense  
Awakened, till, far distant borne away,

His charioteer the battered helm took off,  
And bathed his anguished head.

Him deeming slain,

Greatly the king rejoiced ; and, fired anew,  
Plunged headlong in the midst. But nought availed  
His fury and his might, to stem the tide  
Against the Assyrians setting. Like a god,  
Where'er he went, Arbaces ruled the fight :  
Before him none could stand. His coming-on  
Afar was seen ; and, as the gathered clouds  
Upon a mountain's summit, part, and fly,  
At the uplifting of the tempest's voice,—  
So, at his dreaded onset, all aghast,  
Whole squadrons turned ; and, each man as he might,  
The appalling presence fled. From rank to rank,  
The panic flew ; and, over all the field,  
With feebler arm, and foot retiring still,  
The Assyrians waged the fight. Even round the king,  
Were anxious faces seen ; and many a look  
Behind was cast, as if the massive walls  
Alone could shelter. But, despising death,  
Still foremost was the frenzied monarch seen,  
Destruction dealing ; and, with voice and look,  
Inflaming to the combat.

Through the gate,

Meantime, with Salamenes flew the car.  
His swoon had passed ; but withered was his strength,  
His torture terrible. Too well he knew  
That death had struck him : yet, his own life reft,  
Far less bemoaned, than those o'erwhelming woes,  
On his loved country falling.

From a tower,

Looking intent, the queen beheld a car  
From conflict speeding ; and, therein, a chief,  
Wounded, or slain : yet knew not, for a time,  
That 'twas her brother. More and more, her frame  
Shook with the heart-throbs, as upon her loomed  
Distincter the dark terror. Crushingly  
Fell the dire truth at last ! With faltering voice,  
She bade that messengers should hasten forth,

And to the royal palace bring the car ;  
With her own hands that she the prince might tend,  
And with her presence cheer ; then, hurriedly,  
Descended,—climbed her chariot, and flew on.

But little knew she with what mortal aim  
Death had her brother smitten ; nor more thought,  
How soon the fever-fire in her own veins,  
To ashes would consume her.

The first glance  
At the wan hero, through her very soul  
Sent shuddering. On his brow the grave-gloom hung :  
Death looked from out his eyes ! Yet, not the less,  
With cheerful mien, and voice, she spake to him  
The words of comfort. Sending first, again  
The leech to summon, with her own fair hands,  
His armour she 'gan loosen. But, alas !  
The cuirass stirred not,—by the deep-driven shaft  
Nailed to the side ! Though, like a withered leaf  
'Neath wintry blast, in every limb she shook ;  
Yet still, with mother's care she tended him ;  
With low, sweet voice still whispered hopefully.

The leech arrived ; but help had none to give ;  
“ The arrow drawn, he dies ! ”

“ Then draw at once,”

With a firm spirit, but a feeble voice,  
The sufferer gasped,—“ and let me be at rest !  
Life now is worthless. Mighty Nineveh !  
Thou too art dying ! Few can be thy days,  
And miserable. Ofttimes have I heard  
That, in the hour of death, do visions come  
Of things to be ! 'Tis so : for I have seen  
A leaguered city, wrapped in smoke, and flame.  
Its palaces, and temples, cracked, and sank,—  
The fire devoured it utterly !—And lo !  
Where stood proud Nineveh, the queen of earth,  
Lay blackened ashes only ! ”

As he paused,  
His eyes glared wildly ; one hard breath he drew ;  
Half started up, as though to catch a sound  
Of sudden uproar on the battle-field,—

On his loved sister, then, a piteous look  
Fixed for a moment,—struggled as to speak,—  
Gasped, shuddered, groaned, — and backward sank,  
a corpse !

With reeling brain, and bursting heart, knelt down  
The wretched queen, and o'er her brother wept.

The king, meantime, unconscious of his loss,  
Like to a hunted tiger, hotly raged.

Dire was his agony ; for now the hour  
Of noon was nigh, and still his host gave way.

Oft on the gods, with frantic voice, he called ;  
Oft toward the palace cast a hurried look ;  
Mortally dreading, lest the hateful smoke  
Of sacrifice should mount. His death-charged arm  
Seemed as with strength of ten strong men to strike :  
His voice was like the roar of the wild bull,  
Frighting the desert : 'gainst him no man stood.

But, coming onward, in the blazing car  
Which erst himself had ruled,—he saw, at length,  
His mightiest foe at hand ; and burned to meet  
Him, whom, like pestilence, all others shunned :  
For, on his dream he thought ; and inly said,  
“ Surely the gods fulfil their promise now,  
And give him to my sword !”

Him drawing nigh,  
Arbaces saw ; and, his gigantic spear  
Uplifting, toward him drove. Before him fled  
The scared Assyrians ; leaving ample space ;  
Yet for their monarch trembling, as for him  
Who, singly, and unarmed, the lion dares.

But nothing then Sardanapalus feared :  
Body and soul concentrating in the blow,  
His lance he hurled ; and triumphed as the clang  
Of smitten armour answered. Tartan too,  
Hastily casting on the hooks the reins,  
His brazen javelin flung. The heavier spear  
Of the dread Mede, in the same point of time,  
Boomed through the air. The exulting king stopped  
short ;  
For, his thigh grazing, through strong oak, and brass,

Crashed the dread weapon ; and, behind the car,  
Showed its steel point, and half the quivering beam.

Mail, though of triple steel, had never stood  
That fearful stroke : but, as Arbaces cast,  
The swaying of his chariot balked the aim ;  
And his great enemy 'scaped. Not so himself :  
For the king's spear, with frenzy's fury hurled,  
Broke through the shield ; and on his helmet struck  
So fiercely, that his eyes shot fire, his arm  
The lifted buckler lowered. The brazen lance  
Of Tartan, in that moment, on the rim  
Of the sloped shield impinging, upward glanced ;  
And on the helmet, just above the ear,  
So harshly clanged, that, with the double jar,  
Arbaces reeled : but, as the chariots passed,  
Instantly rose again,—stood firmly up ;  
And, with a smile, from either side his shield  
The spear-shaft breaking short, to Geber thus ;  
“ Wheel round the horses swiftly as thou may ;  
That we a second time may prove the strength  
Of our pleased adversary ; and once more  
Our own essay. But, when the cars draw nigh,  
Let horse touch horse, and wheel in wheel be driven ;  
That so, with arm to arm, and face to face,  
We better may contend.”

Yet no light task  
Found Geber, the wind-footed steeds to turn :  
For on both sides the human torrents rushed ;  
Host against host, like wave encountering wave :  
And when, emerging from that troubled sea,  
The Mede his eye cast round,—far off he saw,  
The monarch's chariot ; and on meaner foes,  
Perforce his strength let loose.

The king not less  
Ardently burned, his mightiest enemy  
Again to front ; but many weaker arms  
Now threatened him ; and task enough he found  
Them to o'ermaster.

Still the tide of war  
'Gainst him, o'er all the battle-field, set strong :

Yet would he not despair ; for, on the gods  
Continually he called ; and, in his heart,  
Said, " Surely they will yet deliver us ;  
And will not of a loving father ask  
A loving daughter's blood ! " From place to place  
Flew he, encouraging, and leading on.  
Strong and unwearied as the tempest's roar,  
His voice was heard : where'er his helm was seen,  
The heart of every warrior bolder grew ;  
And even the coward, shamed, again fought on.  
But wheresoe'er he stood not, there the foe  
Moved irresistibly.

The king beheld,  
And 'gan to sicken. To the sky he looked :  
No sun was there ; the clouds were hard and dark.  
" Not yet the hour," he said ; " not yet 'tis noon ;  
Nor have I given the signal. For his life,  
The gloomy wizard dare not on the child  
Lay his detested hand ! "

So spake aloud  
The anxious king : but yet the hour *was* come :  
The servants of the ireful priest, even then,  
Were for their victim searching.

Dark and dread  
As the on-coming of a stormy night,  
Grew Barak's brow, when came the seekers back,  
And said, " Throughout the palace have we gone ;  
Searched terrace, garden, bower, and labyrinth ;  
But nowhere may the royal maid be found."

Since the great god of light, from heaven's sublime,  
His downward race 'gan run,—two hours had fled ;  
And still with darker brow, the face of war,  
Upon the Assyrians frowned. With fearful glance,  
Oft toward the city did the monarch look ;  
And to the gods imploringly cry out ;  
" Oh ! ask not from me this dread sacrifice ! "

But they his prayer heard not. Still toward the wall  
The Assyrian host was driven ; and more and more  
Came terror on them : but, even yet, the king  
Could not endure the hateful sign to give.

With fury indescribable he raged ;  
 And every captain nigh, from him caught fire,  
 And 'gainst the enemy burned. Nebaioth still  
 Near to the monarch fought ; and still his voice  
 Rang far and near,—to conquer or to die.  
 Brave Jerimoth, unwearied by assault,  
 With his mailed horsemen, fierce as famished wolves,  
 Attacked, and turned, and still attacked again :  
 And Michael, and Jehoshaphat, with cars  
 And horse, impetuous drove upon the foe.  
 Repulsed, they still the hot assault renewed ;  
 And all seemed fixed, to vanquish, or to fall !

But, wheresoever went the mighty Mede,  
 There victory with him went. His countenance  
 Appalling, his dread voice, unnerved the arm :  
 And every Median captain, every man,  
 Felt conquest sure ; and, with unceasing cries,  
 Still cheered each other on.

The third hour passed ;  
 The rout grew wilder ; and, at length, arose  
 The dreadful clamor, “ To the gates, the gates !  
 The day is lost ! Assyrians, to the gates ! ”

Unutterable then the agony  
 And consternation of that wretched king !  
 Looking to heaven, he dropped his spear and shield ;  
 Stretched forth his arms, and shrieked out piteously,  
 “ Save us, all-ruling gods ! oh save us yet,  
 And ask not at my hands a daughter's blood ! ”

But, at that instant, like the rapid cloud  
 Which on the ocean brings the hurricane,  
 Sudden and fatal,—the all-dreaded Mede,  
 With horse and chariots, coming on was seen,  
 O'erthrowing, scattering, terrible as Fate !

The king beheld, and shuddered : with both hands,  
 Pressed on his bursting temples ;—looked again,  
 And, with choked utterance, gasped, “ It must be done !  
 The gods demand the show of sacrifice !  
 But, even at the altar-stone, their hands  
 Will they put forth, and save her ; and to us  
 The victory yet will give ; for, in my dream

So was it shown me. Gods! all-ruling gods!  
Into your hands I render up my child!"

Thus having spoken, with a desperate haste,  
A sable flag he seized; unfurled, and waved.

At once a thousand voices raised the cry,  
"The sacrifice! the sacrifice! Even yet  
The gods will aid us." Toward the Nisroch gate,—  
For so had been commanded,—flew at once  
Swift horsemen,—to the watchers on the tower  
The king's behest to bear. But, from above,  
Already had the signal been beheld;  
And, instantly, upon the pinnacle  
Shot upward a huge blood-red gonfalon.

Rigid as marble, in his car yet stood  
The monarch,—on the tower, with bursting eyes,  
Silently gazing: closely knit his hands,  
His teeth were clenched, his nostrils widely spread.  
While yet he looked, lo! from the palace rose  
A thick, gray smoke. One loud, terrific shriek  
He raised; flung wildly up to heaven his arms;  
Stiffened; and backward, corpse-like, swayed, and fell!

Among the Assyrians who that sight beheld,  
Loud cries of terror rose: thousands then turned,  
And to the city fled.

With tender hand,  
The senseless monarch to his seat was raised:  
Tartan the steeds wheeled round; and, shouting loud,  
To clear the way, flew swiftly toward the wall.  
Rigid, and lifeless seeming, in the arms  
Of two heart-stricken captains, lay the king:  
His teeth were set; his lips with foam were white;  
His eye-balls inward turned.

When this was seen,  
A cry raised some,—“The king is with the slain!  
The day is lost! fly to the city! fly!”

But them Nebaioth angrily rebuked;  
“Liars and slaves! Shame on your dastard tongues!  
The battle is not lost: the king yet lives;  
And soon again in all his might will rise.  
Woe to the cowards then, the traitorous dogs

Who, wanting teeth to fight, have tongues to yell !  
Surely their day shall come !" With words like these,  
He scared the dastard, and made strong the brave ;  
And still, in front advancing, called aloud,  
To clear the way, and let the chariot pass.

From giddy summit of the palace roof,  
The queen, meantime,—though through her brain and  
heart  
Rushed the tumultuous blood,—upon the field  
Long had stood gazing. With unsteady eye,  
And thoughts distracted, looked she ; nor had marked,  
In that vast hell of war, the single fall  
Of even Assyria's greatest : yet too well  
The fatal signs of utter rout at hand  
She saw ; and, though for action all unfit,  
In her soul thus : " Once more will I go forth,  
And cheer the soldiers. Haply, as the voice  
Of Peresh warned me, death may be the fruit.  
I feel it may,—for fire is in my blood,  
And in my brain : yet better far to die,  
Than in this day of terror hold aloof,  
And live but to behold Assyria's might  
Pass like a shadow : for, this battle lost,  
All is for ever lost !"

Resolving thus,  
Her chariot, ready waiting for the word,  
She summoned : on her head a helmet fixed ;  
Braced on her arm a shield ; a spear caught up ;  
Swiftly descended ; sprang into her car ;  
And through the sounding streets, like tempest flew.

Nearing the gate of Palms,—for there she had marked  
The struggle hardest—a great throng she met,  
Frantically flying. Them, with words of fire,  
She shamed, and bade turn back.

As with new life  
Suddenly gifted, they the summons hailed ;  
And with a deafening shout, " The queen ! the queen !"   
Again to combat hasted. On went she,

Crying aloud ; “ Assyrians, now be men !  
Let not the rebel boast again to have seen  
Your backs in battle. This day must ye come  
Triumphant from the field ; or on your necks  
Will chains be fixed ; your sons will be made slaves ;  
Your daughters, and your wives, be concubines !  
Your temples, and your altars, and your groves,  
Will be cast down ; the city of your birth  
Will be a waste and howling wilderness !  
On, on, brave men ! this day redeem your fame !  
Conquer,—and once again shall Nineveh  
Be queen of all the earth ; and at your feet  
The vanquished foe shall lie ! On then ! press on !  
A noble death far better than mean life !  
Shame to the coward, glory to the brave !”

With words like these,—as still, from place to place,  
Swiftly she flew,—the ardent did she fire,  
The cold incite,—that all who heard, or saw,  
Again for battle burned ; and, as one man,  
Sprang on the foe anew. But nought availed.  
As well, against the angry thunderer,  
Might strive the inferior gods, as, 'gainst the force  
Of the terrific Mede, Assyria's arms,  
Though of the bravest banded. Backward still  
Did they retire ; and still, with heart elate,  
Bore on the enemy.

Nigh unto the wall  
The chariot of the monarch had arrived,  
When, suddenly recovering, wildly round  
His eyes he cast ; and horrible rout beheld  
Still raging. Feeble were his limbs ; his brain  
Confused, and swimming ; yet, with strong resolve,  
Sitting erect ; “ Turn instantly the steeds,  
And back into the fight !” he cried. “ Be sure  
The gods will give us yet the victory.  
The fire is kindled,—but the victim still  
Unharm'd will rise. Shout out, ‘ the king ! the king !’  
And pour into the battle !”

Crying thus,

With trembling arm he lifted up his spear,  
And strove to stand: but, with yet fiercer gripe,  
The spasm returned; and, senseless as a corpse,  
Rigid, and horribly convulsed, he fell,  
Foaming, and stony-eyed. Within their arms  
The weeping captains held him; while again  
Tartan the steeds turned round; and rapidly  
Drove onward through the gate.

Arrived at length

Within the palace, to his couch was borne  
The exhausted king. Again the spasm had ceased;  
But, helpless as a dreaming child he lay;  
With wandering eye, that nought appeared to see;  
Mind, that nought seemed to know. Without a word,  
Upon the captains idly did he gaze,  
As, piece by piece, his armour they removed:  
From Peresh then, with trembling hand, and look  
Submissive as an infant, took the cup;  
Slowly the strong and bitter potion drained,  
Unmurmuring; and, with a vacant smile,  
Upon his pillow gently sank to rest.

The roar of battle seemed to stir him not:  
At times, when some enormous cry burst forth,  
His eyes he opened, and rolled wildly round,  
As he would question: but, in little time,  
Again they closed; and, with a placid look  
Of mindless life, he lay, while through his frame  
The potent drug, with swift and silent foot,  
Stole onward; locking, at its magic touch,  
Each gate of sense, by which the grosser world  
External, to the ethereal world within,  
The realm of soul, finds entrance. A deep sleep,  
Dreamless, and death-like, on him fell at last;  
Body and spirit slumbered. Well for him,  
For all, had he ne'er wakened!

But, meantime,

Avenging Fate slept not. With every hour,  
More hopeless for the Assyrians grew the strife.  
Yet still, while with them stood the heroic queen,

Madly they fought: in heaps on heaps they died;  
And still the living, as for death athirst,  
Flew headlong to the fight.

The ceaseless cry  
Of the distracted queen, amazed they heard;  
Yet knew not that 'twas frenzy fired her now.  
O'erwrought at length, a hideous laugh she raised;  
Staggered, and backward fell.

With tenderest care  
Was she upraised, and to the palace borne.

But cooling herbs, and drinks, no soothing brought:  
All night, in strong delirium did she rave:  
Now, as in battle, gaily cheering on;  
Now, as beside her dying brother's couch,  
Gently consoling: bursting now in tears,  
As though beside his corse again she knelt;  
And now, with hurried whisper, to her child,  
Counselling flight. But, ever and anon,  
Chief burthen of her frenzy, rose the cry,  
"On, on, brave men, to victory, or to death!  
See! see! they fly, they fly! the day is ours:  
Pursue! pursue! ha! victory, victory!"

So all the night she raved; nor, till the eve  
Of the next day, found rest.

As though with her,  
Assyria too had fallen,—in hideous rout  
Fled the scared host. The choked-up gates refused  
To myriads entrance; and, till closed the day,  
The sword was busy. Thousands, to the banks  
Of the swoln flood driven back, plunged in, and died:  
Thousands, down trodden, lay, and rose no more.  
Darkness fell thick; and Death was satiate.

The Median signal of recall rang loud.  
Anon the watch-fires blazed: the voice of joy  
Was heard within the camp: but, in the walls  
Of long triumphant Nineveh, the sounds  
Of anguish, lamentation, and despair!

## BOOK THE TWENTY-THIRD.

ALL night, and till the noon, in heavy sleep  
The wretched monarch lay : and, when he waked,  
So was his mind distraught, that, for a time,  
He thought not of the dreadful yesterday,  
Nor of the direr future. Sense confused,  
And troubled, had he, of some desperate strife ;  
Some crushing evil past, or hovering nigh ;  
Yet, if a truth it was, or but a dream,  
He knew not ; and to think upon it feared,  
Lest the dim phantom should before him stand,  
A dread reality. Yet more and more  
His cloudy thoughts took shape. As when, at dawn,  
Young Daylight, still beneath earth's ball opaque  
Far distant, on heaven's dusky firmament,  
First opes his lustrous eyes,—with stealthy foot,  
Night's shadows creep away ; and, one by one,  
Hill, stream, and tree, and valley, from the gloom  
Slowly emerging, gather shape, and hue,  
Till all the well-known prospect stands distinct,—  
So, to his clearing reason, 'gan return  
Remembrance of the strife—the rout—the flight—  
The hideous blood-red flag,—the appalling smoke,  
Omening horrors inexpressible !  
Beyond that, all was darkness. Had she 'scaped ?  
Or had she perished ? Was the battle won ?  
Or was Assyria lost ? As thus he thought,  
A sudden strength came on him. Starting up,  
He spread his arms, and cried, " Where is my child,—

My loved Nehushta ? Hath the rebel fallen ?  
And doth my daughter live ?”

Beside his couch,  
Stood Peresh, and Azubah : in alarm,  
Backward they shrank ; for, such his frenzied look,  
So wild and strange his voice,—nought doubted they  
Madness had seized him. But the leech drew nigh ;  
And, bending low, with soft persuasive tone,  
Said, “ Let my lord the king yet rest awhile ;  
Nor with unquiet thoughts perplex himself.”

Azubah, too, stepped forward, pressed his hand,  
And whispered tenderly, “ Be comforted,  
I pray thee now ; lest that thy sickness come  
Again upon thee.”

Yet he heeded not ;  
And the physician fiercely questioned still ;  
“ Hath the child perished ? Answer instantly,  
Or thou shalt die !” Unknowing what he meant,  
Peresh was silent. Hot with rage, the king  
Sprang to his feet ; and, by his silvery hair,  
The old man seizing, raised his arm to strike.  
But, with a shriek, Azubah caught his hand.  
“ Nay, nay,” she cried ; “ for shame and charity,  
Harm not the man to whom thy life is owed !  
Surely thy daughter liveth.”

When these words  
The king had heard, his rigid limbs relaxed ;  
His arms dropped down ; and on the couch he sank :  
But, on Azubah fixing still his eyes,  
“ Speak yet again : doth the child truly live ?  
And is the battle won ? Pause not to think,  
Else I misdoubt thee : doth Nehushta live ?  
And is the rebel trampled under foot ?”

Azubah, dreading to make known to him  
That conflict’s direful end, turned pale, and stood  
Silent, and trembling : but, with so fierce tone,—  
Upstarting to his feet, and grasping hard  
Her shrinking wrist,—again he questioned her,  
That she perforce replied : “ With truth, O king,  
I answered thee ; surely thy child doth live ;

For she hath not been sick : but, oh ! my lord !  
 Thy host hath fallen before the enemy ;  
 Utterly fallēn !”

When these words he heard,  
 The king released her hand ; upon the couch  
 Slowly sat down ; and, for a time, was mute.  
 With head depressed, hands clasped, and eye-lids closed,  
 Groaning he sat : at length, with hoarse voice, thus :  
 “ Bid Salamenes hither : say the king  
 Anxiously waiteth.”

Peresh, bowing low,  
 With sad tone answered him, “ My gracious lord !  
 The prince, alas ! is slain ! The noble corpse  
 Within the ruby chamber waits the grave !”

Suddenly starting, with a ghastly stare,  
 The king looked up,—as though the thing he heard,  
 Were against nature, and impossible.

“ Slain ? slain ?—where ? when ? Oh gods ! is this the  
 boon

Ye promised on obedience ! Quickly say,  
 How fell he,—when—and by what hand accursed ?”

Reverently bending, thus the leech replied.  
 “ In battle fell the prince. An arrow pierced  
 Through the steel cuirass, deep into his side :  
 Unknown the arm that sent it. From the field,  
 Yet living, was he borne : all tender care,  
 And cheering sympathy of human love,  
 The sorrowing queen bestowed : but nought could stay  
 The fatal doom : and, ere two hours had passed,  
 The noble spirit fled !”

Again, with grief  
 Bowed down, long time in silence sat the king :  
 At length thus spake ; “ Retire ye both awhile ;  
 And let it to the queen be said, ‘ The king  
 Asketh to see thee, for his heart is sad ! ’ ”

With low voice Peresh answered : “ Most dread lord !  
 The queen is with a grievous sickness bowed ;  
 And lieth on her bed : yea death, and life,  
 Do combat for her ; and the worst I fear !”

Hearing these words, at once the monarch rose,

Though weak and trembling ; and her chamber sought.  
But the queen knew him not. Delirium still  
Strongly possessed her : and her frantic words  
Tortured, and vexed him. To the chamber then,  
Where cold, blind, dumb, lay what so long had been  
His truest friend, his wisest counsellor,  
The heart-sick mourner went. Alone he stood :  
Bent o'er the clay, he poured a flood of tears ;  
Smote on his bosom ; clasped his hands ; groaned out  
In bitterest anguish ; rent his robe, his hair ;  
Called on the dead, and bade him live again,—  
Live to redeem his king, and country still.

No voice replied ; no gladdening smile ; no glance  
Encouraging of that heroic eye,  
Which, like a bright star in a stormy night,  
So oft had cheered, and guided ! All was hushed.  
The gorgeous chamber seemed a sepulchre ;  
The warm, perfum'd atmosphere smelt cold,  
And corpse-like. Inly shuddering, a last look  
On the still clay he cast ; groaned heavily,  
And to his chamber went.

Long there he lay,  
Silent, and melancholy : but, at length,  
His captains summoned ; and in council deep,  
And anxious, with them sat. Then learned he all  
That battle's direful loss. Dejected looks  
Were on the bravest ; their best words were few,  
And sorrowful. No counsel could they give,  
Save, in their walls with patience to abide  
The coming of events. The king, meantime,  
New aid should summon : all the countless hordes  
Of riches in Assyria's vaults upheaped,  
Should freely be showered forth : fresh armies yet  
Might be allured : a better day might come :  
They must in patience wait. So was resolved.  
But, first, unto the Medes should heralds go,—  
A three-days' truce to make ; that both the hosts  
Their dead might bury. Closed the council then ;  
And the king sat alone.

Impatiently

Longed he his child within his arms to clasp,  
 But yet, to meet her feared. Thus ran his thoughts.  
 "Would I could see her! Yet I cannot look  
 Upon her gentle face, and hear her voice,  
 All tenderness and love; for every tone,  
 And look, would sting me, thinking on the fate  
 To which I risked her.

"Still, is her escape  
 A mystery, that in vain I strive to pierce.  
 The battle hath been lost; and yet she lives,  
 Whose death had won for us the victory!  
 So said the gods; so said, at least, the priests.  
 Why was the victim spared, when such the cost?  
 To Barak power that none might dare withstand,  
 Was given: he on me urged that sacrifice,  
 As the one only mean, by which the gods  
 Might be appeased: yet, though from morn till night  
 'Gainst us the foe prevailed, he laid not hand  
 Upon the saving victim. Why was this?  
 In treason was it done, that to the foe  
 Might be the victory? No; for, in the fight,  
 He rescued me, when else I had been slain.  
 Feared he, perchance, lest, if the child should die,  
 He too should perish? Nay—in verity,  
 Most dauntless is the man; and his own life  
 Seemeth to hold at nought. But idle this:  
 He shall stand forth, and answer for himself."

The priest was summoned; and with speed appeared.  
 With a stern, gloomy look, awhile the king  
 Regarded him, then questioned.

With proud mien,  
 Him Barak boldly answered. "Doth the king  
 Mock at his servant, that he asketh thus?  
 Knoweth he not that, privily by night,  
 His daughter, with Prince Dara, left the walls,  
 And hath not since returned?"

Astonishment  
 Held the king mute; and Barak thus pursued.  
 "An hour ere noon, as thou didst give command,  
 I called to bring the victim. Through thy halls,

And chambers ; through thy vaults, thy labyrinths,  
Thy terraces, thy gardens, all in vain,  
The searchers flew ;—the maiden had escaped.  
To every watcher at the city gates  
Then question went ; and thus, at length, was learned.  
At midnight, from the Phrygian gate passed forth  
Two royal chariots : they who sat within,  
Were women, veiled, and silent. In the front,  
On either hand, and in the rear, there rode  
Mailed horsemen. One alone, of all the train,  
Spake for the rest. With voice imperative,  
Showing the sign of delegated power,  
The royal signet-ring, Prince Dara bade  
The gate to open ; and none dared withstand ;  
Or question ask."

While thus the wizard spake,  
Sharply his hand uplifting, the king saw  
The ring, indeed, was gone : and fiercest rage  
To the soul convulsed him. In a moment, came  
Clearest remembrance how, on that same night,  
Had Dara to his chamber brought the harp,  
And soothed him to repose. With flashing eye,  
And face inflamed, upstarting, " Wretch !" he cried,  
" Robber ! he stole it from me as I slept !  
Perchance some word, in slumber breathed, gave note  
Of what I purposed ; and the caitiff dared  
To cross me. But, by heaven, and earth, and hell,  
Dearly shall he abide his insolence !  
If the earth hold him, soon shall he be found ;  
Die like a dog ; and leave to dogs his bones !"

By the black demon of revenge possessed,  
Body and soul—thus speaking, to and fro,  
Fiercely he strode. " What ho"—again he cried,  
And Tartan entered : " Send forth instantly,  
From out the Phrygian gate, five hundred horse.  
The traitor Dara hath my daughter stolen.  
To him that brings them back, the king will give  
A thousand golden talents. Question not,  
But do my bidding. Priest, retire thou too ;  
And tell whate'er thou know'st. Bid them be quick,

And subtle in the search. Remember well,—  
A thousand golden talents. If they fail,  
Let them beware."

Again alone, the king  
Grimly sat, vengeance brooding. All the strength  
Of madness came upon him. With clenched hands,  
Contracted brow, pressed lips, and burning eye,  
In fancy drinking deep revenge, he sat.  
His daughter to a dungeon should be cast ;  
Dara to wolves and wild dogs be the prey :  
The queen herself, if, as he 'gan forebode,  
She had given sanction,—even she should die ;  
Ay, by his own avenging arm should die !

Fired by the thought that vengeance to his hand  
Might even now be ready,—frantically,  
Grasping the dagger hard, he started up ;  
And toward the chamber of his hapless wife,  
Like madman flew. Each nerve within him seemed  
As iron strong : his eyes, like coals of fire,  
Glared hotly : as a toad with venom swelled,  
Upheaved his chest : like maniac in his fit,  
He foamed, and ground his teeth. Announcing not  
His purposed coming, from the outer room  
He drove the affrighted women : entered next  
The chamber of the queen ;—furiously thence  
The attendant matrons chased,—the silver bolt  
Shot in the staple ; cast a look around,  
To make assurance that no loiterer stayed ;  
Then, on the couch where lay his dying wife,  
Turned his ferocious eyes, and toward her strode.

As though a demon had his soul possessed,  
Seemed his whole nature changed. No husband now,  
No king, no father was he : what remained,  
Was but a thwarted tyrant, mad to avenge ;  
A ravenous beast, from whom is snatched his prey.

He neared the couch : the all-unconscious queen,  
With vacant eye beheld, but knew him not.  
While yet he gazed, she started, and sat up :  
Her thoughts had to the thick of battle flown :  
Lifting her arm, with quivering voice she cried,—

"See—see—they fly, they fly! the day is ours  
Pursue, pursue! shout victory! victory!"

The king looked on; and, for a moment, felt  
Compassionate, and shamed. But, suddenly,  
She ceased:—turned pale; and, with a trembling lip,  
Fearfully whispered—"Quick! the chariot waits:  
Speed, or the priest may come. Nay, loose thy arms:  
One kiss; then haste away. Fear not, fear not;  
This trouble past, we all shall meet again.  
Thy father loves thee: he hath been deceived:  
He'll joy to know thee saved; and the vile priest  
Shall feel his vengeance. Bless thee, oh my child!  
Heaven bless, and shield thee! We shall meet again!"  
She ceased; and, sighing heavily, sank back.

"Thou hast betrayed thy treason, and shalt die,  
Accurs'd woman!" said the vengeful king,  
And raised the gleaming blade. "Thou, then, hast  
leagued

With a base traitor, with a robber vile,  
To cross me in my purpose. Is the king  
So tame a puppet then, that his own wife,  
His trusted servant, may together join  
To mock at his behest? But ye shall know  
Whom 'tis ye sport with: and, if once again  
To oppose his will, the power remain to you,—  
His be the fault, who spared you. But no more  
Shall ye be trusted: with your blood alone  
Can the black crime be cleansed: and die shall both!"

He paused; and, holding high the murderous blade,  
Her answer waited. Not a word she spake:  
Her lids were closed; her breath was hot and quick;  
Her fingers o'er the silken coverlet  
Strayed feebly, as if trying thence to pluck  
The golden threads.

He saw she heard him not.

"Gods! this is dreadful! She is passing now!"  
Shuddering, he said; and slowly sheathed the blade:  
"To strike her thus were murder! If she live,  
Still must she answer it: if now she die,  
Her guilt dies with her. On his burning brow

Both trembling hands he pressed : with starting eyes,  
 Glared once again upon the dying queen :  
 Fled from the chamber ; loudly called for wine,  
 To drown his senses in oblivion ;  
 And, till deep midnight, all alone remained,  
 In a hot gloom, intoxicate, and fierce,  
 Yet darkly melancholy. Now, his hands  
 Strongly he clenched, as though on vengeance bent ;  
 Now, with hot tears fast rolling down his cheeks,  
 Sobbed, as his heart would burst.

He called, at length ;  
 And a veiled woman entered, and knelt down  
 Before him, pressing with both palms her face.  
 " How now ? " demanded he, surprised, and vexed ;  
 " What would'st thou have ? Yet answer not ; but go ;  
 And let the leech come hither."

" Most dread lord !"  
 After short pause, the trembling dame replied ;  
 " The good physician, overworn, and sick,  
 Hath to his home returned."

" What ? How ? Returned ?"  
 With look and tone indignant, he exclaimed ;  
 " Gone home ? Presumptuous ! How then fares the  
 queen ?"

A silent moment : with a gush of tears,  
 Came the sad answer : " Most dread lord of lords,  
 She hath departed !"

Not a word spake he ;  
 But, as by palsy stricken, backward sank.  
 All was deep silence, save the smothered sobs  
 Of that afflicted woman. By a sign,  
 He gave at last the word,—and was alone.

Alone ! he felt himself *indeed* alone !  
 The stillness of the sepulchre was round.  
 Death, as in bodily presence, seemed to rule  
 Sole monarch there. His wisest counsellor,  
 His truest friend,—his bravest soldier, first,  
 A cold clod lay ; and now his queen, his wife,—  
 Oh heavens ! that glory of all things create !  
 That god-like soul, in shape celestial clad !

That wonder of all eyes ! that bower-down  
Of every spirit ! she too, like a cloud,  
A gorgeous cloud of summer's setting sun,  
Had fled ; and left in utter night the earth !

So ran his thoughts, repentant all too late.  
Fixed, silent, sat he. Pallid was his face,  
Care-marked, yea agéd. Upon vacancy,  
With wide dilated eyes of gloomy fire,  
Sternly he gazed. That look said, " all is lost ! "

Uttering, at length, one shrill, heart-tortured cry,  
He started up,—clenched his sharp-quivering hands,—  
Tore from the roots his hair,—his garments rent,—  
And, flinging up his arms, called on the gods  
For death to free him from his misery.

Soon, at the brimming cup, as though in pangs  
Of thirst expiring, eagerly he caught ;  
Drained it, and filled anew, and drank again :  
Then, muffling up his face, upon the couch  
Heavily sank ; in apoplectic sleep,  
Drowning, at length, his woe.

Three days, and nights,  
With draughts intemperate, and life-numbing sleep,  
Strove he his pangs to dull : nor, all that time,  
Food tasted ; nor with man, or woman, spake.  
His brain toward madness verged : he raved ; he cursed  
He wept ; he vowed revenge.

By the third night,  
The slain were buried. In their quiet tombs,  
The queen, and her loved brother also slept.  
None to the king dared say, " The graves are made ;  
The ashes of thy queen, and brother, wait  
The funeral rites." So to the tomb they went,  
By myriads wept : yet he who most had lost,  
Knew not when they were taken from his sight,—  
Ne'er to be seen again !

On the seventh morn,  
Came the pursuers back ; and to the king,—  
So ordered,—brought report. " Dread lord of lords !  
Six days of toil, six nights of scanty rest,  
Have we endured : our strength is worn away :

Our steeds have died with very weariness :  
Yet tidings of thy daughter have we none."

That hearing, in the tyrant fiercest rage  
Flamed demon-like. Upstarting—hurling down  
The crystal cup that trembled in his hand,  
"Slaves ! ye shall die the death !" he shrieked ; "ye lie !  
Ye have not sought my daughter ! Ye are leagued,  
Hellishly leagued, to thwart me, and deceive.  
Hence with you, traitors ! Tartan, if thou, too,  
A rebel art not, see that every head,  
Ere noon, be stricken off. Away—away—  
I will not hear. Look that my will be done.—  
Yet send again,—a thousand fleetest steeds ;  
And let them search to the uttermost ends of earth :  
Yea ! wear out life ere, baffled, they come back !"

Tartan, all horror struck, retired : but soon  
Returning, on his knees before the king  
Fell down ; and with such passionate vehemence  
Implored, that, powerless to resist his prayer,  
The tyrant softened, and their pardon spake.  
Yet still, quick vengeance craving ; hoping still  
A victim might be found, acceptable  
To heaven, and him, he for the wizard called ;  
And Barak came before him.

"Know'st thou not,"

The king began, "some way the gods to soothe ?  
Is there no other, who the place may fill  
Of her I name not ? By no act of mine  
That offering was refused ; then most unjust  
That heaven on me should visit the offence.  
Answer me, priest, and briefly ; for my soul  
Thirsteth some deed to do, that may wipe out  
This ignominy. Had that wretch accursed,  
Who stole my child . . . . But even yet, perchance,  
May he be found ; swift feet are on his track.  
If other way thou seest, the gods to move,  
At once outspcak it."

Gloomily the priest  
Made answer. "Justly are the heavens incensed ;

And with yet heavier doom do threaten thee.  
But, in the place of her whom they did choose,  
Think not that he, or any mortal else,  
Could, singly, find acceptance."

"For that one,  
Take thou a hundred, then," roared out the king :  
"Surely with that their blood-thirst may be slaked !  
Ha ! I bethink me : justice long hath slept,  
But wakens now ;—the hundred treacherous Medes,  
That should before have died,—them take ; and try  
If all together may not, for that one,  
Accepted be. To-morrow, at high noon,  
See that they die,—die all. Within the square  
Of Jupiter,—even at the statue's base,—  
Shall be the sacrifice : so may the gods  
Well pleased look down, and bless the offering.  
Go, and proclaim it through the city then,  
That all the multitude may gather there,  
And see my power. Still am I king of kings ;  
And at my anger all the earth shall quake.  
Speed to Sennacherib : with foot, and horse,  
A thousand strong, bid him to give thee aid ;  
And guard the victims. Summon also thou  
A hundred priests,—for every man a priest ;  
And, in the self-same moment, let all die.  
Away,—and answer not ; but see it done."

Astonished looked the seer, as thus he heard ;  
But bowed, and took his way.

Still furiously  
The king his chamber paced ; for, in his soul,  
A fire there was which nought but blood could quench.  
His queen, his brother, now were all forgot.  
The utter overthrow of that last field  
Nought troubled him : nor of impending fate  
Thought he : nor for his daughter did he mourn.  
He had been crossed : his will omnipotent  
Had been defied. The child whom he had loved,  
The man whom he had honored, had conjoined  
To baffle him : and, when he launched the bolt  
That should o'erwhelm them, lo ! it came again

Innocuous to his hand ! And still they lived ;  
Still in their cunning triumphed ; still defied  
His power almighty ; and still vengeance seemed  
Distant, nay doubtful. " Is the king of kings  
Thus to be mocked ? Blood, blood," he cried, " my soul  
Thirsteth for blood, and shall be satisfied !"  
So, like a tiger in the toils, raged he,  
Unceasingly ; and no man dared approach.

But, when the sacrifice had been proclaimed,  
Fear came upon the people ; and they said,  
" If this thing be, surely the enemy  
Will like consuming fire against us burn !  
And, if the city should before them fall,  
Will put to death all things that therein are ;  
Warrior, and gray-haired man, woman, and child,  
And leave no tongue to tell the history !"

Thus through the city ran complaint, and dread ;  
Yet no man dared resist ; for, as a god,  
The king was feared, and worshipped.

When he heard

The harsh command, Sennacherib was sad,  
And sorely troubled : and, when he beheld  
The looks of all men downcast ; and their speech  
Complaining heard,—he feared for what might come.  
Then to the king he went, and, kneeling down,  
" Oh ! lord of lords !" imploringly he said,  
" Have mercy, oh have mercy ! Every eye  
Drops tears ; and every heart with grief, and dread,  
Is faint, and troubled. To thy people's voice  
Oh listen ! They beseech thee, to recall  
The awful doom, and let the captives go.  
' Their death may nought avail us '—do they cry,  
' And surely, if this evil thing be done,  
With rage unutterable will the foe  
Against us burn ; and leave unslain no man,  
Woman, or child, that in the city dwells :  
So, for this hundred sacrificed, shall die  
Myriads on myriads.' Mighty lord, oh hear,  
And grant thy people's prayer."

To him the king,

With flashing eye, haughty and threatening brow,  
 Sternly thus spake : " A warrior good art thou ;  
 And, therefore, to thy words, though overbold,  
 With patience have I listened. Hear me now.  
 Fixed as yon heaven above, this earth beneath,  
 Stand I immoveable : they all shall die !  
 Harass me more, and, by the eternal gods !  
 Five hundred, for this one, shall die the death !  
 Thou hast thine answer : go, and make it known,  
 Whoso again shall dare the king to move  
 From his fixed purpose, his own doom will speak."

Shuddering, Sennacherib heard ; bowed low, and went.  
 All which the king had spoken,—to the chiefs,  
 The priests, the lords, and rulers, he made known.

From man to man, throughout the city, soon  
 The tidings spread ; and great was the dismay,  
 And deep the murmuring : yet all obeyed.  
 The altar-stones, the fuel for the fires,  
 Stood ready : and, while yet four hours of noon  
 Were wanting,—a strong guard, of foot, and horse,  
 Circled the place of sacrifice.

#### Unawed

By the king's stern command ; resolved to brave  
 The death he threatened,—yet with beating heart,  
 Blanched face, and trembling limbs,—Azubah went ;  
 Fell prostrate at his feet,—and, bathed in tears,  
 With sobs convulsed, conjured him, by all things  
 Holy, and just, and great, that sacrifice  
 Appalling to forbid. Impatiently  
 His hand he waved, while in a passion-flood  
 Of eloquence she poured forth all her soul :  
 And still, at intervals, he said, " vain,—vain,—  
 Speak not—thy words are vain." Yet still she sued ;  
 And still, his anger gathering more and more,  
 With sharper word he answered.

#### To her knees

She rose at length, and looked him in the face.  
 As lightning through the rain, from her drenched eyes  
 Flashed living fire, and trembling, thus she spake.  
 " If this abominable crime thou do,

Thy name, O king, will, throughout all the earth,  
Become a loathing, and a hiss" . . .

Stark mad,

Sprang up the tyrant,—thrust her to the floor ;  
And, with a voice harsh as a tiger's growl,  
" Curs'd woman ! get thee from my sight !" he cried ;  
" Else slaves shall drag thee forth, and spit on thee.  
Too happy if, for thy great insolence,  
Thou also die not. But beware ! beware !"

Slowly Azubah rose : her face was pale,  
But not with terror : from that beauteous brow,  
That eye, that eloquent lip, where love had dwelt  
As in his home,—came silently, but plain  
As if by clear-voiced herald spoken out,  
" Proud, miserable man ! thy reign is o'er !  
Unworthy as thou art, through good, and ill,  
My soul hath cleaved to thee : it loathes thee now !  
No heart can love thee more. For aye, farewell !"

So spake that loving woman's parting look ;  
But word she uttered none.

Straightway she went ;

The city quitted ; to the Median camp,  
Alone, and weeping, sped : her father sought ;  
Fell down before him ; told the dreadful tale  
Of that most horrid sacrifice to come ;  
Prayed that with him, thenceforth, for evermore,  
She might abide ; and, as his child, again  
Be loved, and cherished ; while, to him, might she  
A comfort, and a solace yet become ;  
A staff to his old age. Rabсарis heard ;  
His heart was melted, and he bless'd her.  
Yet, with those fearful tidings overcharged,  
He tarried not, but to Arbaces' tent  
Ran eagerly.

Already known, he found

The direful tale : for, when Sennacherib,  
Returning, told how bloody were the thoughts  
Of the infuriate king,—Nebaioth then,  
And Jerimoth, with anger filled, and shame,  
Counsel had taken, how that horrid act

They might avert. "Let us send privily,  
And warn Arbaces," said they; "haply he  
Some way to turn the headstrong king may find."

Two brave and trusty men instructing then,  
In secrecy at once they sent them forth:  
And when Rabсарis, out of breath with haste,  
Burst in the tent, he found the Assyrians there,  
Their message ending.

When they ceased to speak  
Arbaces answered not; but, instantly,  
Two heralds summoned: bade them, with all speed,  
A chariot mount; into the city fly;  
And, standing in the presence of the king,  
Say out aloud: "Sardanapalus, thus  
Arbaces, leader of the Median host,  
Doth greet thee. 'Of a surety do we know  
That thou, this day, a bloody sacrifice  
Dost purpose; yea, wilt offer to thy god  
The hundred Median captives. But, beware,—  
For, if this most abominable thing  
Thou do commit,—destruction infinite  
Shall come upon thee: thou shalt die the death;  
The death of murderer die. Have we not, too,  
Captives, by myriads, who, for this blood shed,  
A thousand fold might pay? Bethink thee, then,  
And, ere too late, repent.' " The heralds bowed,  
And hasted on their way.

Before the king  
Erelong they stood; and faithfully, and well,  
Their message told. Then nigh to madness rose  
The despot's fury. "Execrable dogs!"  
Upstarting from his throne, he bellowed out;  
"Give rebels, then, the law unto their king?  
His will alone is law; and, what he wills,  
That surely shall he do, though all the earth  
Rise to oppose him. Tell your insolent chief,  
As well might he the almighty thunderer  
Hope, with his puny threats, to make come down  
From his heaven-throne, as me to turn aside  
From my fixed purpose. Surely as the sun

Shall to his noon-point climb, so surely they,  
 The treacherous Medes, upon the altar-stones,  
 Shall die beneath the knife of sacrifice !  
 And ye, foul-mouthed, who this audacious threat,  
 Audaciously have spoken,—ye shall stay,  
 And witness at what price Assyria's king  
 Doth rate the threatener." To his servants then ;  
 " Hence with these barking curs : put on them chains ;  
 And drag them to the place of sacrifice.  
 There, close beside the victims let them stand,  
 That they may well behold ; and witness bear  
 To him that sent them. If they dare resist ;  
 Or, in opposal, open but the mouth ;  
 Scourge them to death. When all the rites are o'er,  
 Strip off their robes ; and from the city gates,  
 With hoots and hisses, drive them. So may they  
 Tell to their masters, how Assyria's king  
 Doth tremble at their anger." In reply  
 The heralds 'gan to speak ; but, on the mouth  
 Harshly were smitten, and dragged headlong forth.

'Twas nigh the hour of noon : the spacious square  
 With silent, anxious multitudes was thronged,—  
 A sea of pallid faces, and bright eyes,  
 Tremblingly waiting. On the pedestal  
 That bore the giant statue of the god,  
 With arms enfolded in his sable robes,  
 Stood Barak ; from that height o'erlooking all,  
 And all directing. In a circle rose  
 The hundred altar-stones ; at each a priest,  
 Silently waiting, and a victim bound.  
 Loaded with chains, the heralds of the Mede,  
 On lofty seats, conspicuous to all eyes,  
 Sat pale, and shuddering : but, at their distress,  
 No man could mock ; for every heart was sad,  
 And ominous of ill. One sound alone,  
 At times, was heard,—the low and stifled cry  
 Of some poor victim ; as of wife, or sire,  
 Daughter, or son, or mother, never more  
 To be beheld, the torturing thought arose.

The air was thick, and sultry ; no wind stirred :

With ponderous clouds of inky hue, the sky  
Closely was covered : at wide intervals,  
Came down a solitary drop of rain,  
Weighty and broad ; as though from out their heaven  
The pitying gods dropped tears.

The fatal hour  
At length was come. Barak the signal gave :  
And a hoarse, melancholy trumpet-blast  
Proclaimed the opening rites. Down on their knees  
Sank then the multitude ; while toward the sky,  
With hands uplifted, Barak turned his face ;  
And, with a voice so loud that, 'mid the hush  
Intense, by thousands was it clearly heard,  
In words like these began.

“ Immortal gods !

Who, with a wisdom that can never err ;  
With justice that can never prosper wrong ;  
And with a might omnipotent, do rule  
In heaven, and earth, the living, and the dead,—  
Hear us, oh hear ! If, for the people's sins,  
And for the sins of him who on the throne,  
Your great vicegerent, sits, ye have shot down  
The arrows of your vengeance,—hear our prayer !  
Be now propitiate, and in mercy turn  
Your face of wrath away ! To all the earth,  
Was once this mighty city as a sun,—  
So dazzling in her glory and her power.  
Kings bowed before her : the far distant lands  
Sent tribute ; and implored to wear her bonds,  
Proud of submission. The eternal hills,  
Not more eternal, nor more deeply fixed  
On their broad adamantine base appeared,  
Than once this great and glorious Nineveh !  
But ye have frowned upon her : ye have cast  
Shadows of night about her : ye have sent  
Armies of terrible men, who hem her round ;  
Scatter, and slay, her soldiers ; threat aloud  
That they will burn her towers, and palaces ;  
Her walls will overthrow ; will put to death  
All that therein do dwell ; and make of her

A desert, and a howling wilderness !  
But, in your might alone, immortal gods,  
Our foes are strong : and, if ye hold aloof,  
And aid them not, again will they be weak,  
And fly before us. Harken to us then.  
For our own sins, and for the king's offence,  
Humbly do we implore forgiveness now :  
And, to appease your wrath, do offer up,  
In place of that one victim, whom ye chose,  
The hundred now before you. May the steam  
Of this great sacrifice, your wrath appease ;  
And over all the land your blessings bring !"

He ceased ; the signal gave ; and instantly  
That melancholy trumpet breathed again  
Its strange blood-freezing blast. At once uprose  
The trembling multitude : the gleaming knives  
At once were bared. Throughout the crowded square  
Ran hiss of quick-drawn breath : all hearts throbbed  
loud ;

All ears were opened ; strained was every eye  
To catch the signal.

Drearily, at length,  
Wailed out the death-blast ! Wild shrieks rent the air.  
In the same moment, dread as lightning, gleamed  
The falling blades. The horrid rites were done !

A grave-like stillness held the shuddering throng :  
Awhile none moved, or breathed : as in a dream,  
Hearing the hideous chorus of deep groans,  
Horror-transfixed, they stood.

But other sounds,  
Appalling, followed. As though earth would speak  
Her curse on that great wickedness,—there came  
From her deep chambers hollow murmurings ;  
And angry tremblings shook her mighty heart.  
The black gigantic statue of the god  
Rocked visibly ; and they who near it were,  
Fled shrieking ; lest the ponderous mass should fall,  
And overwhelm them.

Barak, only, stood,  
Fearless, and firm ; and, when the earth was still ;

And the awe-stricken multitude was hushed ;  
His strong voice lifted up undauntedly,  
And cried, " Ye foolish men, why fear ye thus,  
When ye should triumph, and be glad at heart !  
Know ye not, then, the omen ? Earth's great voice  
Speaks her acceptance of the sacrifice :  
The statue of the deity doth nod  
Approval, for all heaven. Lift then on high  
Your voices, every man, and peal the hymn  
Of praise, and thanks, to Bel omnipotent,  
To earth, and all the starry host of heaven."

Ceasing to speak, unto the priests he signed,  
And to the people ; then, with powerful voice,  
Himself began the song. With him, at once,  
Chaired in the priests : soon, of the multitude,  
Sang thousands also : and, as stronger grew  
Their courage, and their hearts with music warmed,  
Still thousands more joined in ; till rose, at length,  
A mighty flood of sound harmonious,  
That filled heaven's concave.

But at once it closed :

In one wild shriek of fear unutterable,  
Was swallowed up ; and in a burst so loud  
Of thunder, that the city to its base  
Was shaken : for a glaring ball of fire,  
Broad as the disk of the full moon, shot down :  
Right on the statue's head, with iron clang,  
Smote crashing ; burst—and, in a hissing shower  
Of shivered lightning, quivered, and expired.

All eyes were darkened ; deafened were all ears.  
In heaps down sank the terror-stricken crowd,  
Covering their faces. When the roar had ceased,  
And they 'gan rise, and dimly look about,  
Lo ! on the earth the giant statue lay,  
Shattered, and scorched to blackness !

As if dead,

Upon the pedestal, with limbs outstretched,  
Lay Barak : but, in little time, he stirred ;  
Looked round ; upon his elbow raised himself ;  
Then stood upon his feet ; and, lifting up  
His hands unto the people, spake aloud.

But none regarded him; nor aught could hear,—  
So loud the wailings, and despairing cries,  
Of that awe-stricken multitude. “Alas!  
Alas!” they cried, “the gods are wroth with us,  
For this most bloody deed. The solid earth  
Shakes in her anger; and the vengeful heaven  
Hurls down its terrible fire! Away, away!  
Fly to your homes, ye men of Nineveh;  
Leave this abhorréd place! lift up your hands,  
At your own altars, and pray ceaselessly,  
That on the guilty heads alone may fall  
The wrath of heaven; and that the fearful doom,  
Which hangs o’er this devoted city now,  
May be recalled; and, for the wicked few,  
The myriads may not utterly be lost!”

With words like these, cried man to man; while all,  
Of evil darkly pondering, fled the spot,  
With loathing, and with horror: to their homes  
Hastily speeding, told the fearful tale:  
With parents, wives and children, kneeling then,  
Called on the gods to pardon, and to turn.  
Their face of wrath aside; and pour not out  
On that unhappy land the cup of woe.

Through all the city was the voice of grief  
And lamentation heard: for every man  
Became a prophet; and the coming fall  
Of once earth-ruling Nineveh foretold.

## BOOK THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

MEANTIME, Arbaces with his captains sat,  
Anxiously waiting. Wherefore came not back  
Their heralds, was the wonder: but the truth  
No man even guessed at. "With the king they plead,"  
Said some, "and will not cease till he be moved  
To nobler thoughts." But others said, "perchance  
The tyrant sleeps; or with his concubines  
Taketh his pleasure; and the heralds wait."  
So in conjectures various passed the time;  
And restlessly they sat.

But, when the earth  
Beneath them 'gan to quake; and her great voice  
In deep and hollow murmurings to speak,—  
Then hastily all rose, and from the tent  
Went forth, that they might look abroad, and see  
What fearful thing was coming.

Black and dense,  
The thunder-clouds above the city hung;  
But earth again was still; a solemn hush,  
As of deep night, was felt. As thus they stood,  
Silently gazing,—rose upon the air,  
Cloud-like and faint, yet vast, that awful hymn:  
Pallid grew every face; and man on man,  
Speechless with horror, looked; for well they knew  
The bloody deed was done!

But when, at length,  
That bolt terrific on the city struck;  
And that earth-shaking peal of thunder burst;

And, afterward, the piercing shrieks were heard  
Of the fear-stricken multitude,—then spake,  
With a loud voice, Belesis: “King accurs’d!  
By man and gods accurs’d! thy doom draws nigh!  
Earth sickens at thee: the hot bolts of heaven  
Are loosed to blast thee; and the sky heaps up  
Its clouds to pour upon thee in a flood!  
Tyrant, and murderer! here I prophesy:  
The mandate is gone forth: thy grave is dug:  
Thy sceptre to a worthier hand is given:  
And, ere another moon shall wane away,  
There, on that spot where stands proud Nineveh,  
The great and guilty city,—shall be found  
Black, smoking ashes only!” Having said,  
He turned away, and passed into the tent;  
And by the most was followed.

But, awhile,  
Arbaces stood, and toward the city looked,  
Pondering what next to do. Resolved, at length,  
Two captains, and a trumpeter, with sign  
Of parley well displayed, in haste he sent;  
Who, at the gate arriving, should demand  
Why came not back the heralds of the Mede;  
And what had been the sacrifice. That done,  
He to the tent returned; and with his chiefs  
In earnest conference sat. All surely felt  
The day of retribution was at hand:  
Yet, how the powers above, the event would shape,  
But darkly might they guess.

A sound, at length,  
Approaching them was heard,—the voice of men  
In grief and anger; for, their robes torn off,  
Their heads uncovered, and their bodies soiled,—  
Even as with ignominy from the gate  
They had been driven,—the reverend heralds came,  
Painfully walking: and, as they passed on,  
The soldiers and the captains gathered round,  
Burning with shame and anger.

To the tent  
Were they brought in; and there the fearful tale  
At large did they rehearse; there own disgrace;

The bloody massacre ; the awful bolt ;  
The consternation of the multitude.

Rage hot as fire within the bosom glowed  
Of all who heard ; and feverish was the thirst,  
That shame and bloodshed, with swift blow to avenge.

Yet how ? The walls impregnable, the gates  
Of everduring brass, all strength of man  
Would set at nought. The foe, secure within,  
Would hold them in derision. So said most.  
Some spake of engines that should burst the gates :  
Some counselled, with tall ladders, in dead night,  
To scale the wall : some would again have tried  
The stratagem, once foiled, by stealth to ope  
The portals, and let in the host : and some,  
A price upon the tyrant's head advised ;  
And treaty with his captains and his lords,  
The city to surrender,—sure to fall,—  
And thus, from fire and slaughter to preserve  
Themselves, and it, and all who therein dwelt.

So, in confused debate, for many hours  
Conferred they ; nor on purpose could resolve.

Arbaces spake not,—for not yet he saw  
Clear way to 'vantage : but, to every voice,  
Calmly he listened ; and, of every scheme,  
The better part selected ; hoping still,  
That 'mid the chaos would gleam forth, at length,  
Some guiding-star to action.

But, while yet  
The strife of tongues was loud, Belesis rose,—  
For yet he had not spoken,—and to him  
All turned attentive, as, with look inspired,  
And ardent tone, thus strenuously he spake.  
“ Perplex yourselves no more ; nor waste your breath  
In useless consultation, what to do,  
Or what to leave undone. The arm of heaven  
Is stretched above the city ; and the might  
Of man is needed not. The rock-like walls ;  
The gates of everduring brass,—to you  
Impregnable,—to Powers Omnipotent,  
Frail are as gossamer. By stealth would ye  
The city enter ; or, in shade of night,

The walls would climb ; or, with your banded strength,  
And potent engines, batter at the gates,—  
Sure to be foiled : but the Almighty Gods,  
Even with their breath, could blow the ramparts down :  
Could, with the flashing of their eye-balls, fire  
The temples, and the palaces, and towers :  
Or, holding back themselves, might summon forth  
Their ministers, the earthquake, or the flood,  
To shake the strong foundations, and bring down,  
Like dry leaves, every stone ; or to o'erwrap  
With the deep waters, like a winding-sheet,  
The corpse of the drowned city. Cease ye then  
To ponder and contrive. Leave all to heaven :  
For, surely as yon sun is over-head,  
Though to us viewless,—so assuredly,  
Though ye behold it not, there is put forth  
The hand that shall yon city strike, and crush  
To dust and ashes. I have seen—I see—  
The mouldering skeleton unburied lie,  
Thousands of years to rot, yet unconsumed,  
The marvel and the warning of a world !  
Then be ye calm : retire into your tents :  
Refresh yourselves ; and patiently await  
The foot-tread of the swift-avenging gods."

He ceased ; and there was silence ; for his eye  
Shone like to his on whom the inner heaven  
Is opened ; and his voice oracular  
Seemed as a speaking god's.

At length uprose  
Arbaces, and thus said. " Belesis, thou  
With wisdom more than man's dost counsel us :  
To every voice have I given patient ear ;  
On every scheme have pondered ; yet remained  
Within me darkness, and distrust of all.  
Against yon matchless city's strong defence,  
No hope have we, by merely mortal power,  
That retribution swift and great to bring,  
For which our spirits thirst. And, not to man,  
Perchance, hath heaven assigned this chastisement.

To him, for small transgressions, may be left  
The rod of justice ; but, the Gods themselves,  
*Such* crime will surely punish. Nay, even now,  
See ye not tokens of the coming doom ?  
Why, for long days, as with a funeral pall,  
Have the clouds covered earth ? Why riseth up,  
Though no rain falleth, the dark troubled flood ?  
Why quakes the ground ? why falls the marble god,  
Shattered, and scorched beneath the thunder-bolt ?  
Such things before have been, nor man the cause,  
Or object ; yet, when wickedness like this  
Polluteth earth ; and, on the hated deed,  
Such tokens follow,—surely must I deem  
That they the immediate hand of heaven do show,  
Stretched forth to punish. As we are advised,  
Then let us rest ; and patiently expect  
What the all-ruling and just gods decree.”

He ceased, and all were satisfied. Then went  
The princes and the captains to their tents :  
And soon throughout the camp a rumour flew  
Of strange and terrible events at hand,  
By the wise priest foreseen. What these should be,  
All day the talk was, and the wonderment.

Nor, when the sun's great spirit-stirring voice  
Had sunk to silence ; and the twilight's hush  
'Gan soothe the earth's loud throbbing heart to rest,  
Aught had the fever bated. 'Mid the gloom,  
Gathering in groups, with tones of wrath, and awe,  
Still talked they ; darkly guessing when, and how,  
Heaven's vengeance on the accursèd would come down.

Oft was a shrinking finger toward the sky  
Tremblingly pointed ; eyes were upward turned ;  
And, ere long, through the host a whisper flew,  
That, from the clouds down looking, had been seen  
Dread faces of the doom-denouncing gods.

At length blazed out the watch-fires,—to their tents  
All summoning. But yet, far on in night,  
Throughout the camp was heard the muffled hum  
Of men low talking : and when, nigh on dawn,

O'erwrought at last, in sleep profound all lay,  
Still in their dreams they saw Supernal Might  
Inexorably working overthrow  
Of the proud tyrant, and his towers of strength.

Meantime, till darkness fell, in Nineveh  
Were fear, and discontent, and loud complaint,  
And auguries of ill. The monarch heard  
How spake the people; and for Barak sent;  
And, when the priest before him stood, thus said.  
"The sacrifice is done; but, if well pleased,  
Or wrathful, thereat, be the Powers above,  
As yet no sign doth show. The thunder-bolt  
That hurled the statue shattered to the ground,  
Thou say'st is token that the sacrifice  
Accepted was; and will their wrath assuage.  
But other thoughts possess the multitude:  
Dark prophecies of evil gather strength;  
And men are sad at heart, and sore afraid.  
Go therefore, thou, and counsel with the stars;  
With Spirits of good, or evil,—heaven, or hell,—  
I reckon not what; so thou may'st rightly learn,  
And truly tell, this city's destiny,  
And mine. If happy augury thou shalt bring,  
Let it be noised abroad, that all may know:  
If evil, in the chamber of thy heart  
Lock up the secret, save to me alone."

He ceased awhile; forgetful that the priest  
Still in his presence stood; and, all absorbed,  
Thus with his own dark thoughts communion held.  
"For me hath Fate no terror I need dread.  
My cup of life hath been a sparkling one,  
Luscious, and strong; and bravely have I quaffed.  
If nigh the bottom now, even be it so:  
To fulness have I drunk; nor Fate itself  
Can rob me of one drop from the sweet past.

For every future ill that she may threat,  
In my own hand I hold the remedy,—  
Death will cure all. When life no more is sweet,  
Needs but one blow,—a momentary smart,—

Then earth, and man, and gods, and Fate are shut  
For ever from me ; and may do their worst.  
But better days may come : I yet may rise,  
And trample down the rebel,—now so proud ;  
And, like the sun eclipsed, more glorious show,  
From the brief gloom emerging. Come what may,  
While living I *will live* : music, and wine,  
Feasting, and love, shall make me still a heaven  
Which the stern gods might envy : and, if Fate  
Of these should rob me,—welcome then the stroke  
That brings swift death, and blank oblivion !  
As I have lived, so joyously I'll die."

Thus, while yet distant and uncertain seemed  
The threatening evils, did his proud heart boast :  
Forgetful that, ere death can welcome be,  
Must life a load intolerable lie  
On the crushed spirit.

But the wizard spake ;  
And, with a start, the musing king awoke.  
" Lord of Assyria ! would'st thou clearly learn,  
And with assurance of its truth, the doom  
To thee, and to thy kingdom, from the first  
Predestinated,—ere this earth was formed,  
Or the great sun and stars in heaven were fixed,—  
Speak but the word ; and I will summon up  
Those who can all reveal."

" Then call them now,"  
Hastily said the king, " whoe'er they be,—  
Evil, or good,—and I will question them."

" Lord of the earth art thou," the priest replied,  
" But not of air ; nor of the realms beneath.  
Nor power hath living man, at his own choice  
Of time and place, from their dim silent land  
To call the spirits of the mighty dead.  
They may not be commanded : but, invoked  
By solemn rites, and with an humble heart,—  
At the fit hour and place, may hear the call ;  
And, in the shadow of their mortal form,  
Appear, and answer."

" Let me see, and hear

These ghosts, or demons,—whatsoever they be ;  
And, for the manner, place, or time thereof,  
I reckon not : therefore, as thou wilt, dispose  
The order of thy mystery. But, beware !  
No juggling, priest ! no trick to cheat the eye ;  
No villain hid in darkness, with thin voice,  
To play the solemn ghost. Bold sorcery,  
Black as thou wilt,—I heed not. Call the dead,  
The damned ; spirits of heaven, or hell ;  
Or demons of the earth,—if such there be,—  
That ride upon the hurricane ; or lash  
The sea to foam ; or, 'mid her deepest vaults,  
Disport with Earthquake. Summon what thou wilt,—  
So it be real, and no mockery :  
But, if thou tamper with me, priest, thy life  
Shall pay the forfeit."

" Be thyself the judge,  
O king !" the seer replied : " But, canst thou leave,  
At midnight, thy bright halls, and regal pomp ;  
And, clad in sackcloth,—with uncovered head,  
Stand in the darksome vaults that underlie  
The hoary palace of thine ancestor,  
All-conquering Ninus ? For, beneath the roof  
Where feasters revel, and the dazzling lamps  
Make nightly sunshine, the dim mournful shades  
Of the great dead will never be invoked."

Awhile the king sat silent ; with fixed eye  
Keenly the prophet scanning, as in doubt :  
But, soon assured, replied ; " A bold request  
Thou makest : sackcloth, for the kingly robes ;  
The royal head dis-crowned ; the sunbright hall  
Of mirth and feasting, at the midnight hour,  
For the dark vault exchanged :—yet, not the less,  
Thus, then, and there, shalt thou behold me, priest :  
For, whether good, or evil, my soul thirsts  
To know the things to be. But, no delay :  
This night shall it be done. Yet, once again,  
I warn thee,—no deceit. With eye severe,  
Wilt thou be marked ; with every sense awake.  
Nor ill it pleaseth me that I, at length,

In their own form and working, shall, in part,  
Those mysteries behold, of which, till now,  
Report alone hath reached me. But, enough :  
At midnight I expect thee." Nought replied  
The solemn prophet ; but bowed low, and went.

Long musing sat the king,—suspicion dark  
Fretting within him, lest, beneath this show  
Of magic wonderment, might treason lurk :  
Or, at the best, some purpose insolent  
To blind, and lead astray. The hour, the place,  
The solitude, the ceremonials all,  
Strange seemed, and doubtful : yet, was he resolved  
The event to prove. The wine-cup touched he not ;  
That, with clear eye and mind, to all might he  
Give heedful notice. Treason to o'erawe,  
If such were dreamed of, twice a hundred men,  
In mail complete, he summoned to attend ;  
Who, when he should have entered, by the gate  
Might take their stand, and bide his coming forth.  
Thus having ordered, in a restless mood,  
The hour he waited.

Thrice five hundred years,  
Adown the soundless-flowing stream of time,  
Had floated on,—since, in his pride of power,  
Great Ninus that stupendous pile had reared,  
Within whose vault, now, at the midnight's noon,  
The last descendant of his mighty line,  
With head dis-crowned, and sackcloth for his robes,  
Entered, of fate to question. Through his veins  
A chillness ran, as closed the massive door,—  
Its thunder-like resoundings dying off  
In the far space, like echo 'mid the hills,—  
And all alone, save with the priest, he stood.

A grave for nations, might that vault appear,—  
So vast, so silent, and so terrible !  
Long lines of feeble lamps, whose farthest ray  
Showed but like kindling darkness,—lighted up,  
Grim as a smile upon the face of death,  
The tomb-like horror : yet no form distinct  
Of aught was visible. The priest moved on ;

And signed the king to follow. Still was all  
Shapeless, and dark, save where, at either hand,  
The base of some enormous pillar stood,  
Propping the unseen roof. On, on they went ;—  
The echo of their softly treading feet,  
Amid the empty vast, like Spirit-tongues,  
Gloomily muttering. But, ere long, more thick  
The darkness gathered. As a rising cloud  
Shuts, one by one, from the lone traveller's gaze,  
Heaven's cheering stars,—even so, as on they moved,  
Some formless thing obscure, seemed blotting out  
Lamp after lamp,—till all before them, now,  
Was solid blackness. Paused at length the priest,  
And stood in silence : nor the monarch aught  
Could dare to question ; for his blood ran cold,  
His hair began to stiffen. One wild look  
All round he cast. To either hand, shone still,  
And far behind, the lines of glow-worm lamps ;  
But, on the blackness that before him stood,  
His eyes soon fixed ; for there he seemed to feel  
The presence of some dread invisible Thing,  
Ere long to appear ; and, like the voice of Fate,  
His destiny utter.

But the priest, at length,  
With solemn accent lifted up his voice :  
And, like the clamor of a distant host,  
A throng of echoes muttered. "Mighty shades  
Of kings departed ! on whose awful brows  
Hath, in far distant ages, sat the crown  
Of this most glorious empire of the earth,—  
The latest of your long-enduring line,  
Nor least,—Sardanapalus, king of kings,  
Here, by my voice, invokes you. Fate doth frown ;  
Victorious rebels threat, with sword and fire,  
The ancient city of your majesty !  
Oh ! from your dim and silent regions, then,  
Deign to appear ; and let your voice be heard,  
Prophetic of her doom."

The wizard ceased ;  
And for awhile was silence : but, at length,

A sound as of a tempest coming on,  
Arose, and filled the vault; then died away :  
And lo ! amid the thickest darkness stood  
A dim gigantic form. A regal crown  
Was on the massive head ; the silvery beard  
Descended to the breast. The face was wan  
As a gray cloud of morning. On the king  
The large cold eye-balls were a moment turned ;  
And then it passed.

Came next a female form,  
Tall and majestic ; fierce, yet beautiful.  
Crowned like the first was she ; but, on her arm,  
A shield was braced ; her right hand grasped a spear.  
He knew the warrior-queen, Semiramis.

But she was gone : another filled her place ;  
Another, and another : on each brow  
A kingly diadem glimmering : on—on—on—  
Another—still another,—a long train  
Of phantom monarchs, pale, and sorrowful :  
Some, in the gorgeous robes of peaceful state ;  
Some, clothed in mail complete. In youth were some,  
Some, middle-aged, and some were gray with years.

Each, as he passed along, upon the king  
Turned his cold moon-like eye : but not a voice  
As yet was heard ; and grave-like was the hush.

Strange horror held the king : his hair stood up ;  
His breath came quick : the beating of his heart,  
In that intensest silence, like the stroke  
Of some great engine, seemed his ear to stun.

Still onward glided by the ghostly train ;  
Till came, at length, one shape that, more than all,  
Sent shuddering through his soul. He saw, distinct  
As in the life,—though wan and mournful now,—  
The face of his dead father : the same crown  
That he had worn ; upon his stately form  
The same habiliments.

Not like the rest,  
Passed he away. With pale phosphoric eye,  
Upon the gasping son, the phantom sire  
Gazed long, and silently : till thus, at length,  
From lips unmoving, with sepulchral tone,

The well-known voice pronounced; "FEAR NOT,  
 FEAR NOT;  
 BUT LAUGH THY FOES TO SCORN. GREAT  
 NINEVEH,  
 TO MORTAL MIGHT WILL NEVER BOW THE  
 KNEE,  
 TILL TIGRIS FROM HIS BED SHALL 'GAINST  
 HER RISE;  
 O'ERTOP HER BATTLEMENT, AND LOFTY  
 TOWERS,  
 AND RIOT IN HER STREETS."

The spectre ceased;  
 And melted in the darkness. But, at once,  
 A multitude of awful voices rose,  
 As in far space, and cried again, "Fear not:  
 Great Nineveh will never bow the knee,  
 Till Tigris from his bed shall 'gainst her rise;  
 O'ertop her battlement, and lofty towers,  
 And riot in her streets!"

With every word,  
 Fainter, and yet more faint, the sound became;  
 As if in rapid flight, 'mid upper air,  
 Or through the solid earth, the voices fled.

Fell then a heavy silence. Cold with awe,  
 Yet inwardly exulting, a brief space  
 The monarch stood; but not a word could speak,—  
 So was his soul o'erwrought: nor spake the priest;  
 But both in silence turned, and took their way.

Upon the morrow, when from troubled sleep  
 The king arose,—with pride was he inflamed,  
 And confidence in that dark augury.  
 Then sent he forth, the princes and the chiefs  
 For a great feast to summon.

Ne'er before,  
 Even in his days of undisputed power,  
 Had shone so gloriously the festive hall,  
 As now,—when, on the very brink of fate,  
 He, and his matchless city, tottering stood.  
 Deeply he drank, and loudly did he boast.  
 "Let the fools lie, and rot upon the plain!  
 What heed we? For three years our walls are stored:

They cannot climb them, nor can burst the gates.  
Let the fools rest ! Famine shall gnaw their flesh,  
Or pestilence sweep them off : but here will we  
Feast, and rejoice, and laugh their rage to scorn.  
Great Nineveh will never bow the knee,  
Till Tigris from his bed shall 'gainst her rise ;  
O'ertop her battlement, and lofty towers,  
And riot in her streets ! So spake the Fates.  
Fill then your cups : with music, and with wine,  
And with the joys of love, our lives shall pass."

Thus, with loud voice, spake he his boastful heart ;  
And all the thousand lords and rulers raised  
Their brimming cups, and to the bottom drained.

Yet were the minds of most with care o'ercast,  
With dark forebodings, or ill-smothered ire.  
Upon the vacant place, where erst had sat  
The prince of all beloved, was many an eye  
In sorrow turned : upon the noble queen  
Was many a sad thought fixed : remembrance, too,  
Of that abhorred sacrifice arose ;  
And, with it, 'gainst the perpetrator, wrath,  
Hard to conceal. Nor at the feast were seen  
The two, of all the captains honored most,  
And more than all illustrious, Jerimoth,  
And young Nebaioth : nor was it unknown,  
Though unavowed, that, in a deep disgust  
At that most bloody act, they held aloof.

But, as the night wore on ; and the high strains  
Of joyous music lifted up their souls ;  
And the deep draughts of sunny wine 'gan fire  
Their sluggish blood, and, with unnatural shine,  
Dazzle the mental eye,—loud grew their mirth ;  
And high their boasting.

Toward the morning, rose  
A tempest, that the walls appeared to shake :  
As though the clouds had burst above their heads,  
Poured down the hissing rain : the thunder roared ;  
The incessant lightnings leaped ; yet nought recked they :  
Deeper they drank, and madder grew their mirth.

Two hours the sun had risen, ere, in the sleep  
Of utter drunkenness, the revel closed.

## BOOK THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

FAR otherwise, within the Median camp,  
Had passed the changeful night. In dreamless sleep,  
Three portions had gone by : but, when the storm,  
Like a wild beast awaked and ravenous,  
Burst in its fury forth ; and, cataract-like,  
Came down the boiling rain,—wide flew all eyes,  
From sleep even heaviest. With loud hiss expired  
The deluged watch-fires ; and in darkness deep  
As of closed tomb, the affrighted sentries stood.

What then to do, they knew not. With their spears  
Planted in earth,—against the tempest, some,  
Stood stiffly staggering : some, upon the ground  
Hastily flung themselves ; and some, driven on,  
Reeling, and stumbling, fell. But, when heaven's fires  
'Gan volley,—in the momentary blaze,  
Uprooted tents they saw ; faces of men  
Looking aghast ; and steeds, that from their stalls  
Had broken,—in wild terror, o'er the plain  
Headlong careering.

Thus, till dawned the day,  
In darkness, and fierce light alternating ;  
In terror, and confusion, lay the host.

Nor, when the gloomy day-beam on them stole,  
Much comfort brought it. Still, unabated, roared  
The hurricane : still, with its mighty voice,  
The thunder spake ; with fires incessant, still  
Heaven flamed ; and the big clouds their deluge poured.

Save on that higher ground where camped the host,—  
 Far as the eye could see, o'er all the plain  
 The turbid waters spread. Majestic trees  
 Uprooted lay : the strong-winged eagle toiled  
 Vainly, that blast to face ; then, screaming, turned ;  
 And, on the pennons of the tempest borne,  
 Swift as the arrow leaves the clanging cord,  
 Shot onward, and was lost. Noon came ; and night ;  
 And still the storm raged on. Another morn,  
 And yet no change. Then in the hearts of most  
 Awoke despair : a second flood, they deemed  
 Was coming on the earth ; and all alike  
 Surely must perish.

'Gainst the hurricane's wrath,  
 Dared few to stand : but, with unbating zeal,  
 From morn till night, amid the soldiers went  
 Their mighty leader ; and with words of hope  
 Exhorted, and encouraged. In his hand,  
 For staff, a spear he bore ; a lion's hide  
 Shielded his body. Wheresoe'er he went,  
 He carried comfort ; for he taught the eye,  
 Beyond the blackness of the storm, to see  
 The glorious day of promise.

Of the chiefs,  
 Strove also some, the soldiers' hearts to cheer :  
 But most, by deep dejection were subdued :  
 Their arms were rusted, and their garments drenched ;  
 Their limbs, with cold, and wet, were cramped, and stiff :  
 Food had they little,—for the driving rain  
 Pierced through the strongest tents ; and nauseous made  
 All viands ; nor, of fire, one spark could live.

Beleis only, when most fiercely raged  
 The tempest, most rejoiced ; for now he saw  
 The immediate advent of the hour of wrath  
 Upon the guilty city. Day and night,  
 Still was his cry, " Behold ! the hand of God,  
 At length, to do great wonders, is put forth.  
 Be of good heart, and fear not : for the time  
 Of your exulting cometh."

Three dark days,

Three dreadful nights, the hurricane had raged :  
With the fourth morn it ceased. The soldiers, then,  
Took courage ; and with wine refreshed themselves :  
And soon,—for through the night had fallen no rain,—  
Fires kindled ; and of savoury food partook ;  
Their garments dried ; and cleansed from rust their arms.  
Then, when the work was finished ; and their limbs  
New strength had gathered,—freely through the camp  
They wandered ; each the other questioning,  
How he had fared ; imparting each, in turn,  
The tale of his own suffering. But with joy  
Were all inspired ; and expectation great  
Of what should follow. Toward the city oft,  
Marvelling, they looked ; for, 'gainst the western wall,—  
As on a sea-cliff when the storm is high,—  
In foam and thunder dashed the furious waves  
Of the o'erflooded river. Yet, no thought  
Had they that, even before such dread assault,  
The rock-like walls could shake. As eve drew on,  
Again with food and wine were they made glad ;  
Then lay them down to sleep.

The king, meantime,  
Safe in his strong-walled palace, at the storm  
Laughed, and was glad. Each night, his sun-bright  
hall

Echoed the noisy banquet ; and, each night,  
More riotous became his mirth ; more loud  
His savage curses, boasts, and mockery.  
“ Rage on, rage on ! ” was still his impious cry ;  
“ Pour down your waters, till the caitiffs drown,  
And rot like vermin ! Choke them with your blasts,  
Ye roaring winds ! ye lightnings, scorch their bones !  
And ye, deep-throated thunders, bellow forth  
A chorus for the dead ! Rage on, rage on !  
Soon will your work be done : the vulture, then,  
The wild dog, and the wolf, shall tear their flesh ;  
And on the plain, a daring monument  
Of treason's fate, their whitening bones shall lie ! ”

Thus he, insensate ; even while o'er his head  
The Avenging Arm was lifted to destroy.

On that fourth night, by their long sufferings worn,  
Thirsting for sleep, the Median host lay down.  
No fires were kindled ; and no sentinels  
Kept watch, unneeded now. The stillness deep,  
Succeeding the wild hurly of the storm,—  
Even as a mother's gentle song doth hush  
The cradled babe,—soon lulled them to repose.  
No eye of all the myriads was unclosed :  
Throughout that spacious camp, of life appeared  
No token ; save, at intervals, the neigh  
Of courser ; or the murmuring tone of one  
Talking in sleep.

But, had there been an eye  
With lid unshut, an ear not locked in sleep,  
Then, on the far horizon had been seen  
The battling lightnings ; over-head, the sweep  
Of ponderous clouds, like breathless messengers  
Hasting to tell that, with redoubled wrath,  
The storm was coming : then, had well been heard  
The gathering uproar of the turbulent flood,—  
'Gainst the doomed city, as with ocean's might,  
Hurling its deepening waters.

With a speed  
Mocking the eagle's flight, the tempest came.  
No rising breeze, to warn of its approach,—  
At once, with fury uncontrollable,  
O'er all the plain it burst. Anon, was heard  
The rumbling of the thunder's iron wheels,  
Upon the hurricane driving : thick as hail,  
Came on the flood of lightnings. From their sleep  
All started,—and, in wonder, left their tents,  
To look on what was coming : for, so dire  
The hurly of the elements,—it seemed  
As, in her last great agony, the world  
With death were struggling.

Soon, upon the earth,  
O'erthrown lay every tent ; and, all aghast,  
Gazing around, the countless myriads stood.

'Twas midnight ; but a glare was on the sky,  
That might have paled mid-noon. As though the sun,

Melting, had poured in showers of lightning down,—  
Fell on the city the dense floods of fire.  
All heaven seemed fire. Strange, and portentous  
clouds,

Like flaming mountains, flung by angry gods,—  
Careered the sky ; and, as with life instinct,  
And keen for vengeance, scattered, as they flew,  
Their blazing bolts. Yet fell no drop of rain :  
Hot was that wind as from a lion's mouth,  
Strong as a torrent. Few before its sweep  
A moment stood ; but, sinking on the ground,  
In breathless awe looked on. Wall, palace, tower,  
Of the great city,—'neath the incessant blaze,  
Like iron in the hottest furnace glowed.  
The river, in rough torrent rolling, shone  
Like melted brass ; and to the battlement  
Dashed up its fiery foam.

As thus they gazed,  
Behold ! the earth beneath them, like a ship  
By ocean's swell uplifted, slowly heaved ;  
Thundered within, and trembled,—as the hills,  
When loosened rocks rush down. Some thought the  
towers

Nigh to the river shook : and eagerly  
Thousands of fingers pointed. But again,  
With yet a stronger lift the earthquake came :  
And lo ! the towers upon the western side,  
Like trees before the tempest, rocked, and fell !  
Through all its length,—like an enormous snake  
Stirring in sleep,—the ponderous wall was seen  
Slowly to writhe, and twist : then, suddenly,  
Even as a giant in the pangs of death,  
Shuddered convulsively : heaved, rolled, and reeled,—  
As by a hand almighty and unseen,  
From base to summit rocked :—bowed, broke, and fell,  
Prone in the boiling flood !

As from a cliff  
Precipitous, in mid ocean, when the storm  
Lashes the deep,—the mountainous waves recoil,  
With noise of thunder ; and, in clouds of foam

And spray, fly upward, higher than the mast  
Of tallest ship,—even so,—beneath the stroke  
Of that Titanic wall, down falling sheer,—  
The turbulent flood, driven backward, gathered up  
In one enormous wave ; even in such cloud  
Of spray and foam did the crushed water fly.

Fearful the uproar of that overthrow,—  
For, as with second earthquake, shook the ground,—  
Yet, in the hideous bellowing of the wind,  
Came but a feeble sound, as when, far off,  
A sluggish billow rakes the pebbly beach.

Of all the Median host who thereon gazed,  
Stirred not a man ; astonishment, and awe,  
With a strange extacy conjoined, so held  
Body and spirit still. Nor scarcely yet  
Their senses could they trust. With eyes wide strained,  
Eagerly gazed they In the rock-like wall,  
A mighty gap they saw ; through which, abreast,  
Might thousands, horse, and foot, and chariots go.  
They closed their eye-lids ; opened them again ;  
And still was seen the same. With a fierce joy,  
Then 'gan their souls to kindle : for they knew  
That retribution, now, indeed was sure ;  
And nigh at hand. Upon the tyranny,  
Long-during, of that city,—on the blood  
So lately, so inhumanly poured forth  
By her detested ruler, did they think ;  
And thirsted for revenge.

As though alone  
To that dread work, the earthquake, and the storm,  
Had been sent forth,—at once 'gan sink their rage :  
Still earth's great pulse at times throbbed tremblingly ;  
Still flashed the lightning ; still in heaven's deep vault  
The thunder muttered : but, amid its pause,  
One sound alone was heard,—the roar and dash  
Of the impetuous river, and the boil  
Of waters writhing 'mid the giant wreck.

Then did Belesis, with a prophet's fire,  
His voice uplift. " Said I not truly, then,  
'The sky doth gather up its clouds to pour

Upon the guilty city?" Said I not,  
 'The long enduring walls shall be cast down?'  
 Foretold I not that fire should utterly  
 Consume her temples, and her palaces;  
 Yea, of yon haughty mistress of the earth,  
 Leave blackened ashes only? Look! behold!  
 Already have the flames their victim seized!  
 No bolt, chance-driven, hath kindled up yon fires.  
 Ye heard the thunder only; and ye felt  
 The earthquake; and ye saw the lightnings fall:  
 But I, in opened heaven beheld enthroned  
 The great avenging gods, when, from the clouds,  
 They in their anger smote. I saw their eyes  
 Bent on the city, as they grasped, and hurled  
 The burning bolts. The thunder was their voice,  
 Threatening destruction. To the ground they looked;  
 Spake the dread word; and lo! the affrighted earth  
 Trembled, and quaked, and the strong wall fell down.  
 Trust in me then, when now again I say;  
 The fires that in yon city ye behold,  
 Never shall man put out, nor rain-flood quench.  
 The work by Fate decreed, shall never cease,  
 Till in one universal ruin lie  
 Temple, and palace, tower, and rock-like wall;  
 And Nineveh shall be a name alone,  
 A marvel, and a tale!"

Vehémently

So cried he out: and still from place to place  
 Went on, the host inspiring: nor all night  
 His eyes could close: but on the gathering flames  
 Still looked exulting; still swift doom denounced  
 Against the guilty city.

Great indeed

Was the rejoicing throughout all the camp.  
 Quickly they reared again their prostrate tents;  
 And many with the wine-cup would have passed  
 The hours of night: but, with a calmer soul,  
 Arbaces saw; and, with a serious mien,  
 Checked, and admonished them. "No time for mirth,  
 Nor for vain glorying. Surely not *our* might

These wondrous things hath done. In silent awe,  
As in the immediate presence of the gods,  
Thankful, and humble, rather, should we kneel,  
In prayer and adoration. To our tents  
Now let us go ; and, every man apart,  
Bow down and worship. Till the morning then,  
In slumber, greatly needed, let us lie,  
Our limbs to strengthen ; for even yet, perchance,  
Much toil must we endure. The hand of heaven  
Hath now indeed a mighty gate thrown wide ;  
Nor bolt, nor bar, of human strength and skill,  
Again can close it. But exult not yet :  
In that wide breach, for many thousands still  
Perchance death lies in wait. Yet, not the less,  
Our way is clear : and, when the bated flood  
Shall give us passage,—trusting in the gods,  
Will we go on. Meantime, with hopeful mind,  
Yet patiently, and thankful, let us wait.”

Awhile throughout the camp was heard the hum  
Of eager voices, and the tramp of feet,  
To and fro hurrying : toward the city oft  
A hand was pointed, when, with ruddier gleam,  
The flames shot upward : as from far he smelt  
The battle, loudly many a courser neighed,  
And pawed the ground : but through the camp, at  
length,  
Stole silence ; and once more all soundly slept.

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On that same night, Assyria's blinded king  
Again, amid his thousand lords and chiefs,  
Sat at the riotous feast. A wilder joy  
Than e'er before possessed him ; for he deemed  
His empire steadfast as the eternal hills ;  
His foes as but a mist about their heads,  
That soon must melt and vanish. Loud were heard  
The clang of harp and timbrel ; loud the voice  
Of singers, choiring in triumphant song,—  
Him lauding as a god. With pride inflamed,  
Harsh was his laugh, and bitter was his mock,

At the long-dreaded foe. And when, at length,  
With midnight woke again the terrible storm,—  
To madness rose his savage merriment.  
The lightning's glare made pale his blazing lamps;  
Yet nought feared he, intoxicate,—but raised  
In maniac glee his arms, as he would clutch,  
And hurl upon his foes, the blasting bolts.  
Great thunders shook the walls; the hurricane  
Howled like a countless army of the damned:  
Yet but the wilder, as they louder raged,  
Became his extacy: for, in that din,  
Nought heard he save the withering voice of Death,  
Against his enemies.

From his seat, at last,  
Upspringing,—to and fro, with rapid stride,  
He paced the hall. The lords, astonished, saw  
His frantic gestures, and his glaring eyes.  
His crimsoned face, distended veins, and lips  
In eager motion, showed that to its height.  
His voice was lifted; yet no sound was heard,—  
In thunder swallowed, and the tempest's roar.

But, suddenly pale, he stopped; for lo! the ground,  
As with great blows, seemed reeling: and the walls,  
Like trembling timbers of wave-battered ship,  
From roof to deep foundation sharply jarred.

Up from his seat at once sprang every guest,  
Pallid with terror, trembling, shrieking loud.  
Some, on the glittering tables fixed their eyes,  
Where gold and gems, like to a sun-kissed brook,  
Quivered, and rocked; some, on the heaving floor  
Gazed awe-struck, as they feared to see it ope,  
And swallow them: upon the lofty roof  
Looked some; and some upon the swaying walls,  
As dreading momentarily lest they should fall,  
And bury them.

In midst of all, the king  
With countenance aghast, stood staggering.  
But the shock passed, and not a stone had fallen.  
Then grew he bold again; and, lifting up  
A brimming goblet, unto all made sign

That they should drink : and, when their cups were  
filled,  
Toward heaven he turned his face ; and, raising high  
The golden vessel, waved it round and round,  
As though to call out, " Thunder, Hurricane,  
The king of all the east doth pledge you now.  
Go on, and conquer : ye his soldiers are,  
And, in your might and terror, will strike down,  
And utterly destroy his enemies."  
So he, and drank.

But, scarce his impious lips  
The wine had drained, when, reeling, down he fell.  
The floor was lifted ; the strong pillars swayed ;  
The roof, and massive walls, heaved to and fro.  
From every hand at once down dropped the cup :  
Some, backward fell ; some, o'er the tables prone :  
Who fell not, tottered like to drunken men :  
Distant was every eye ; and every face  
Corpse-like with terror.

Once again the earth,  
As if beneath the stroke of some vast weight,  
Trembled and jarred : and faintly, afterward,  
Amid the thunder and the wind, was heard  
A noise as of the dash of waves, and grate  
Of rocks descending. But the ground no more  
Was shaken ; and the fast-subsiding storm,  
Like madman when his fury-fit is gone,  
Sighed off to rest.

Soon, from the floor arose  
The trembling king ; and staggered to his throne.  
The guests rose, also, and in haste sat down :  
But every countenance was blanched with awe :  
And, when the monarch, with a ghastly smile,  
Poured out the wine, and signed to them to drink,  
Each hand seemed ague-struck. When fell the storm,  
And men could hear, and speak,—with catching breath,  
Dark fears were whispered : nor, though strove the king  
To wake again the mirth and revelry,  
Could any heart make answer. To their lips  
They raised the cup, and, with a hollow laugh,

Mimicked a merriment; but their souls were dark  
With dread of yet worse evil.

Still, resolved  
The gloom to chase,—with a bold front the king  
His goblet filled; and bade each guest his cup  
Fill also, and drink deep.

“What looks are these!  
Ye are not men,” he cried, “rulers, and chiefs,  
But feeble-hearted women, if a blast  
Of the rough wind, and trembling of the ground,  
Can shake you thus. For thrice five hundred years  
Hath stood this matchless city: thrice again,  
Though hurricane and earthquake doubly rage,  
And foes in tenfold number gather round,  
Still must she stand; for thus the Fates decree:  
Thus dead kings spake it. ‘This great Nineveh  
To mortal might will never bow the knee,  
Till Tigris from his bed shall ’gainst her rise;  
O’ertop her battlement, and lofty towers,  
And riot in her streets.’ Then be ye glad.  
Not upon us, but on our enemies  
Was hurled the wrath of heaven. At morn look forth,  
And ye shall see on whom the bolts were shot,  
For whom the earth hath gaped. Be joyous then:  
Fill to the brim; and be our motto still,  
‘EAT, DRINK, AND LOVE; NOUGHT ELSE IS  
WORTH A THOUGHT.’”

Speaking, he raised his cup; and, after him,  
All filled, and gave the answer. With forced glee,  
Spake many, wishing so the king to please:  
But most, with inward shuddering heard again  
Those ominous words, remembered but too well,  
As herald of their first great overthrow.

Ere yet the acclamations all were hushed,  
Without the palace a loud cry was heard,  
A howl of consternation and despair.  
Silent they sat, and listened; man on man  
Anxiously looking, as though each of all  
Would question, “What dire evil now hath fallen?”  
Some rose at length, unbidden, and went forth,

The cause to learn : the rest in mute suspense  
Sat pallid ; for the outcries louder grew ;  
And all with dread of some strange horror shook.

Anon, with faces white as sepulchre,  
Shivering with fear, came they who had gone forth :  
All eyes were on them fixed, all ears athirst  
To catch their tidings. Like to drunken men,  
Unsteadily they walked ; and, nigh the king  
Approaching, stood and gasped ; but spake no word,  
So terror froze them. With like look of fear,  
The monarch on his glittering throne sat mute,  
Their speech awaiting. Long time did they stand,  
As they were magic-stricken : till, at length,  
Impatience mastering dread, with husky voice  
The king exclaimed—" Your tidings—quickly speak—  
Speak,—or ye die !"

Then fell before his feet  
The trembling lords ; but Tartan still stood up,  
And gave the answer.

" Mighty king of kings !  
Make strong thy soul, for the dread doom draws nigh !  
Furlongs in length, hath earthquake overthrown,  
From pinnacle to base, the western wall !  
Tigris, like angry ocean, hath arisen !  
O'ertops fallen battlement, and shattered tower,  
And riots in the streets !"

Like one who sees  
A spectre in the darkness, glared the king :  
He strove to rise ; but all his strength was gone :  
He strove to speak ; but his relaxing jaw  
Dropped nerveless. In a cold collapse, like death,  
He shrank together, even as shrinks a leaf,  
By lightning blasted.

Round him came in haste  
A pitying few ; and, with a tender care,  
Unto his chamber bore him. But the rest  
Girt up their robes, and from the palace fled,  
Speechless with terror. Some unto their homes  
Retired ; and gathered up their gems and gold,

On flight intent; for now *indeed* all knew  
The day of doom was nigh.

With trembling limbs,  
Some to the fatal breach walked hastily,  
With their own eyes to see the yawning mouth  
Of great Assyria's sepulchre.

Oh! night  
Of ruin, and of dread! From wall to wall,  
Throughout the city sounds the voice of woe!  
The dead are floating in the deluged streets:  
In every quarter flare the heaven-lit fires.  
Gone are the thunder-clouds: the waning moon  
Through a thin vapour sheds her ghastly light  
On the great chasm, and on the boiling flood.  
Nigh to the foamy margin, stream the flames  
Of countless torches, hurrying to and fro;  
While drowning wretches, in their agony,  
Beat on the torrent waves, and, shrieking, sink!

From house-top, temple, tower, and battlement,  
The awe-struck myriads silently look on,  
And know the day of their destruction nigh!

## BOOK THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

RESPLENDENT as on that great morn he rose,  
When, from the inmost depth of heaven's immense,  
The bright eternal solitude of God,  
Came forth the word,—unspoken, yet through all  
The palpitating heart of nature felt,—  
Bidding the waters of the flood dry up,  
And the drowned earth a second life begin,—  
The ardent sun, from his long night of cloud,  
Triumphantly arose—again to urge,  
Through heaven's clear depths, above a smiling world,  
His dazzling car of fire, and lightning steeds.

Yet not to that crushed city heralding  
Advent of life renewed: despairing eyes  
Met his uprising; eyes that all the night  
In sleep had never closed: and, for the hymn  
Of joy that should have hailed his coming up,  
Was heard the cry of lamentation loud:  
For the sweet placid hour of opening day,  
When men, refreshed, look forth on earth and sky,  
And bless the sweet breath of the youthful morn,—  
Was now a time of anguish, and of toil.  
They who all night had labored, labored still:  
Yet were the fires unquenched; yet unremoved  
The ruins under which lay thousands crushed.

Distractedly along the torrent's marge  
Ran many, seeking if, among the drowned,  
Were father, son, or mother, or young child,  
Husband, or lover, lost. Some, on the wall,  
Like moping idiots,—with dull staring eye,

And mouth agape,—upon the mighty wreck  
Of that once deemed eternal, gazing sat.

With burning brow, and look of care, toiled some,  
Their silver, gold, and jewels,—with aught else  
Of rare, and costly,—for a hasty flight,  
To set in order: some, with hearts bowed down,  
Sat pale and helpless; 'gainst their fate to strive,  
Deeming all labor vain. Throughout the walls  
Of that stupendous city, was not one  
Who on that morning with light heart arose.

Far otherwise, within the Median camp,  
Was hailed the glorious sunrise. With the dawn,  
Upstart every man; and every eye,  
As though even yet might all be but a dream,  
Looked eagerly, to see again the work  
Of flood, and earthquake, on the rock-like wall.

Exulting, they beheld the ghastly chasm,  
And the fierce river, like a stormy sea,  
Boiling and foaming 'mid the giant wreck;  
For there they saw the broad and sure highway  
Through which, erelong, their banners should be borne  
To triumph, and to vengeance.

All the day  
The sounds of joy were heard: with food, and wine,  
Their limbs were strengthened: and impatiently  
The time they waited, when the flooded stream  
Should ebb, and give them passage.

While the day  
Was yet but young, Arbaces to his tent  
The leaders summoned, and brief conference held.  
Then Azareel, the faithful, and, with him,  
Almelon, reverend in his weight of years,  
He singled from the rest, and thus bespake.  
"A herald call; and to the city speed:  
Yet, to the presence of the king go not:  
But, when the rulers and the chiefs are met,  
Calmly thus speak to them: 'Why longer now  
Should ye against us struggle? The just gods

A gate have opened to us ; and no strength  
Of man again can close it. Then, submit.  
Lay down your arms : unto your conquerors swear  
Lasting allegiance ; and untouched may all  
The city leave : your daughters, and your wives,  
Unharm'd may pass : and, wheresoe'er ye will,  
There may ye go. But take not with you gold,  
Silver, or precious stones ; for these, a debt  
To the long plundered nations shall be held.  
One man except, to every living soul  
Within your gates, we life and safety pledge :  
The tyrant and the murderer, alone,  
Must die the death. For him let no man plead :  
Mercy herself 'gainst him would shut the ear ;  
So unto gods and man alike is he  
Loathsome, abominable ! But, if ye  
Our offer scorn, and blindly still resist,—  
Then surely every man that beareth arms  
Ye doom to perish ! ye for bondslaves give  
Your mothers, and your daughters, and your wives,  
Your fathers, and your sons,—yea, every soul  
That shall escape the sword.'

“ Thus to the chiefs  
Say ye ; yet not with bearing arrogant,  
Word, look, or tone offensive. Bid them think,  
Their wall is overthrown ; their city in flames ;  
Their armies wasted ; help for them a dream.  
As to an ill inevitable, then,  
Let them with grace submit ; nor, weakly proud,  
By vain opposal, tenfold bitterness  
Pour in the cup from which, by Fate's decree,  
Perforce they all must drink.”

Here ceased the Mede :  
The council was dissolved ; and, with all haste,  
Almelon, and the ardent Azareel,  
A herald summoning, into a car  
Joyfully rose, and toward the nearest gate  
Urged the swift horses.

Warders, looking out,  
Beheld them ; and,—their solemn mission heard,—  
Drew bolt, raised massive bar, and opened wide.

Meantime, in hurried council, at the house  
Of Jerimoth, the anxious leaders sat.  
For, to the king when they that morn had sent,  
His will to know, or for a conference sue,—  
Sternly had he the trembling messengers,  
With words like these, repulsed. “Trouble me not;  
Nor dare to vex me more. All talk is vain:  
Let every man that would from ruin ’scape,  
Gather his silver, gold, and precious gems;  
And, ere the enemy block up the gates,  
Take parents, wife, and children; and make speed  
To leave the city: for the day is nigh  
When she shall utterly perish!”

At these words,  
Sad were the hearts of all: but some, with wrath  
Against the monarch burned,—seeing that thus,  
In their great strait, did he abandon them.  
Some, counselled parley with the enemy,  
Time so to gain; till, haply, might arrive  
Strong succour; by whose aid, the tide of war,  
Even yet, might back be turned. Some, urged to build  
An inner wall, and to the last resist.  
Others derided, saying, “ere the stones  
Be got together, or the trench be dug,  
The enemy will enter like a flood.”

Apart unto their fellows whispered some,  
“The city burns, and none the flames can quench:  
The wall is open; and the foe at hand,  
Couched like a lion ready for the spring:  
Sardanapalus leaves us in our need;  
Why should we spend our blood for him, who nought  
Cares for himself, or us? Better at once  
Choose for our king Arbaces: ruled by him,  
No enemy need we dread: of small account  
Were then the breach, now threatening fate to all;  
And, with his myriads for our aid, erelong,  
The fires that, else, will the whole city burn,  
Were speedily extinct.”

Among their friends,  
Thus whispered some; but none, with open voice,  
Dared yet propound it; for in reverence still,

Though censuring, did the nobler spirits hold  
That last link of the long and splendid chain  
Of great Assyria's kings.

While thus, confused  
By clashing counsels, sat the troubled chiefs,—  
Word came that, with a herald, from the Mede,  
Two captains conference craved. At once was hushed  
The tumult: and, in low tone, man with man  
Closely conferred; conjecturing anxiously  
On what might be the message of the foe;  
And what should be replied.

But, in brief time,  
The Medes arrived; and, when all silent sat,  
Almelon, in few words, and with such look  
And tone as best might sweeten the sour draught,  
Their message fully spake. On him all eyes  
Were fixed attentive; every ear was quick,  
Ere yet 'twas spoken, to catch up the word.  
Nor, at the first, seemed great their discontent;  
For, than submission, what less could be claimed  
By an all-powerful foe: but when, at last,  
With sterner voice, Almelon spake the doom  
Against the king decreed,—then from his seat  
Leaped Jerimoth, his eye-balls flashing fire:  
“Enough, enough!” vehemently he cried:  
“Sacred your office makes you, or these words,  
Accursed, and insolent, had been your last!  
To them who sent you, haste. This our reply.  
‘Our rampart is cast down; our city in flames;  
But, while one stone upon another stands;  
While foot can move, and arm can lift a sword,—  
To death will we defy you!’ What base things  
Are we, then, held, that, with such infamy,  
Ye dare insult us! Death, or slavish bonds,—  
Forced on us,—were less ignominy far  
Than such vile traffic for a little breath!  
We'll hear no more. Go hence, and speedily.  
Bear back our answer: soften not a word;  
And bid them do their worst.”

While hotly thus,

With gesture fierce, and countenance inflamed,  
Spake Jerimoth,—Almelon raised his hand,  
Signing forbearance, craving to be heard.  
With look not less imploring, Azareel  
His hands uplifted also ; and, two steps  
Toward the hot chief advancing, raised his voice.

But, through the assembly, now, wild tumult raged :  
At once a hundred tongues spake eagerly ;  
And no man from the rest could hearing gain.

At length Nebaioth, and Sennacherib,  
Apart led Jerimoth ; and, with mild words,  
Counselled forbearance ; and his rage appeased.

Nebaioth then unto the Median chiefs  
Spake privately : “ Ye see with what amaze  
Your message, stern and unexpected all,  
Hath overcome us ; and that none aright  
Knoweth, as yet, what it were well to do.  
Give us, then, still a little time for thought,  
And for debate : for, in the fiery speech  
Of Jerimoth, ye have not heard the mind  
Of all the council. To Arbaces, then,  
Bear not his testy answer : but retire  
Where I shall lead you ; and in patience wait,  
Till on reply we fix.”

These temperate words  
Pleased well the Medes : and Azareel, the hand  
Of his young enemy taking, thus replied :  
“ Nebaioth, though against us hast thou stood  
With hottest zeal,—yet, for a generous foe,  
We all do know thee. When the time shall come  
That we as friends in one great cause shall stand,—  
Then be our love more ardent than, ere yet,  
Our fiercest enmity. But now, oh ! now,  
With words of wisdom, and of eloquence,  
Unto the hearts of the proud chiefs lay siege.  
The earthquake that rent wide your rock-like wall,  
Not more resistless than the fate which now  
Heaven hath decreed against you ! Then, submit.  
From one man only, mercy is shut out.  
Hath he deserved that, in devotion blind,

Myriads for him their lives should sacrifice,—  
And vainly?—for, though tens of myriads first  
For him should perish, not less sure his doom.  
Oh! bid them ponder, then; and wiser thoughts  
Call to direct them: else, will misery,  
Unutterable, come upon you all!”

To him Nebaioth: “Cruel is the strait  
In which we stand: nor see I well, as yet,  
How best to counsel, so that honor pure,  
By prudence be not fouled. Yet, not my thoughts,  
But those of the assembled chiefs, must rule.  
Come with me now; lest, by your presence checked,  
Men speak not out their minds: and, when, at length,  
On purpose we decide, I will return,  
And hither bring you, our reply to hear.”

So he; and to an inner chamber led  
The ambassadors,—well pleased, and hopeful now  
Of happy issue.

But, not unobserved  
Had they retired: and, when Nebaioth now  
Returned among them,—many voices rose,  
Enquiring, whither they had gone, and why.  
And, when he answered them, among the most  
Was gladness, that yet time remained for thought:  
And that the first hot words of Jerimoth  
Stood not for their reply.

In close debate,  
Angry and loud, at times, then entered they.  
But when, like meeting rivers, which, long while  
Warring together, mix at last their waves,  
And, in one channel, murmuring, take their way,—  
The long contending wranglers ceased to jar;  
And answer was agreed on,—to the Medes  
Nebaioth went, though with slow foot, and sad,—  
For much he feared the issue,—and once more  
Before the rulers brought them, and the chiefs,  
That they might hear it.

When all silent sat,  
Rose Jerimoth; and, on the expecting Medes  
His bright eye fixing, bluntly thus began.

“The words I spake,—unpleasing to the rest,—  
Give, or withhold ; for, either way, to me  
Nought matters it : yet, mark ye,—as my own,  
Not as the answer of the assembled chiefs,  
Let them be spoken. For the general voice,  
Thus the reply.

“ ‘To your most stern demand,  
An iron fate compels us to give ear.  
If, by the gods’ decree, our towers of strength  
Must yield to you,—submissively we bow :  
Even let our women, and our little ones,  
Our sons, and aged parents, wander forth,  
That ye may riot in our quiet homes,  
And wallow in our spoil : even let our walls,  
Or stand, or in thick smoke go up to heaven,  
As best shall please you : but, of noble men,  
Why ask ye that, which, for all time to come,  
Must black them with dishonor ? Why to us  
Proffer ye life ; and liberty to go,  
Unquestioned, unmolested, wheresoe’er  
Choice, or blind chance, may lead us,—yet, to him,  
Who all our homage, all our duty claims,—  
And now the most, when by fate’s ruthless heel  
Trampled, and strengthless—grace, or favor, none  
Will grant at all ; but death inevitable  
Pronounce upon him ? Why ’gainst him alone  
This pestilent malice ? And what dastard slaves,  
Hateful to all the world, should we become,  
Him in his last great need abandoning,  
Our own brief lives to save ! Leave free the king :  
From us no oath of blind allegiance claim :  
Let him, like us, another city seek,  
Or other empire found,—then, to your hands  
We yield ourselves, and will the gates throw wide,  
That ye may enter : but, if for his blood,  
Tiger-like, still ye thirst,—then blood for blood,  
A deluge will be shed ; for not one foot,  
Save with the lives of thousands, shall ye gain.  
All men must die : and, to the noble mind,  
Whether to-morrow, or long ages hence,

Small matter, so he but with honor die.  
Long life, with infamy, were but a curse,  
And we reject it. Then with you it rests,  
A poor revenge on one man to forego,  
Or, that to gain, the blood of myriads shed !'

"Such is our answer : and the eternal rock  
Not more unbending than our fixed resolve.  
Reply not then ; but, with what speed ye may,  
Haste to report it."

Silently, and sad,  
The Medes arose, and to the camp returned.

Amid the assembled leaders when they stood,  
And told their tidings,—all awhile sat mute.  
But, with a smile upon his lips, at length,  
Belesis rose, and to Arbaces thus :  
"Declared I not all labor would be vain,  
Their hearts to change ; or, from the fate decreed,  
To save the guilty city ? Their own will,  
Maugre the will of man, the gods still work ;  
And, from the earth's foundations, have they doomed,  
At the due time, this city's overthrow,  
And utter desolation. Lo ! their wall  
Is rent asunder ; and the ravenous fires  
Devour their dwellings ; yet still hard as stone  
Remain their hearts ; and will, till in one heap  
Of smoking ruins the proud city lie."

To him no answer made the sorrowing Mede ;  
But, with few words the chiefs dismissing, passed  
To the inner tent ; alone and silent there  
With his own heart to counsel.

Dark, and stern,  
That morning from his bed had risen the king.  
His fate inevitable now he knew ;  
And how to meet it pondered. With harsh words,  
He to his captains conference refused :  
And when, with cheeks tear-sprinkled, Tartan came,  
And told the summons of the haughty Mede,  
And what had been replied,—his answer still

Was but the same: "Let no man trouble me,  
 Nor for me care; but each, as best he may,  
 Take what he hath of costly,—gold, or gems,—  
 And, with his parents, wife, and children, flee,  
 Ere yet the enemy block up the gates,  
 And chain you to your doom. Let no man hope:  
 Help is impossible; nor Bel himself  
 Could from destruction his own city save.  
 Then, while the way yet open lies, bid all,  
 Who still would live, haste forth. But, as for me,  
 Here, where the glory of my life hath been,  
 Shall be my death-place too. I cannot fly;  
 I cannot yield me to a rebel's arm;  
 But I can die: and, dying, shall be still  
 Their master,—snatching from their insolent grasp  
 The monarch whom, with most pestiferous breath,  
 They would insult, then slay. Of this enough:  
 Wipe from thine eyes those womanish drops; then list.  
 To thee his last command Assyria's king  
 Hath yet to give. From out the walls this night  
 My children shall I send; and treasure such,  
 That unto each a monarch's wealth will be.  
 In Paphlagonia, with mine ancient friend  
 The satrap Cotta, a brave, upright man,  
 Will they find safety. Tartan, to thy charge,  
 As from my death-bed, I commit them now.  
 Take all my chariots, for no heavy wains  
 Must cumber your swift flight: take likewise all  
 That once were hers—my noble, beauteous queen!  
 Ah! blest so soon to die! for life had now  
 Been torture insupportable! Great gods!  
 I have been mad—mad—mad!"

He ceased; tore out

Distractedly his hair; his garments rent;  
 Beat on his bosom; moaned, and wailed aloud.

Tartan, his head averting, with both hands  
 Covered his face, and wept.

But, in brief time,  
 His soul re-manning, thus, with faltering tongue,  
 The grief-struck king pursued: "Forbear, forbear:

Sorrow is useless now : when thou art far  
From this lost city ; and no task remains,  
Calling to action,—then thy tears pour forth ;  
And mourn for him who, had he not been king,  
Perchance had been less wretched, and less wrong.  
Mark now my last command. Two thousand horse,  
In mail complete, the choicest of the host,  
Have thou at sunset nigh the palace gate,  
Fronting the south. The chariots in the court  
Shall bide their coming. With my children place  
Thy blooming wife : and whomsoe'er beside  
From ruin thou would'st save, them also place  
In chariots nigh at hand. Of gems, and gold,  
Take, as thy guerdon, amply, royally.  
For thy whole life to come must thou provide ;  
Since all thine own possessions soon will pass  
To rebel hands, or perish in the flames.  
Go through my palace then ; take what thou wilt ;  
For nought to me is estimable more ;  
And what thou shalt not take, will be the spoil  
Of the detested Mede. Three cars apart,  
With richest treasure laden, are prepared :  
Each by a hundred, picked from out the best,  
Night and day guarded. Unto Cotta, two,  
One, to Nitocris take. When, first, in care  
Of that just man thou hast my children placed ;  
And their great riches to his upright hands  
Surrendered duly,—to Nitocris then,  
The sister of my queen, and once, alas !  
By me too foully wronged,—speed instantly.  
Thou know'st of old her dwelling. Keep with thee  
The mail-clad horse whom hence thou wilt lead forth ;  
For precious is the freight ; and robbers now,  
And plundering troops, will swarm throughout the land.  
“ The car, by Uriel ruled, conduct thou then  
With jealous care : and, when within her gates  
It shall be taken,—to Nitocris thus,  
Say thou in private. ‘ From Assyria's lord,  
Sardanapalus, last of that long line  
Of monarchs most illustrious, am I come.

As from his tomb, receive the words I speak ;  
For in the shades of death he wanders now !  
Thus said the king : Behold ! the gods, incensed,  
Have brought destruction over all my realm.  
The earthquake, and the flood, have overthrown  
My wall, deemed everlasting : foes at hand,  
Innumerable, soon will pour within.  
My days are few ; my heart is desolate ;  
Yet mighty still. Assyria's lord shall ne'er,  
For insolent rebels be a mockery :  
Nor will ingloriously by flight prolong  
A life he loathes : nor o'er the wreck of power,  
In moping melancholy, idiot-like,  
Sit brooding : but, as he a king hath lived,  
By his own hand will, still a king, expire.  
Nitocris, sister to my noble queen,—  
Ah timely gone !—as from the grave, I ask  
Thy full forgiveness. All intoxicate  
With power ; and to my passions still the slave,  
I knew not what I did. Be then the offence  
With my cold ashes buried : and when thought  
Of the lost king ariseth, be his name  
Not with dishonor spoken. For a gift  
Of brotherly love, from this great treasure sent,  
Take thou the third : wealth for thy utmost wants ;  
Yea, for the splendor of a kingly throne,  
Amplly sufficient : but the rest remains  
For them who have found refuge in thy gates.'

" When, Tartan, to the sister of my queen  
Thou hast thus spoken ; earnestly implore  
That to thy presence may my child be brought,  
Nehushta ; and the youth who with her fled,  
Prince Dara,—for with her do they abide,—  
As I this very morn have surely learned  
From one who there beheld them,—and are bound,  
In knot of marriage. Haply, had I still  
Been the world's monarch, this had roused my wrath.  
But noble is the youth ; of royal blood ;  
And well he loves her. I am then content ;  
Yea joyful ; for, of parents both bereft,

Peril had else beset her. To thy words  
Nitocris will give heed : and, when they come  
Into thy presence,—on my daughter's head  
Place thou thy hands, as mine I place on thee,  
And say, ' The blessing of thy father, dead,  
Be on thee evermore ; and on the youth  
Whom thou hast wedded ! Long and happy years  
Be yours ; contentment, health, and virtuous life !  
And may your children, and their children live  
An honor and a blessing to your age ;  
And leave to all posterity a name  
Beloved and worshipped !'

“ Then, when she hath risen,—  
For she will kneel ; I know my child will kneel,  
To the deputed blessing,—speak thou on.  
' Thus to the daughter of his love doth say  
Assyria's fallen king. Forgive, my child,  
That, in extremity of threatening fate,  
Thy life I seemed to peril : but, be sure,  
No power of man, nor even the gods' command,  
Audibly spoken, could have forced me on  
To the abhorred completion. Auguries,  
Boldly delivered as the voice of heaven ;  
And visions of the night, deceitful all,  
Had taught me that mere show of that dire act,—  
Obedience 'tokening,—by the wrathful gods  
Would be accepted ; and the sacrifice  
Demanded not. My people then to save,  
I bade prepare the altar. Thee had Fate,—  
Or what appeared the hand of heaven itself,—  
As victim singled : and a tongue accursed,  
Frenzied, or fiendish, urged me ever on,  
Even to the last dire end,—if in the fight  
Should still the foe prevail : but crown, and life,  
Power, and dominion, all had I resigned,  
Rather than with thy pure and innocent blood  
Insured them, though had tenfold been their worth.  
Show of obedience only, to the black,  
The hellish mandate, did I sanction then ;  
But, with most stern command, on pain of death,

The act did interdict. Thus, seemingly,  
But never in the truth,—thy wretched sire  
Did to thy death consent. Even from his grave,  
He calleth on thee to forgive him then ;  
Nor speak his name with curses,—as, perchance,  
Malicious men, or ignorant of the truth,  
Might, else, have taught thee.'

“Tartan, when thou thus  
Unto my child hast spoken ; and when she,  
After awhile, her tears hath wiped away,—  
Then, to the chamber be the treasures brought ;  
Thyself the work o'erlooking. And now, mark.  
When the strong oaken planks, with iron bound,  
Which all the chariot's cavity enclose,  
Shall have been opened,—thou wilt find within  
Three roomy chests : of sandal wood is one,  
Two are of cedar. Task for four strong men,  
Picked from a host, would be each chest to lift.  
Then, to the chamber when they shall be borne,—  
Upon the single chest of sandal wood  
Lay thou thy hand, and to Nitocris say ;  
'This gift, while yet he lived, and was a king,  
Sardanapalus to the sister loved  
Of his most noble and lamented queen,  
Did send, to be her own for evermore.  
Take it ; be happy ; and the past forget.'

“And when she hath her hand upon it placed,  
Accepting it, and hath the answer given,—  
Then, on the boxes twain of cedar wood  
Lay thou thy hands, and to my daughter say :  
'These gifts, Assyria's most unhappy king,  
Unto his child, his loved Nehushta, sends,  
To be her own for ever. Take them then ;  
Be happy, and be good ; both thou and thine !  
Thy father pardon ; but forget him not.'

“These words when thou hast said ; and when my  
child  
Upon the chests her tender hands hath placed,  
Accepting them,—then is thy task performed ;  
The last injunction of thy sometime lord

Is well discharged ; and thou art ever free.  
And if, as some have taught, the spirit of man,  
From flesh disjoined, doth wander o'er the earth,  
Noting the deeds of men ; and o'er their fate  
Not powerless, or for evil, or for good,  
Then shall my grateful ghost thee aid and bless  
Through all thy life to come.—Yet, for myself,  
Total oblivion, endless night, a blank  
Such as to me was all ere life began,  
Were happiest, best ! for, in what future time,  
Could I forget the past : and what, to me,  
Dis-throned, and powerless, were eternity,  
Save an unending anguish ! But enough :  
For private thought be this. Thou now hast heard,  
And well dost understand, the last behest  
Of one, to thee no tyrant, whatsoe'er  
By others he be deemed. Farewell ! be true ;  
Be just ; in all things honorable be,  
As thou hast ever been : and, when this storm,  
Now desolating, shall have passed away,  
Again wilt thou be happy."

Having said,  
Around the weeping youth his arms he cast,  
And strained him to his bosom.

With bowed head,  
Sobbing, and trembling, Tartan went : and he,  
The miserable king, upon his couch  
Heavily groaning, sank : yet tears shed none :  
Their fountain was dried up. As, in one night,  
Had twenty years upon him laid their weight,  
His face was shrunk, and agèd. All alone,  
Corpse-like he lay ; and unto none would speak ;  
Nor food, or wine, would taste.

But, toward the night,  
When word was brought him, that, in safety all,  
And undisturbed, unthreatened by the foe,  
His children, with the chariots and the horse,  
Had from the Phrygian gate, in order firm,  
Gone forth ; and now were far upon the plain,—  
Then, as a load were suddenly uplift

From soul and body, he, with brightening face,  
Bade set before him food : and, eagerly  
As a parched traveller in the desert drinks  
Of the cool liquid diamond, drank he,  
In long and copious draughts, inspiring wine.

Anon to him was said ; " Behold ! my lord,  
The watchers on the southern battlement  
Have seen from far the torches moving on,  
Till now in utmost distance are they lost ;"  
Then more his heart was glad. But when, at length,  
Again the word was brought, " O king of kings !  
The men who on the highest pinnacles,  
And on the mound of Ninus, keep the watch,  
Have seen the torches, even like sinking stars,  
Beyond the farthest stretch of sight go down ;  
Yet sign or sound of foe there hath been none,"—  
Then, with loud voice, and with a ringing laugh,—  
That seemed like joy, yet was but merriment  
Of madness mocking misery,—he called,  
And bade musicians play, and women sing,  
And dance before him, as in times of old.  
And, ever and anon, he lifted up  
The ruby goblet, and cried out, " Ha ! ha !  
'Tis brave ; 'tis beautiful ; again, again."

His eyes were bright as tiger's in the gloom ;  
Red as hot coals his cheeks : but, as the worm  
That gnaws the dead, already were within,  
Eating his heart,—on every feature stamped,  
Was a strange ghastliness ; a grave-like mark ;  
As though the cold and bony hand of Death  
Had pressed, and shrunk the flesh ; or, as the life  
That glowed within the burning body yet,  
Were but the stirring of some fiendish thing,  
Within a new-made corpse.

So revelled he,  
As ne'er before he revelled ; as no more,  
Save once, he e'er should revel.

Hot, and loud,  
Delirious, but not joyful, through the night  
Thus on he fared : and, when the sun arose,

Starring with gems each dewy blade of grass,  
And from their night of slumber calling up,  
As with a voice of gladness and of love,  
All birds, and beasts, and every happy thing,  
That on the earth, or in the waters lives,—  
The wretched master of the world's great throne,  
In a hot darkness, covering, as a pall,  
Body and soul alike, sank down to sleep.

## BOOK THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

WHILE yet the king his feverish revel held,  
Arbaces, from a hot and sleepless bed,—  
For his soul grieved when on the woes he thought  
Of that Fate-destined city,—rose, and walked  
In the sweet air and silence of the dawn,  
That he might cool the burning of his brow,  
In stillness meditate, and fix resolve.  
Loose was his robe ; uncovered was his head :  
The light breeze stirred his locks of wavy gold. .  
By care his face was marked : as though with pain,  
His high expansive front magnificent,  
Was dark, and wrinkled : close were pressed those lips,  
Firm, and majestic ; and all eloquent  
Of the great soul within : of gentleness,  
Of justice, and benevolence, in peace ;  
Of power, and burning ardor, in the strife.  
Through the wide ruin of the wall, at length,  
His calm, grand eye, clear as the starry night,  
On the lost city pensively he fixed ;  
Marking how, since the eve, the ravening flames  
Black chasms had left, where once had been the homes  
Sacred, perchance, to peace, and all the joys  
Of love domestic. Picturing thus the bliss  
For ever gone, the miseries yet to be,  
Tears filled his eyes ; and fain had he resigned  
Power, and ambition ; and to humblest life

Descended,—so, by that self-sacrifice,  
Those ills he might have stayed; yet gained the good,  
For which alone the strife.

Resolved, at length,  
Soon as the sun, by the glad myriads hymned,  
Above the eastern mountains had arisen,—  
The princes, and the leaders, to his tent  
He summoned: and, when all were well refreshed,  
His thoughts made known; nor opposition found.

Almelon then, and fervent Azareel,  
Again selecting, he addressed them thus.  
“Once more, my friends, unto the city speed;  
And to the rulers and the captains say:  
‘Are ye not blind,—for one most wicked man,  
To call on heads of myriads, innocent,  
Assured destruction! What can ye expect?  
Your wall is opened wide; the ebbing flood,  
In few days more, will leave a broad highway  
For thousands, ranked abreast, to pour within:  
Nor have ye strength to stay us. Ere the night,  
Our horse and chariots will your gates block up:  
Ye cannot flee; ye cannot stand in fight:  
Your city burns; ye cannot quench the flames.  
Were we so bloody-minded,—every man,  
And every woman, every living thing  
Within your walls, to death might we devote.  
But pity moves us: and the brotherly hand,—  
Were peace assured,—to all would we extend.  
The galling yoke is broken evermore,  
Wherewith, for ages, hath Assyria’s power  
Enslaved the nations; and the East is free.  
What would ye, then? Would ye weak mortals tempt,  
In pride of conquest, on yourselves the yoke  
Retributive to place? Ye have no hope:  
Ye cannot conquer; cannot long resist:  
Contending, ye must fall. If, then, our blood  
Thus needlessly, thus wantonly ye shed,  
What can ye look for, but such vengeance dire  
As may all future despots pale with dread,  
And make the gentle weep? Oh tempt us not!  
Weak are the strongest; foolish the most wise!

When boils the blood, its fumes make reason drunk ;  
And deeds are done, at which the nobler soul,  
Recovering, shudders. Once more do we call ;  
Once more implore you, for yourselves and us,  
To stay the scourge of war. Your costly gems,  
Your gold, and silver,—spoil of lands enslaved,—  
Must to your conquerors now be rendered back.  
Plain justice this : but, on allegiance sworn,  
Have we not offered life, and liberty ?  
What would ye more ? Yet, lasting peace to gain,  
More do we grant you. Hear, and ponder well !

“ Whoso, before to-morrow's noon, shall come  
Submissive, and his arms before us lay,  
Swearing allegiance,—he as one of us  
Shall be regarded : and, when from the walls  
Are sent the contumacious, shall remain,  
Possessing still his home, and household wealth,—  
If such the flames have spared,—and 'gainst him none  
Shall cast reproach. Yea, if from out the gates  
Come all the people,—unto every man  
Such grace shall be : and, when the costly spoil,  
Rent from the nations, hath been taken back ;  
And we a king have chosen, who, with right,  
With justice, and beneficence shall rule,—  
Then, to the old in-dwellers, cheerfully,  
Will we the city yield ; and homeward go.

“ But, to her ancient limits, from that day,  
Assyria must return,—room large enough  
For proudest monarch,—and all other lands,  
Late tributary, must be wholly free ;  
Each a self-governed kingdom ; to none else  
In aught accountable. What say ye, then ?  
Were ye not blind, and barbarous, such terms  
Indulgent to reject ? And for what end ?  
To save from punishment one tyrant king,  
Who unto all mankind hath been a scourge :  
Whose food hath been of broken hearts ; whose breath,  
His victims' sighs. Oh ! for such cause, draw not  
On myriads innocent an awful fate !  
THAT MAN MUST DIE ! By earth and heaven alike,  
Irrevocably hath his doom been fixed :

And, though ye perish all,—ye save not him.  
Alone, then, let him die : and on the earth  
May peace descend for ever ! If at once  
Ye do consent,—then, by a solemn oath,  
That which we now have said, will we confirm :  
And, pouring all our host into your gates,—  
With brotherly zeal, regarding neither toil,  
Hardship, nor peril,—day and night will strive,  
The flames to quench, which, longer uncontrolled,  
Too surely will in utter ruin lay  
This great and glorious city.

“ ‘ But, if ye,  
Guilty, not less than mad, will still resist,—  
Then on your heads alone be all the weight  
Of ills to fall ! As conquerors strike we then,  
Who would have come as friends. But, be ye wise ;  
And, for yourselves and us, such fate avert.’ ”

“ So to the rulers and the captains speak ;  
And be not soon repulsed : for if, at first,  
With hot speech they reply,—speak yet again,  
Conjuringly ; and, taking, if ye may,  
The bolder men apart,—in private urge,  
And with new force, what publicly ye spake.  
Go swiftly then ; and may the all-ruling gods  
Your labors bless ! ”

When they had gone, once more  
To the chief leaders turning, thus he spake.  
“ Take chariots, horse, and tents,—of food, and wine,  
A six days' full provision. Hasten then ;  
And all the distant city-gates well guard,  
That none may issue. But if, suppliant,  
The men come forth,—their arms delivering up,  
And a safe passage craving to our camp,—  
Untouched let them proceed. Or, if you see  
Unwarlike men, who with their wives come forth,  
Their children, or their parents,—let them pass :  
Nay, if their household goods they bear away,  
Give them free room : for, not against the weak  
And humble do we war. But, if ye see  
That men of prouder mien do issue forth,  
With cars, or loaded wains,—them must ye stay,

And closely search ; that neither gems, nor gold,  
Be taken from our spoil. But, most of all,  
By day, and night, let heedful watch be kept,  
Lest that the tyrant 'scape. With wary eye,  
Scan every face : for, haughty though he is ;  
Ay, in his own conceit scarce less than God ;  
Yet, life to save, in the most mean disguise,  
Yea in the beggar's tatters, might he shroud  
His deity ; and triumph in the guile.  
Then look to all ; and, whom ye doubt, bring here."

Again before the council of the chiefs  
And rulers of the city, with calm voice,  
And not as missives from a conqueror,  
Almelon, and the faithful Azareel,  
Pleading, conjuring, and exhorting stood.

Their task accomplished,—to an inner room,  
Nebaioth leading them, again they went,  
There to await reply ; and instantly,  
In hot debate, thoughts jarring, voices raised,  
The captains plunged ; and mere confusion reigned.

Some, and no few, then inwardly resolved  
The offered grace to accept ; and privily,  
Ere next day's noon, unto the camp repair ;  
Make full submission, and swear solemnly  
Allegiance to the Mede ; so of their life,  
Their home, and household wealth, to be assured ;  
For in Arbaces every man had trust ;  
And all too surely saw that hope was none,  
And that resistance but worse fate would bring.

So every cautious, every timid man,  
Consoled himself, and said, " If, by my death,  
Life to Assyria's monarch might be bought,  
Good purchase were it : but, my breath of life  
Not, like a worn-out garment, may be cast  
Unheeded from me, and for no return.  
Hot-headed fools, like fiery Jerimoth,  
May love their honor better than their life ;  
And die to save it : but, when life is gone,  
What weighs their honor then ? The jackall's howl  
Above the tomb,—to him who therein rots,  
Were just as welcome, as a hymn of praise,



These words, the Medes  
Heard doubtingly; inclined the head, and went.

For long hours still, the hot Assyrian chiefs  
Tumultuous conference held: yet o'er the rest  
Could none at last prevail. They parted then;  
And, for the early morrow, fixed return  
To final council.

But, ere set the sun,  
From out the gates went many a steed and car;  
Of men on foot went thousands; and their arms  
Unto the Medes delivered; and the oath  
Of true allegiance swore. From out the gates  
Went also, both that night, and on the morn,  
Women, and children, in great multitudes,  
On mules, and asses, riding; and, on wains,  
By oxen drawn, and mules, their household goods  
Bearing away; and weeping as they went.  
For, throughout all the city, soon was known  
The message of the Medes: and, when they heard  
That from Arbaces had the promise come,—  
Firm faith had all. They, then, who purposed flight,  
Went fearlessly; and, to the Median horse  
And chariots, nigh the gates, submission made:  
With kindness were received; and hindered not.

But, on the morrow, when, in council met,  
These things unto the rulers and the chiefs  
Had been made known; and when they also found  
That from among themselves had gone no few,  
Who in the Median camp, as enemies,  
Now stood against them,—scorn, and rage, burst forth.  
Themselves to die, resolved, ere basely yield,—  
Nought were they shaken: and the brief debate,  
Though stormy, ending, thus spake Jerimoth.  
“At length, then, we are fixed. The rotten few  
Have dropped away; and all the sound are left;  
The stronger for the severance. Our fate  
We know, and boldly meet. Whate'er his faults,  
The king is yet our king: and though he still,  
Despairing, holds aloof,—yet, with *our* lives,  
*His* life we'll shield; with him will live, or die.

Our soldiers all are true ; and, to the last,  
For homes, and altars, and the king of kings,  
Will stand within the breach ; yea pile a wall  
Of their dead bodies, 'gainst his murderers  
To bar the passage. If in this great cause  
Our fate be death,—we shall at least have lived  
In honor to the last : and, through the world,  
Our names, like bright stars, will for ever shine ;  
Admired, and worshipped : we shall die, to live  
Like gods, 'mong future men ;—far nobler life  
Than that which is but animated earth ;  
Dependent on each breath ; and shared alike  
By every crawling, every noxious thing.  
Such death were glorious riches, then, not loss :  
As such we leap to seize it ; rather far  
Than, by dishonor, basely win a life  
Which were the bitterest death ; a living death ;  
Death to the soul ; and life to but the clay :  
Life such as hath the worm, the toad, the asp,  
Or, meaner still, the cringing, dastard man,  
Hated by all, and hateful to himself :  
A breathing plague-spot ; a still rotting sore ;  
A thing, 'gainst which the brave man stops the nose,  
Turning aside with loathing. Never be  
On us such infamy ! Why, what hath life,  
In all its pleasures, all its sensual joys,  
To match the extatic rapture of the soul,  
When in the thick of battle offering up,  
For a good cause, the heart's last crimson drop !  
When, like the lightning from the dark earth loosed,  
Springs up the exulting spirit, radiant  
In its own glory ; and the mangled clay  
Joyfully quitting,—straightway to the stars  
Shoots onward ; there, in everlasting light,  
Itself a star, to dwell !

“ Then, if to die,  
Welcome we death ! But heaven may yet give life,  
Yea victory : for if, as rumour speaks,  
Aid be at hand,—upon the foe may we  
Pour torrent-like, and sweep him from the plain :  
If not, the very ruins of our wall

Will be a rampart hard to overclimb,  
 When men like us upon it take our stand,—  
 To die prepared, but resolute, till death,  
 No foot of ground to yield. If by my voice  
 Ye were directed, then, our bold reply  
 Should be at once, defiance to the last :<sup>1</sup>  
 But, as the general will from mine dissents,—  
 The rumoured succours hoping; and delay  
 Esteeming, therefore, wiser,—I submit.  
 Two captains choose we, then; and to the Medes  
 Thus let them say, ‘ Three days allow us yet  
 For thought, and for resolve : upon the fourth,  
 We will decide; and heaven protect the right ! ’ ”

So he, and all approved. But, when himself,  
 With young Nebaioth, by the general voice,  
 As messengers were chosen,—scornfully  
 He shook the head, refusing. With glad heart,  
 A stern defiance bearing, had he flown;  
 But, truce to crave, liked not.

Nebaioth, too,  
 The proffered honor, with cold look, declined.  
 He chose not, with a falsehood on his tongue,  
 Before his noble enemy to stand,  
 Time craving for maturer thought, when war  
 Already was resolved. To the lost king,  
 As sole resource now left, immediate flight  
 He still had counselled; and yet cherished hope  
 His words might not be vain.

Sennacherib,  
 And Michael, to the doubtful post, at length,  
 Sore pressed,—not willing,—with a herald went :  
 And, when before Arbaces and the chiefs,  
 In council brought,—low-voiced, reluctantly,  
 Their message told.

In silence, for awhile,  
 The whole assembly stood. His piercing eye,  
 Upon the messengers Arbaces fixed;  
 And, as he gazed, across his countenance stole  
 A darkness, like the thickening of the air  
 When thunder gathers. Round the assembly then

A glance he shot; and every face beheld,  
Lowering, and discontent. The priest, alone,  
With a proud bearing smiled, as he would say,  
"I told you on what hollow reed you leaned :  
Their eyes are blinded ; and their doom is fixed :  
'Gainst Fate all strife is vain."

Then once again  
Upon the Assyrian captains looked the Mede,  
And sternly thus :

"Our generous intent,  
With fraud is met. Not for maturer thought  
Ye ask delay ; but for some covert guile.  
Succour, perchance, ye hope ; or hope, by stealth,  
Your sentenced king may 'scape. Now, dare ye stand,  
With eyes uplift to heaven ; and solemnly  
Call on the gods to witness that your words  
Hide not a falsehood ?—Ye are motionless,  
And have no answer. Brave men are ye both ;  
And all unfit to be the messengers  
Of lying tongues. Your sad and downcast looks  
More honor you than subtlest eloquence,  
The false defending. But now, clear your brows,  
And to my words give heed : for much imports,  
To you, and us, that they be understood,  
And known irrevocable.

"When ye come  
Again in presence of the Assyrian lords,  
Say, thus the Medes reply. 'Your hollow words  
We listen not ; and by your shallow guile  
Are not deceived. For thought, and for resolve,  
Time ample have ye had ; and *have* resolved ;  
Though on no honest course. Fit punishment  
Were, now, our offered mercy to recall ;  
And force you to submission absolute  
Beneath the conqueror's will. With every hour,  
We mark the Tigris sinking to his bed ;  
And know that, ere to-morrow's sun shall set,  
Your wall will be defenceless. Not less ye  
This truth must know. Ye know, too, that your fate,—  
Though we stood idle,—on the breath depends

Of the first waking wind. The ravenous flames,  
Even in the stillness of this utter calm,  
Ye cannot master : what if once again—  
And tokens are not wanting, both on earth  
And in the sky, portending its approach—  
The hurricane should flap its awful wings  
O'er your doomed city ! think ye that, one day,  
Before the flaming Fury it could stand ?  
What hope then have ye ? and why, mad, or blind,  
For sake of one great criminal, should ye  
Your fate, already dark, make black as night ?  
But we have warned you : and, if ill the event,  
Censure yourselves alone. Now, finally,  
Hear our resolve. This one day will we grant,  
This only, ere our mercy we retract,  
And draw the avenging sword. Day's lightning-steeds  
Now more than half way up heaven's arch have run :  
Till they beneath the western hills shall sink,  
Your answer will we wait. If, ere that time,  
The terms propounded ye in full accept,—  
Then shall the solemn oath, by you to us,  
By us to you, be taken ; and may heaven  
Send lasting peace between us ! But, if ye,  
Fate-ruled, will still our offered grace refuse,—  
Then, be that sunset as a clarion blast  
Proclaiming war awaked. From that time forth,  
Cast hope aside ; and arm you to endure  
The worst that may befall ! But still we trust,  
For you, and us, that wiser thoughts may rule.'

“ Go now ; and that which ye have heard, report  
Unto your lords and captains. If our terms  
In full they will accept,—then, with all speed,  
Return unto us ; lest, through more delay,  
The flames should gather to resistless might,  
And utterly consume you. But, if still  
Our offer ye reject ; and, reasonless,  
Will on destruction rush,—then send, at least,  
With what despatch ye may, your aged men,  
Your women, and your children, from the walls,  
Lest also they should perish ; for, be sure,

Not swifter follows thunder on the bolt,  
Than, on the sinking of the flooded stream,  
Shall follow our assault."

Here ceased the Mede :  
The Assyrian captains briefly made reply ;  
Then bowed, and took their way.

But when, anon,  
Amid the rulers and the chiefs they stood,  
And the full answer gave,—then wrath arose  
In minds of many ; and a stern resolve,  
Rather the bitterest ills of fate to dare,  
Than basely, in his last extreme of need,  
Their king to death abandon. Faithfully  
So stood they ; willing life itself to lose,  
The life to save of him who, recklessly,—  
Had his imperious pleasure so impelled,—  
Their blood had poured like water.

Once again,  
As oft of late, Nebaioth urgently  
Craved to the king admittance ; for he hoped,  
By fervour deep of prayer, at last to move  
That obdurate heart, in pity for the woes  
Of myriads, to bow down ; and, by swift flight,  
Himself and them to save.

But now the king  
Access denied him ; for, in black despair,  
Clothed as in armour, to all things without,  
Was he impassive. For Assyria, now,  
For all the millions that still hailed him king,  
No thought had he : he knew that hope was none ;  
That, with the falling of the flooded stream,  
The human tide would enter ; ne'er to ebb  
Till ruin had whelmed all. One hideous thought  
Alone possessed him,—death by his own hand !  
With every passing hour was brought report  
Of the fast-sinking river ; and he knew  
That, with the morrow, or the next day's dawn,  
The final doom must come. Yet, though resolved  
By death to end his woes, and disappoint  
The vengeance of his enemies,—to life

Instinctively still clung he ; to the last,  
The fatal blow deferring.

Nor, as yet,  
Of the unnumbered gates which to the realms  
Of darkness lead the souls of wretched man,  
Had he made choice : the poisoned cup, the sword,  
The water offered rest : nay even, when raged  
Fiercer the madness, in the very flames,  
Exultingly thought he, the oppressive load  
Of life to shake away,—so baffling quite  
The malice of his foes, that even the bones  
Of their once lord supreme,—their victim, last,  
Should mock their blood-hound search.

Yet still, as sank  
The wave of passion, that toward death's dark strand  
Thus bore him onward,—back he shrank appalled,  
As from a precipice ; unnerved his hand,  
His very soul aghast.

Like mournful ghost  
Revisiting the mansion loved in life,—  
Through that resplendent palace, all alone,  
With downcast look he wandered ; and in thought  
Called up the glories, and the joys, all gone ;  
The fearful yet-to-come,—so nigh, so sure,  
Its earthquake-step might almost seem to shake  
The steadfast present.

For long, anxious hours,  
Through the vast, brilliant chambers, gloomily  
Thus roamed he ; then, as if, by change of place,  
Some ease from pain to find,—the lofty roof  
With weary foot he climbed : yet, but to feel  
New torture there ; for, 'neath the unclouded sun,  
Gorgeously shining, lo ! the rebel camp,  
In dread magnificence outspread below,  
As with a lightning-flash his eye-balls seared.  
A moment, with both palms his face he hid,  
Heavily groaning : but his soul re-manned ;  
A deep breath drew ; and once again looked forth.  
Like marble was his cheek ; his lip compressed ;  
His eye distent and gleaming.

"Twas the hour  
Of burning noon ; and all within the camp  
Was motionless, and hushed. Beneath the shade  
Of open tents, the countless myriads lay,  
Peacefully resting. Leaning on his spear,  
Or with slow foot, like one who walks in sleep,  
Listlessly gliding,—here and there he saw  
The unneeded sentinel. In long, close ranks,  
Like unconsuming fire, the brazen cars  
Gleamed to the sun. High o'er the meaner tents,  
In midst of all, the vast pavilion rose  
Of the dread rebel chief ; and, close beside,  
The mast-like staff, whence, idly fluttering now,  
Drooped the gigantic banner ; hated sign  
Of black rebellion waked. He closed his eyes,  
And shuddered.

But, when elsewhere he looked forth,  
No comfort found he. On all sides arose  
The devastating flames : and, last and worst,  
Vision horrific ! lo ! the broken wall,  
A huge, and ghastly breach ! a yawning gulf !  
Dire entrance to the everlasting tomb  
Of all Assyria's glory !

Heart-sick, gazed  
The miserable king ; and longed for death,  
To blot out all for ever ! To the brink  
Of that high roof he walked, and looked below.  
" Here might I die," he said ; " here all forget !  
One onward step ; one resolute downward leap ;  
One moment's passage through the whizzing air ;  
And all would be a blank ! What, then, to me  
Would matter,—though Assyria, as myself,  
Should fall, and perish ! At the final hour,  
Then hither will I come : and, when I mark  
Destruction covering all, here will I die,  
And disappoint my hated enemies !

" But this most glorious palace of the earth,  
By their abominable revelries  
Defiled shall never be : its sumless wealth  
No rebel hand shall clutch. The seer foretold

Banquet, and flood, the earthquake, and the fire,  
As the gods' scourges. Three have come to pass;  
But, for the last, *myself* will be the god  
To execute the doom. This gorgeous pile  
The flames shall swallow; and my own right hand  
Shall kindle the great fire. The vault beneath,  
With every element of combustion quick,  
Shall be surcharged. The palace of the world  
Shall be extinguished, as a burnt-out torch:  
And the detested rebel shall not glut  
His wolfish eyes with even the very dust  
That was Assyria's king. But, no delay:  
The end draws nigh.—Thought must be action now."

Strong in that dire resolve,—with rapid step,  
Downward he went: before him called in haste  
The astonished captain of the household guard;  
And hurriedly thus spake.

"Jehabad, heed

What now I bid thee. See that it be done  
Swiftly, and well; else, will the monarch's wrath  
Fall heavy on thee. Summon instantly  
Thy soldiers, every man. Throughout the vault  
Beneath the palace, let them pile up wood,  
As for a thousand watch-fires: and thereon  
Be poured, in torrents, pitch, and bitumen,  
Naphtha, or aught inflammable more,—that fire  
Unquenchable may in a moment rise.

"The foe, to-morrow, or the next day's dawn,  
Will enter at the breach. They look to feast  
Within the radiant chambers of the king;  
And revel in his spoils. Fools! let them come!

"But now no time for words. Away at once.  
When all is ready,—see that thou appear  
Again before the king; that his own eyes  
May look upon the work; and that his hand  
May deal the rich reward." Jehabad bowed,  
With knee upon the floor; then rose, and went.

A strength demoniac gathered in the soul  
Of the great despot, as the fearful end  
He thus resolved. The world itself in flames,

To him had seemed but fitting funeral pyre  
For the world's dying lord. A bitter laugh  
Burst, ever and anon, as to and fro  
With heavy foot he stalked; and his red eye  
Flashed mockery, as round the gorgeous walls,  
And on the priceless treasures, oft he glanced,  
And triumphed o'er his baffled enemy.

Anon he called: the obedient lords appeared;  
And thus he gave command.

“My sun goes down;  
But shall set brightly. What to-morrow's eve  
May bring, I know not: but to-day is mine;  
And shall be joyous, though the jaws of death  
Gape for me ere it close. Then, order take,  
That in the chamber of the sun be spread  
This night a banquet, such as may outshine  
All former revel. Through the palace go:  
And whatsoe'er is richest, and most rare,  
That gather ye; and in the feasting hall,  
On the spare tables, and the couches spread.  
The golden, and the silver statues, place  
Around the walls; and on the floor pile up  
The treasure-chests, the vases, and the bowls,  
The jewel caskets,—and whate'er beside,  
Of rare and costly, may not elsewhere stand.

“But with my concubines alone I feast:  
In all their beauty, their most bright attire,  
Then bid them come; and let their hearts be glad.  
To-morrow, haply, may they—but, enough:  
Ye know my will. See it be all fulfilled.”

When thus the king had spoken,—and his lords  
Submissively had bowed, and gone their way,—  
Again he felt alone: his soul again  
Bent underneath its load of wretchedness.  
Upon a couch his burning frame he threw,  
And longed for sleep,—ay, deep eternal sleep. “

But not one instant came forgetfulness  
To cool his burning brain; and, like to one  
By fever racked, his restless limbs he tossed,  
And rolled his blood-shot eyes. Thus passed the hours,

At length the captain of the palace-guard,  
So ordered, in his presence stood again,  
Bowed low, and spake. "Dread lord ! thy will is done ;  
The work is finished."

With a sudden strength,  
As at glad tidings brought, uprose the king ;  
And downward hurried : the vast vault explored :  
And, as the sleeping elements of fire  
Upheaped he saw ; and knew that, at one touch,  
Like a volcano wakened, all would burst  
In flame unquenchable,—delirious joy  
Shot through his soul. He felt that, at the last,  
Himself should be the conqueror ; and laughed out  
A hollow, fiendish laugh. The vast, dark vault  
From all its depths laughed back ; as if with mirth  
Of demons in derision. But, with scorn,  
The thought he banished ; and a lustrous gem,  
The ransom of a noble, from his vest  
Forth drawing, to the captain of the guard  
Gave it, and thus ; "Faithful, as brave, art thou :  
Swiftly and well thy task hast thou performed ;  
And all dost merit. To thy soldiers, too,  
Shall rich reward be given. But hasten now ;  
And place before the portal chosen men,  
Who day and night shall keep a heedful watch,  
That no man enter."

Having said, he went ;  
And in his chamber waited restlessly  
The hour of his last banquet : knowing not  
That in the bottom of the cup lay Death !

## BOOK THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

So fared the wretched king. But, in the camp,  
To greater end the moments, big with fate  
Of millions, had been passed. Since hour of noon,  
Anxiously watchful, thousands had looked forth,  
Hoping, ere sank the doom-suspending sun,  
That, from the city issuing, they might see  
The messengers of peace. But, girt with clouds,  
Fire-edged and angry, the red orb went down ;  
And the last day of lingering mercy died !

Soon, in Arbaces' tent the captains met,  
To hasty council summoned : and himself  
The first thus spake. " No answer hath been sent :  
The truce is o'er ; and, by to-morrow's dawn,—  
So swiftly ebbs the river,—we may storm,  
Dry-shod, the breach. But, ye have marked the heavens,  
The iron clouds, and heard the wailing wind ;  
And know that tempest threatens ; yea with signs  
Strange and portentous. If again should fall  
The cataracts from heaven's ocean,—ere the morn,  
Tigris again will rise, and bar the way :  
And we still long must wait. The enemy  
As yet expects us not ; nor, haply, knows  
How far hath ebb'd the flood : for, by the breach,  
No watch is stationed. At the set of sun,  
Valiant and trusty men I sent,—the depth  
To try ; and carefully the ground explore,  
For best, and surest entrance. Not one man

Stood there to spy for enemy ! To the knee,  
Not deeper, did they wade : the ruins, then,  
At two great gaps o'erclimbing,—openings clear  
Right in the city saw they : nor, even there,  
Found one to question them. I counsel, then,  
That, with all safe despatch, this very night  
Assault be made ;—so may success be won,  
The surest, soonest ; and with least of loss  
To us, and them, alike. If wise ye deem  
This counsel,—then my farther thoughts at once  
Will I expound ; for all have I designed ;  
And time for act is short."

The general voice

Loudly approved ; and then again he spake.

" All night will be thick darkness : nor, till dawn,  
Will rise even the worn moon. With prudent speed,  
Let all prepare them, then, that, from the camp,  
One hour ere midnight we may take our way.  
The favoring breeze right from the city blows ;  
So, haply, may no sound of our approach  
Reach the dull watchers' ears : yet, cautiously,  
Slowly, and silently, must all move on :  
And this the order be of our attack.

" Archers, and spearmen, two score thousand strong,  
Shall at both gaps assault : but all the rest,—  
Chariots, and horse, and foot,—in separate bands,  
Before each northern gate must take their place ;  
And, silent, wait the event. The breach once passed,  
The soldiers then, in firm array, right on,  
Stopping for nought, must speed ; and every gate  
That fronts the camp fling open. Let the horse  
First enter. Through the Nisroch gate who pass,  
Or gate of Palms,—must toward the palace haste ;  
And hem it round, that no one thence may 'scape.  
The infantry, quick following them, its gates  
Must burst, or overclimb ; and from his den  
Drag forth the tyrant. Meantime, through the squares,  
And the chief streets, shall cars and horse move on,  
To check advancing foes. The despot slain,  
Or captured, brief resistance will be made,

And mercy sued for. Haply, so, may peace,  
Even on the morrow, this dire contest end.

“ Throughout the camp, then, unto every man,  
Be these things well made known ; confusion, else,  
May come upon us, and discomfiture,  
Or heavy loss. And, furthermore, to all  
Thus be it ordered. ‘ Till the word shall come,  
Let not a soldier, tempted howsoe’er,  
For plunder rove : since, separate from the rest,  
Might many be cut off. Let no man strike  
The unarmed, or unresisting ; for such deed  
Shame would bring on us. Lastly, let all heed  
That none upon a woman lay the hand  
Of violence ; for such shall surely die.’

“ Now, with all temperate haste, unto our tasks  
Let us go forth : and may the mighty gods  
Give to our labors victory, and peace !”

He ended : all were glad, and went their way :  
And soon throughout the camp was heard the hum  
Of cautious preparation ; man to man  
In low tone speaking ; the dull clink of arms  
Hastily donned ; the tread of horses’ feet ;  
The gentle roll of chariots, in array  
Warily ordered : and, at length, the tramp,  
Stealthy, and slow, of all that mighty host,  
’Mid darkness marching on.

---

As day’s great lamp  
Beneath the western hills in pomp went down,—  
On him no more to rise,—Assyria’s king,  
To the resplendent chamber of the sun,  
For his last banquet went. Already placed  
Each on her lustrous seat, in richest robes  
Dazzling to look upon, the concubines  
His coming waited. Like a summer’s dew  
In the first sunbeam, costliest gems, and pearls,  
Hung thick upon them. Round the spacious hall  
Up-piled, might seem the treasures of a world.  
The air was perfume. Music exquisite,—

Faint as in noontide dreams of tender maid,  
Sick with first love,—in distance rose, and fell.  
All that could palate, eye, ear, fancy, charm,  
Was there abundant : all save that pure joy,  
That sunshine of the heart, in which alone  
Lives happiness. A hundred women, young  
And beautiful ; of all the ransacked East,  
The choicest flowers, arose as he went in.

In his most gorgeous robes attired,—with gems  
Glittering like sun-sparks on a bubbling spring,—  
The monarch entered ; and, with blandest word  
And smile, to all gave greeting.

But that smile  
Strange was, and fearful : each her breath drew quick  
Each to the other looked, and then again  
Upon the king ; and inwardly all said,  
“ Distempered is his brain ; his look is gaunt  
As if shrunk up with age ! ”

Yet, with forced glee,  
From one to the other went the unconscious king,  
And spake the words of gladness. But his voice  
Was hollow as the echo in a vault ;  
His eyes shone torch-like ; from his touch came fire :  
And, when fond words he whispered in the ear,  
Like hot steam from a caldron seemed his breath.

Aghast all looked upon him, as on thing,  
Not of this world : and each, as he drew near,  
Trembled, and would have fled.

But, at the feast,  
At length, they sat ; and joyously, and loud,  
From bands unseen, the stirring music pealed.

Deeply the monarch drank ; and with gay tones,  
Still feigned high merriment. But, as the sun,  
Through the hoar mist of Arctic region, shoots  
On icy pinnacle his slanting beam,  
Powerless to thaw,—so vainly strove his mirth,  
The frost of grief and fear which bound each heart,  
In joy to melt. At times, a pallid face  
In answer strove to smile ; 'twas like the glance  
Of moonlight on a marble sepulchre :

A forced, and feeble laugh, at times, replied ;  
It seemed a mirth-dressed sob :

The night drew on :  
With choicest fruits, and flowers, and nectarous wines,  
The tables now were spread. The attendants all  
Had been dismissed ; and with his concubines  
Alone the king remained. Then called he out  
For louder, gladder music ; and stood up,  
Inviting to the dance.

Obedient rose  
The beauteous victims ; but their languid limbs  
Heavily moved, as if of life half 'reft ;  
Their looks were mournful, as of those who weep  
Above the just-closed grave.

“ Ho ! cease the dance !  
Cease music, cease ! ” exclaimed the angry king,  
On the floor harshly stamping. “ What means this ?  
What cloud is it hangs o'er you, shedding night,  
Where should be summer's day-beam ? Ye are owls,  
Who should be nightingales ; or, rather, larks,  
Singing as up they go to meet the day ;  
For your day is at hand. To-morrow's sun  
Shall witness the deliverance of you all.  
From out the gates shall ye ride joyously ;  
Each bearing gold, and gems, the dower of queen.  
Amid yon rebel camp, with open arms  
Will ye be welcomed ; and the proudest there,  
Will bend the knee, and sue to be your slaves,  
Your wedded slaves. Behold these chests of gold,  
These jewel-caskets,—each a mine of wealth !  
All, all are yours. To-morrow, at high noon,  
Gather together here, and take your fill.  
To me they now are nothing ; spare them not ;  
For, if not yours, a spoil will they become  
To the vile rebel. Then away with care,  
And let your eyes be bright. Take each a cup,  
A brimming cup of soul-delighting wine :  
Let mirth and jocund dance so fire our hearts,  
That, to the end of time, it may be said,  
Assyria's merriest revel was his last.”

They heard, astonished ; and, with brightening looks,

Quaffed each the nectarous draught ; for every heart  
Throbb'd wildly with gay hope ; and love for him,  
The despot king, felt none. Of happy homes  
Fondly they thought ; and many a soft eye gleamed  
With tears of sudden joy. In virgin youth,  
From parents, brethren, sisters,—and the land  
That gave them birth, had some been torn away ;  
From loving, broken-hearted husbands, some.  
The tyrant's will no human tie could bind :  
Report of beauty heard,—he had sent forth  
Command to seize it : and none dared resist !

Filled now with hope of freedom,—every face  
Beamed sunshine ; and the heavy limb grew light,  
As it might tread on air.

The tyrant marked  
That sudden brightening ; and his heart was wroth.  
They joyed to leave him then ! him ! earth's dread lord !  
They, the poor slaves, to whom his lightest look  
Had been a law ; whose lives were on his breath ;  
They joyed to leave him !

In his maddening brain  
Then first awoke a diabolic thought !  
Like gleam from hell, on his black soul it came ;  
Glared hideously,—and went : too soon, alas !  
Fiercer to come again ! A strange, dark smile  
Gloom'd o'er his face ; yet horror chilled his blood :  
He started, as from some terrific dream ;  
Hastily took again the guise of mirth ;  
And mingled in the dance ; called out, anon,  
For merrier music ; quaffed the frequent cup ;  
And thought he laugh'd at fate.

Thus sped the hours.  
All in the palace marvelled, when they heard,  
Far on in night, those sounds of revelry ;  
Knowing the period of the truce was o'er ;  
And that the foe, like couchant lion, watch'd  
The moment for his spring. The very morn'  
So soon to follow on that reckless night,  
Might see, perchance, the shielding flood withdrawn ;  
The human deluge pouring through the breach.

But none there dream'd that, even then, the plain

Trembled beneath the tread of arméd hosts,  
The hot steed's trample, and the chariot-wheel.

Even they who on the battlement kept guard,  
Heard not their coming ; for the gathering wind,  
Right from the city toward the hostile camp  
Swept strongly,—bringing on its wings the moan  
Of fires wide scattered, and the din confused  
Of those who toiled to quench them ; but all sounds  
Upon the plain beneath, bore far away.  
So, nought suspecting, in the dreamy mood  
Of wearied men who watch, they walked and mused.  
And when, at length, some broad and heavy drops,  
Wide scattered, heralding a storm, 'gan fall,—  
Their hope was, that the flood again might rise,  
And baffle still the foe. Thus, dreading nought  
Of present danger, each man, as he might,  
From wind and rain sought shelter.

But, at length,  
When the deep thunder in the distance spake ;  
And on the far horizon gleamed the fires  
Of hotly warring lightnings ; and 'gan fall,  
With quicker, broader, heavier, harder plash,  
The strong, large rain,—then, here and there, looked  
forth

A solitary watcher, inly glad  
At thought of havoc that dire-threatening storm  
Might bring upon the enemy. But lo !  
Sun-bright beneath the lightnings, the plain burned  
With hosts of mail-clad men ; chariots and horse,  
Moving together on !

A moment gleamed  
That sight of dread ; then all again was dark,  
Formless, and soundless. Had it been a dream,  
Or sense-illusion ? Haply so thought some.  
But no : the alarm was given : out came the blast  
Of warning trumpets ; peal on peal they rang ;  
From point to point, through all the city flew  
The dread alarm.

Starting from their sleep,  
Upsprang the myriads ; some, in haste to arm ;  
Some, wild with terror, shrieking ; some, to hide

Their wives, their children, or their little wealth ;  
Some bent on flight ; some to their gods in prayer  
Hastily falling down ; but all amazed,  
Confused, and terror-struck.

Yet still was doubt  
Among the watchers on the battlement ;  
For few had seen ; and, when the rest sped forth  
To look upon the field,—in such dense cloud  
Drove the slant rain that, though the heavens again  
Brightly were kindled, scarce an arrow-flight  
Could keenest vision pierce. Amazed, confused,  
They shrank, and to their shelter fled again ;  
Sure that no foe, against that angry heaven  
Could dare contend.

But, 'mid the storm's dread howl,  
Fearful though faint, anon the blast was heard  
Of hostile trumpet sounding the assault.

When first the Medes,—along the river's bank  
Advancing toward the breach,—the alarum heard  
Upon the battlement ; and knew the foe  
Was roused, and arming ; and when, like a stream  
From precipice launched, against them dashed the rain,  
And in their eyes the ceaseless lightnings gleamed,—  
Staggered were they, bewildered ; and stood still,  
Bending the head ; ashamed to turn the back ;  
Not daring to go on ; expecting all  
The signal to retire.

But not so dreamed  
Their god-like leader, ever in the van  
Of danger eminent ; and daring most,  
When most the peril. As the trumpet's clang,  
And shaking banner, the young war-horse stirs,—  
So the hoarse thunder, and the fiery bolts,  
His strong soul lifted. Backward looking now,—  
For at their head, beside the guides, he walked,—  
Dismay he saw among his troops, and doubt,—  
Fatal confusion threatening. Starting forth,  
Toward them he hasted ; and, from line to line,  
Along the flank advancing, sent his voice,  
Loud as a lion's roar at dead of night,

Far borne upon the wind, and rousing up,  
As with new wine, their hearts : " On, on, brave men  
Your home is now the city, not the camp.  
God is our captain ! His great gonfalons,  
The lightnings, lead us on to victory ! "

With words like these, from rank to rank he went,  
And poured into them fire. A trumpet then,  
From one who stood beside him, he snatched up ;  
And his own mighty breath into the brass  
Drove storm-like ; sounding signal of assault,  
Rapid and fierce, till the strong metal rang  
As it would shiver. With a joyous shout  
The host gave answer ; and moved boldly on ;  
Bending against the tempest ; and resolved  
On conquest, or on death.

Yet still spake out,  
From time to time the trumpets ; on, still on,  
Urging assault : and still along the line  
The voice of their great captain was sent forth,  
Their hearts to strengthen : for, with gathering rage,  
The tempest howled and yelled : against its might,  
Scarce could the strongest move ; and oft they swerved,  
And staggered, as they walked. Like corn full ripe  
Beneath the wind, whole masses to and fro  
Reeled heavily : yet still on, on, they went,  
Forcing their arduous way. The vault of heaven  
Seemed as one thunder-cloud. Lightning, and rain,  
Dashed into mist, ran battling on the ground.  
Dazzled, confused, amazed, yet resolute still,  
Thus on they toiled, slowly and painfully :  
But when, at length, the foremost gained the breach,  
Behold ! the enemy, in numbers thick  
As bees around the hive about to swarm,  
Gathered to bar their entrance !

Yet, at once,  
No moment pausing,—such their chief's command,—  
Began the fierce assault. The archers, first,  
Their huge bows bent, and in a cloud let fly  
Death-threatening shafts. Alas ! by rain relaxed,  
The strengthless sinews failed : mail-piercing bolts

Became as toys ; and, midway toward the foe,  
 Dropped harmless. Backward went the archer bands,  
 Useless, abashed : and, in their place, advanced  
 A host of spearmen. Through both gaps at once,  
 Led by the guides, the iron columns strove  
 To force the dangerous way. Up clambering thick,  
 Above the rock-like ruins of the wall,  
 Pressed myriads onward : but, at every point,  
 Like hornets issuing to defend their nest,  
 Sprang up the foe ; nor way was made at all.  
 No lack of light ; for scarce an instant slept  
 The thunderer's bolts : and when, a moment, fell  
 Black darkness,—they but paused, and drew hard breath ;  
 Then leaped to fight anew.

But, from the pass  
 Where hottest raged the strife, the Medes, at length,  
 Backward were driv'n ; for there the choicest men,  
 And bravest captains of the Assyrians stood.  
 Yet still the Median spearmen to assault  
 Fiercely returned ; bore onward for a space,  
 And still again retired ; for, in the front  
 Of battle, furious as a tiger, raged  
 The madman Zimri ; to full strength restored,  
 From that dread blow of his great enemy,  
 Arbaces, in the midnight conflict dealt ;  
 Which him to shades of death well nigh had sent ;  
 And which to avenge, or perish, now he longed ;  
 Hoping, in stress of battle, once again  
 To meet his hated foe.

That senseless wish  
 Fate granted ; for, as sunshine fires the cloud,  
 Turning the dark to ruby and to gold,  
 So, on the hearts of the now wavering Medes,—  
 Again forced backward,—rose the glorious voice  
 Of their great leader, as, all bright in arms,  
 Flame-like beneath the lightnings,—at their head  
 Suddenly came he ; and, with clarion tone,  
 Cheered them to victory.

The great golden shield  
 Blazing before him ; in his strong right hand

The gleaming battle-axe—Jove's thunderbolt  
Scarce swifter, deadlier—right upon the foe,  
Maugre the bristling spears and flashing swords,—  
As, on a numerous herd, a lion springs,  
So, singly, on went he.

At that dread sight,  
That voice appalling—even o'er hurricane  
And thunder heard—well might the bravest fear,  
And feel his strength to fail: but Zimri knew  
Nor fear, nor reason; for, with hate and rage,  
His brain was like a fire. At one wild bound  
Upon the Mede he sprang; one blow let fall;  
Then sank, disparted! for the griding axe  
Cut through the shield, and shore in twain the neck,  
As a sharp scythe the thistle.

One brief glance  
Upon the quivering face Arbaces cast;  
From his axe-handle plucked the riven shield,  
And onward hasted. Terror-stricken now,  
The Assyrians turned, and through the rugged way  
Fled headlong. He, pursuing, past the wall  
In open space arrived. But, as a bark  
Amid the breakers shooting, where the sea,  
And some disgorging river, hotly clash,—  
At prow, and stern, and either side, at once,  
Meets the fierce war of waves,—so, 'mid the throng  
Of enemies pouring on, the invincible Mede  
Soon on all sides was hemmed.

By rage and fear  
Driven frantic; daring, from excess of dread;  
As feeble sparrows at the hawk will peck,  
Hovering too nigh their nest,—upon him sprang  
A crowd who, man to man, had fled from him,  
As deer before the lion. But the sweep  
Of his tremendous axe, clear room soon made;  
And on he moved, as if, to all that host,  
Singly, the equal: onward still went he;  
Nor looked behind, to mark if on his track  
Followed the spearmen; for he deemed the hand

Of heaven itself was with him ; and the shield  
Of God put forth to guard him.

But his course,  
Check sharp and fearful met ; for, hissing fell,  
Even at his feet, a sun-bright thunderstone,  
Rending the earth, and scattering in his face  
A sulphurous dust. A peal that shook the ground  
Burst with it ; and came then a darkness thick,  
An utter blackness. On his cheek he felt  
The hot breath of the lightning ; and his sight  
Seemed blasted. " I am stricken blind !" he said :  
" O'er proud of heart I was ; and the just gods  
Fittingly have punished ! To a worthier hand  
Be their great work committed ! Oh forgive,  
Dread Powers unknown ; for weak and vain is man,  
Erring and ignorant, ever ! My last breath  
I give unto your praise : and may my blood,  
Now to be shed, cleanse mine iniquities !"

Down to his knees he sank ; then, on his face  
Fell prostrate ; and in silence waited death.

The sky again was kindled : and, behold !  
Joy to Assyrian eyes, their dreaded foe  
Stretched on the earth, as dead ! The bolt, they  
deemed,

Had smitten him : and all who near him stood,—  
Hoping the king's reward,—with headlong haste  
Rushed on to seize him. Still in speechless prayer,  
With eyes fast closed he lay ; around him felt  
The human torrent pouring,—eager hands  
Everywhere clutching him,—outrageous cries,  
As of a clamoring army, round him heard ;  
And marvelled that as yet they smote him not.  
Thus wondering, by mere instinct ope'd his eyes ;  
And lo ! the light, the blessed light again  
Shining as ever on them ! Had he dreamed  
Of blindness ? or, in mercy, had the gods,  
By act miraculous, and for great ends,  
Restored the sight they had taken ? Like the glance  
Of sun on rising wave, across his mind

Shot the bright thought.

As, at the touch of flame,  
The nitrous dust, cold, black, and motionless,  
Starts up, a spirit of fire,—with strength intense,  
Rending, and hurling,—so, by that great hope,  
To more than mortal might enkindled, sprang  
Suddenly up the Mede.

As on his rock  
Above the clouds, the eagle, through the storm  
Upsoaring, in clear sunshine lights at last;  
And from his strong wings in a shower shakes off  
The glittering rain-drops:—or, as from the wheel,  
Rapidly whirling, in a cloud is driven  
The crushed and scattered dust,—even so, his foes,—  
With fury as of flame, and might that laughed  
Their strength to scorn,—far off Arbaces flung.

Strange terror seized them then: a god, they deemed,  
His form had taken; and, aghast, they fled.  
Yet numbers, who that more than mortal might,  
For distance, had not seen, still crowded on;  
Thrusting aside the timid,—all athirst  
Their enemy's blood to shed.

But, lifted now  
Beyond all former daring; every nerve  
Charged as by lightning; every sinew strong  
As tempered steel; and confident that heaven  
Its champion had appointed him,—right on  
The heroic Mede advanced. Against the wind,  
As slowly, firmly, moves the thunder-cloud,—  
So, 'gainst the tempest of his enemies,  
Dreadless, and irresistible, bore he.

Behind him close, his spearmen tracked his steps,—  
A broad, dense column of protruding steel;  
A living, moving wall. But, in their front,  
Courage regaining, thronged the enemy,—  
From all parts pouring on to check their way;  
And, wanting their great captain, ill had fared  
The Median spearmen then. He, rising still  
In power, and daring, as the peril more,  
And difficulty gathered,—like a god

Mixing in mortal battle, might have seemed ;—  
So terrible his aspect ; such his deeds ;  
Surpassing human.

As, in burning waste  
Of Afric,—when the numerous caravan  
Toils slowly on, and the worn travellers drink,  
In fancy, of the cool delicious spring,—  
Darkening, and reddening, the thick atmosphere,  
Like cloud of smouldering flame, 'gins wrap them in :  
No sound is heard, no breath of air is felt ;  
In speechless terror all the portents mark ;  
And the tired camel casts a wistful eye,  
Feeling a peril ;——if in distance, then,  
The Red Plague of the desert is descried,—  
The Fiery Column, with an eagle's speed  
Careering, charged with death,—aghast with ear,  
Face to the earth, the panting travellers fall :  
The camels drop ; and in the burning sand,  
By instinct lessoned, deep their nostrils hide ;  
And, trembling, every living thing lies mute,——  
Even with such terror, at the dread approach  
Of their dire Battle-Plague, the Assyrians shrank ;  
And on, still on, toward nearest northern gate,  
Unchecked he held his way.

From west to east,  
From north to south, through all the city rose  
Wild cries and wailings. Hastily equipped,  
From every quarter poured the soldiers on,—  
Roused by the trumpets ; but unordered all,  
Unknowing where the foe. The stony streets  
Rang loudly to the clatter of the steeds,  
And chariots' thunder. Voice, to lifted voice,  
Replied ; and asked again. Some here, some there,  
Reported the assault. By lightning, now,  
Dazzled to blindness ; now, in thickest night  
Shut up, as in a vault,—slow way they made ;  
And terror, and amazement mastered all !

## BOOK THE TWENTY-NINTH.

WHILE thus, as in her mortal agony,  
Raged the distracted city,—in the hall  
Of the imperial palace was the sound  
Of revelry ; the jocund dancer's foot ;  
The clear gay laugh ; the voice of hopeful heart,  
Expectant of the morrow. The loud choir  
Of mirth-inspiring music, ceasing not,  
Shut out the trumpet's larum, and the din  
Of battle's gathering tempest.

With a face  
Heated by wine, and madman's merriment,  
A ruby goblet in his burning hand,—  
The king, upon his silken couch reclined,  
Some graceful feat was lauding, when, uncalled,  
With corpse-like aspect, at the door appeared  
A trembling slave. The monarch on him cast  
An eye of wrath : yet fled not the scared man ;  
But, with clasped hands, and look of agony,  
Some tale of terror mutely seemed to tell,—  
Fearful to speak, or enter. At the sign,  
Eagerly on he came ; and, at the feet  
Of the astonished king down falling, said ;  
“ Dread lord of lords ! forgive the words I speak.  
The enemy hath entered at the breach,  
And rageth in the city.”

Deadly pale,  
The king arose, but spake not. To the door  
He pointed ; and the shivering slave was gone,

A few brief moments, on the cheerful groups  
Linked in the dance, a strange, dark look he cast;  
Then, with slow step, went forth. The demon-thought  
Again had waked within him. Like a brand  
Of burning iron on the quivering flesh,  
So on his brain it wrought. The golden key  
Within the wards he turned; that no one thence  
Might issue, no intruder pass within;  
Then, by the marble stairs, with firm, swift foot,  
Resolved and strong, descended.

Like a mist  
Before the breeze, passed off the fumes of wine;  
For, now, distinctly on his ear arose  
The blare of trumpets, and the din of hosts  
In mortal combat. Buckling on a sword,  
To the open court he hastened; looked around,  
And listened. Borne along the changeful blast,  
The sounds of battle, now, seemed far away;  
Now, at the palace gates loud thundering.

Silent, and motionless, awhile he stood,  
Noting the sudden storm, the angry sky,  
With never ceasing lightnings all ablaze,—  
And wished heaven's thousand flood-gates would break  
loose,

And 'neath the deluge whelm his enemies :

• “Yea, though with them fell I, and all my host;  
And every stone of Nineveh should roll  
Like pebble in the torrent !”

Thus, at length,  
Outspake he; and, with swift and furious step,  
To and fro hurried. But, as came again  
The uproar of the battle, swelling now  
As though within the court itself had raged  
The mortal struggle,—suddenly he paused;  
Laid hand upon his sword, and ready stood,  
Assault expecting. But, again borne off,  
The tumult died away; and then once more,  
Shaping in words his bitter thoughts, he spake.  
“What may this mean? The flood not yet hath fallen;

Or they who brought report have lied to me.  
Traitors, then have we? Said they not, 'Once more  
Must rise, and set, the sun, ere foot of foe  
Can touch the ground?'—But yet, what matters it  
If now, or two days hence, the evil come.  
The fall of the great city is decreed;  
By gods, or Fate, or demons, is decreed;  
And nought can stay it; nought in earth, or heaven,  
One day retard it. Wherefore covet, then,  
A few hours more of lingering wretchedness!  
I am, in truth, awearied of this life;  
And rather would at once leap down the gulf,  
Than longer stand and tremble on its brink.

"Ah! could I but drag down with me yon host  
Of rebels curs'd! I hear you, foul-mouthed, base!  
Dogs! adders! vermin! crawling, noxious things!  
Worms that gnaw bravely the dead lion's heart!  
I hear, and loathe you! Ay, ye vaunt aloud,  
In pride of victory o'er the king of kings,  
As though your strength, and not the Fates' decree,  
Had overthrown him. Nay, erelong, no doubt,  
Ye trust to see the monarch of the world,  
For a few years of miserable life,  
A suppliant at your feet! Ye fondly hope  
To riot in his gorgeous palaces;  
To deck your vile clay in his royal robes,  
And in the sunshine of his priceless gems.  
Haply, within your hearts ye also say,  
'Shall we not revel with his beauteous dames?  
Shall we not drink the nectar of their lips?  
Shall we not take them for our concubines,  
And of the king make mirth and mockery?'  
Slaves thrice accursed! ay, even this ye hope!  
But he shall balk you still.——Infatuate fool!  
Didst thou not promise them, that, with the morn,  
They should go forth in freedom; gems, and gold,  
The dowry of a queen, each bearing off?  
Didst thou not tell them, 'In the rebel camp,  
The greatest will be proud to sue to you,  
And pray you be their wives?' I marked you then,

False wretches ! I beheld your sparkling eyes,  
 Your sudden brightening ! From your falling lord  
 Glad were ye all to fly ; and in the arms  
 Of damn'd rebels try your blandishments !  
 But I will stay your sport : ye still are mine ;  
 Still shall be while I live : and, when I die,  
 Ye also to the air shall render up  
 Your fair, false beauty ! Double vengeance thus,  
 On you, alike, and on the hated foe,  
 At once I wreak ! Ay, wanton traitresses !  
 Together will we perish ! The same torch  
 That lights my funeral pile, shall kindle yours !

“ Rage on, accurs'd rebels ! At these gates  
 Your proud foot shall be stayed. Here come ye not,  
 Or come as victims. Meantime, till the flames  
 Envelop all, the revel will I hold.  
 Ha, ha ; throughout all nations, and all times,  
 This feast shall be renowned ! ”

Unconsciously,  
 Thus to his thoughts, and passions turbulent,  
 Clear voice he gave ; with gesture vehement,  
 And rapid foot, still walking to and fro.

Alone, and unobserved, he deemed himself :  
 But, drawing near, one man upon him now  
 Bent his stern eye ; one ear his every word  
 Well marked, as, with a fiendish cruelty,  
 Again his dark soul spake. “ Ay, every one !  
 The youngest and the fairest, all shall die !  
 A steam of sacrifice shall reach heaven's gates,  
 Such as the nostrils of blood-loving gods  
 Ne'er yet have scented ! such as well may fit  
 The hour, when sinks the empire of the world,  
 And dies earth's greatest king ! Though perish then  
 My mortal body,—yet, throughout all times,  
 And every land, my great renown shall live !  
 But they, too, perish with me : all, all die ! ”

He started ; for, behind him, his mad words  
 Strangely were echoed. A deep voice returned,  
 “ Yea, king ; all, all shall die ! ”

Surprised, and wroth,

Backward he looked ; and, like a statue fixed,  
Beheld the hated Barak. A drawn sword  
Supported his gaunt hand : his face was pale,  
And passionless as stone. A dark, grim smile  
Illumed the despot's face. " Ha ! wizard—here ?  
What think'st thou ? Is the fated hour now come ?  
Shall the proud Mede this night his iron rule  
Fix o'er the eternal city ? or, even yet,  
Will the gods strike, and wither him ?"

" Yea, king !"

With calm, stern tone the prophet answered him :

" The hour *is* come ; my hour ; and thine the next !

The Mede already in the sacred walls

Hath poured his myriads. Harken to the din !

Hear'st not the bray of arms, the victor's cries,

Each moment nearer. Surely will this night

Behold the glory of Assyria fallen !

Thy reign, O king ! is passed. Another head

Thy crown must wear. There is no hope in man,

Or gods to save us ! 'Tis the gods' decree.

" Like a strong river swollen by wintry rains,  
Roaring and foaming through rock-narrowed banks,—

So, through the streets rolls now the torrent foe !

I saw them come : I knew the fated end :

I sped to warn thee ; and myself to die.

As yet, they enter at the breach alone ;

Ere long, at every gate will they pour in.

Hast thou resolved, O king ! on life, or death ?

And how to live, or how to meet thine end ?"

Not as a subject to a dreaded lord,

But as the greater spirit to the less,

With lofty look, and tone severe he spake.

The imperious temper of the king was chafed.

Long had he loathed, yet secretly had feared,

That strange dark man : but treble hatred now

Fired him to frenzy. He, the paltry priest,

Had dared to beard him : with a master's tone

Audacious, schooled the monarch of the world,

Even as a boy ! But still was he the king !

Though falling, still the king ; and, to the last,  
 Would live the lord of all ; the life of man  
 Still at his pleasure hold,—to take, or leave,  
 As fancy moved him : and, though now he stood  
 As on the very outskirts of the world,  
 Scenting the realms of darkness and of death,  
 Yet one last act of kingly dominance  
 Should cheer his parting soul.

But, cunningly,  
 Smoothing his brow, and with a quiet tone  
 His fury masking, thus he made reply.  
 “ Priest, said’st thou not, thy fate with mine is linked,  
 Thy end, ere mine, an hour ?”

“ I said it, king ;”  
 Calmly the guile-suspecting seer replied ;  
 “ ’Tis written in the scroll of things to come ;  
 ’Tis the decree of Fate.”

“ Thou liest,—’tis mine,  
 I bid thee die !” shrieked the king, springing on.

A madman’s strength was in his vengeful arm ;  
 A tiger’s fierceness in his sudden leap :  
 But, in the instant, from his hard-clenched hand,  
 Loud clanging flew the sword : for, lightning-swift,  
 With giant strength, the priest his own huge blade  
 Dashed ’gainst the falling steel,—and, far away,  
 Rapidly whirling as it cleft the air,  
 Jangling and whizzing, sent it.

The harsh clang  
 Benumbed the murderous arm, that, for a time,  
 Strengthless it dropped. A strange astonishment  
 So held the king, that not a word he spake,  
 Nor moved a limb ; but, with wild, wondering eye,  
 Followed the glittering weapon on its flight :  
 Then, as he saw it fall, laughed loud, and long,  
 A wild hysteric laugh. His very brain  
 Seemed as it felt the jar ; so purposeless,  
 So lost his look ; as though, with madman’s rage,  
 Were idiot’s weakness mingled.

A stern look,

Calm, but contemptuous, on him threw the priest.  
"Fool to the last!" he said; "A life all vain;  
Hateful to all; now hateful to thyself;  
For the dread world unknown, thou soon must quit;  
Yet, ere thy dying breath be quite gone out,  
Would'st snatch at mine! Why? gilded gewgaw! why?—  
Because thy tinsel pomp ne'er bowed my soul  
To worship at thy feet. A very god  
Thou'st deemed thyself; and millions, better far,  
Hast spit upon, and trampled in the dust,  
Till they, too, hailed thee as a deity.  
A god?—Nay, Monster!—man, goat, tiger, mixed!  
Yet, being what thou art, the Powers supreme  
Have placed thee on the highest throne of earth,  
Their will to execute,—not thine, poor slave!

"Ere the foundation of the earth was laid,  
Of all the doom was fixed. This monstrous realm  
In its due time arose; a mighty man,  
By Fate ordained to found it: at due time,  
Was fixed its fall: and thou, weak, sensual thing,  
The sorry instrument! Thy follies, crimes,  
Thy tyranny, thy avarice, thy lust,  
Made thee the agent fit to rouse the hearts  
And hands of nations 'gainst her iron rule;  
And drag her to destruction. For this end  
Wert thou created; to this end hast wrought.  
Thy work is finished: thou, the unconscious tool,  
Done with, art cast aside, to bleed, drown, burn,  
Or rot; then mix with other human clay,—  
A beggar's, or a slave's, no matter which,  
Since equal all to thine. Yet thou'rt a god!  
Hast felt thyself a god: been hymned as god;  
Worshipped by prostrate hosts. *I worshipped not!*  
Think'st thou for reverence of thy paltry state,  
I served, obeyed thee? No, I mocked at that;  
I smiled at thee; or, when I smiled not, loathed.  
'Twas as the tool, though base one, of the gods,  
Or Fate, more strong than gods, that I beheld,  
And served thee. Why, in that terrific night,

When round thee was thy host all perishing ;  
 When thou thyself, fear-stricken, to the ground  
 Shrank cowering, and the Irresistible  
 Was hasting to the death-stroke,—wherefore then  
 Came I to save thee ? Thinkest thou for love,  
 Or reverence ? No ! thy work not yet was done ;  
 Thy hour not come ; and I was *sent* to save.

“ And what thy gratitude ? my recompense ?  
 Twice hast thou striven to slay me ! Generous king !  
 Yet, if by *thy* hand, or my own, I die,  
 What matters it, so fate be but fulfilled !  
 Think not, in baffling thy most kingly thirst  
 For murder,—that I valued life, or hoped,  
 Or dreamed, of years to come : I crave them not ;  
 Well knowing that the all-disposing Fates  
 This night, this hour, demand the life they gave.

“ Hark ! murderer ! to yon more than thunder-peal  
 Of human tempest ! Wide are flung the gates ;  
 The living ocean pours its billows in !  
 Fallen is great Nineveh ! Eternal night  
 Is gathering round her : and thy greater far  
 Is now Assyria's lord. Hark ! more and more  
 The uproar heightens ; nearer draws the storm.  
 Sardanapalus, now no more a king,  
 Wilt thou to some base soldier yield thy breath ?  
 Or wilt thou solely thine own victor be,  
 And fall as I shall fall ? The hour is come :  
 Thy life is asked. Poor puppet ! once a king !  
 See how a man can die ! ”

He turned away ;  
 Looked up to heaven ; then, with clasped hands, and  
     voice  
 Solemn and deep, thus spake :

“ O'erruling gods !  
 Or Fates, whate'er ye be, to man unknown,  
 I bow to you : I yield to your decree !——  
 Earth, sky, air, water ; birds, and beasts, and man ;  
 Green trees, and mountain-tops ; lone wilderness ;  
 Sun, moon ; and ye, great mysteries of heaven,

The bright and countless stars,—farewell ! farewell !  
 To me ye are no more ! The universe,  
 To me, is blotted out ; and all is nought !”

He ceased : one long, rapt, melancholy look  
 On heaven, and earth, cast round : deliberately  
 Upon the ground his sword hilt fixed ; the point  
 Against his heart, with hand unwavering, placed ;  
 One moment paused ; one word inaudible breathed ;  
 Then forward fell, transpierced !

No sound was heard.

He spake not ; groaned not ; struggled not,—but died :  
 As though his iron will, in death, as life,  
 Held mastery yet.

More loud and steady now  
 Arose the din of battle ; for the wind,  
 Like a strong man by sudden palsy struck,  
 At once had fallen ; and its utmost strength  
 Was but as infant’s sob. The rain had ceased ;  
 Thunder was hushed ; and o’er the firmament  
 Strange darkness ’gan to steal.

The unwonted signs,—

Omens and prodigies, to calmer men,—  
 Passed all unnoted. Even the heightening roar  
 Of conflict drawing nigh, the king marked not,—  
 In such astonishment upon the corpse,  
 Close at his feet, he gazed. His blood, that boiled,  
 Now cold within him ran : his maddened brain,  
 As by the touch of a magician’s wand,  
 To sober changed. Deep rapt, and silent, long  
 He stood, and looked : then thus, at length, broke forth.  
 “ O, man inscrutable ! what art thou now ?  
 What was this essence, Life, that gave thee thought,  
 Loftier than that of conqueror, or of king ?  
 Strength of the lion ; resolution fixed  
 As law of Fate : and, having vanished, leaves  
 A carcase merely, on which dogs may prey ;  
 Slaves trample ; vultures, flies, or worms, may feast ?

“ Is this clod *thee* ? thee, Barak, the dark priest ?  
 Or art thou on the winds careering now ?  
 Or, viewless, plunging through the earth, or sea ?

Or, far above, in the deep heart of heaven,  
 Amid the stars, or in the burning sun,  
 Mingling with gods and heroes of long past?  
 Or in dark Hades, wandering mournfully?  
 Hadst thou, in my place, held Assyria's throne,  
 Still proudly had it stood, immoveable:  
 Thine iron arm, indomitable soul,  
 Had crushed rebellion, even at its birth.  
 But what avails? 'Tis done; the ruin wrought;  
 Assyria is no more: and I, like thee,  
 Must plunge into the dark, for heaven, or hell!

"But who is this, with look of fiery haste?  
 Surely the foe hath not already——Ha!  
 Nebaioth? wherefore here? I have forbid  
 Intrusion on me. Get thee hence."

"Dread lord!

Oh hear me, hear me!" dropping on his knees,  
 Cried out the noble youth: "the enemy  
 Have entered at the breach; flung wide the gates,  
 And this way hurry on! For thee they cry:  
 Like famished wolves they thirst to drink thy blood!  
 Oh! ere it be too late, fling off those robes!  
 Quickly a dark and mean disguise put on:  
 And, 'mid this wild confusion, even yet,  
 From some far distant gate thou may escape.  
 Resistance soon must end. Our soldiers now  
 Strive feebly. Thousands fling their arms away;  
 And either run, or yield. Oh! fly, then, fly!"

"Enough," the monarch cried; "now get thee hence.  
 The king, be sure, will 'scape. A stratagem  
 Of rare device is laid; and cannot fail.  
 When ye shall see this palace of the earth  
 Mounting in flames to heaven,—then may ye know  
 The king hath baffled all his enemies:  
 Strive then no more in useless fight, but yield;  
 Or, if ye may, 'scape also. Now, away.—  
 Yet, ere thou leave the palace, give command  
 That every serving-woman, man, and slave,  
 And every soldier, through some southern door,  
 Make speed to quit it. Hastily seek then

The warders of each gate ; them bid remain :  
And, when the foe shall strike upon the door,  
Entrance demanding,—let them, first, three times  
Sound on the trumpet, as for life they blew ;  
Three times make pause, as if on parley bent ;  
Then fling back bolt and bar ; the gates throw wide,  
And bid them in. Fear not : the king shall 'scape.  
Brave youth ! farewell !" That said, he turned, and  
went.

Nebaioth, from his knees, much marvelling, rose,  
Much fearing, for, so strange the monarch's look ;  
His voice so strange, that, though he saw and heard,  
Scarce could he know them his. Yet now no time  
For wonder, or delay : the king's behest  
Must be obeyed.

That done, he issued forth ;  
And where, with maddest fury, Jerimoth,  
And all the choicest of Assyria's host,  
Resisted still, plunged headlong in the fight.

Dire the confusion ! By the lurid gleam  
Of flames that, through the thickening atmosphere,  
Scarce served to show the enemy,—front to front,  
And hand to hand, the desperate battle raged.

Meantime, Sardanapalus to the hall,  
The sun-bright hall of revelry and mirth,  
With slow step took his way. The calmer mood  
Still for the moment ruled him ; and he paused,  
Remorseful for the deed he had resolved.

Long at the door he stood ; and heard within  
Mirth-stirring music ; the gay dancer's tread ;  
And laughter of light hearts : for nought knew they  
Of the stormed city, and the slaughter dire,  
Flooding her streets. No hideous dream was theirs  
Of the dark sleeping horrors 'neath their feet ;  
Waiting the touch of fire, to burst at once,  
A dread volcano of unquenchable flame !  
Of freedom were their thoughts ; of home, loved home,  
The home of infancy, of blooming youth ;

Of parents, brethren, sisters, youthful friends,  
All soon, so soon to be beheld again.

The jealous king knew not their innocent joy,—  
Sensual, and vain, and false, misdeeming them,  
And eager in new arms love's joys to taste.  
Then blackness gathered o'er his countenance ;  
Again his heart was stone !

Long, to and fro,  
He walked, and hearkened : with a cautious hand,  
Silently turned, at length, the golden key ;  
Ope'd stealthily the door. Unseen himself,  
He saw the joyous bounding of the limb,  
The clear, bright face, all sunshine with young hope ;  
Listened the tone of gladness, and the word  
Of cheerful heart, foretasting liberty.

In his fierce soul thronged fellest demons now.  
" Accursed crew !" he muttered ; ground his teeth ;  
Rolled his large blood-shot eyes, and clenched his hands ;  
" This, then, your love is ; your eternal love ;  
Your gratitude, your worship ! One there was  
Who loved, who would have loved me to the end ;  
But, in my fury, I insulted, wronged,  
Spurned her ; and she is gone ! gone to my foe !  
Azubah, to the death hadst thou been mine,  
Had the fiend slumbered in this mortal hell,  
This mad, black breast ! But all is over now !  
Sensual, imperious, and intractable,  
My life hath been ; my headstrong will the law  
Of countless millions : mine have been their life,  
Their blood, their minds, their bodies, as I would,  
To deal upon them. Then, as I have lived,  
So will I die ; still master over all !

" Beautiful falsehoods ! Ah, ye think to move,  
With your voluptuous kisses, the stern hearts  
Of the red-handed conquerors. Your arms  
Round them ye hope to twine ; and in their ears  
Whisper soft blandishments : to tell the tale,  
How the king loved you ; how caressed ; how toyed ;  
What burning kisses showered—faugh ! hell, and death !  
Yet, all the while, ye loved him not : oh no !

Gave kiss for kiss in fear,—but not in love ;  
Never for love ! he was not to your choice :  
Not such as he *your* hearts could ever win.

“ Then, in your cunning, would ye picture forth  
The man whom ye *indeed* could love, adore,  
Live for, yea die for : and the silly dolt  
Caressing you, would in your picture see  
Himself, his dear-loved self ! Then both would join  
In fiercer rapture ; and your mockery still  
Would be the king ; the poor deluded king !  
How he would look ; what say ; what madness act,  
If from the grave, alive he might come forth,  
And look upon your dalliance ! Ah ! false fools !  
So think you ; ay, I read it in your eyes ;  
Your springing limbs ; I hear it in your voice.  
But the king yet shall mar your wantonness :  
Shall give you lovers who, with hot embrace,  
Hotter than your desires, shall wrap you round ;  
Yet shall not mock him ! ”

A harsh trumpet-blast,  
Quivering, and long drawn out, broke short his words.  
“ Ha ! come already ? Then the end draws nigh !  
Once more would I have led the merry dance,  
The death-dance, with yon beauteous hypocrites :  
Nay, yet I will. Ha ! what great revelry !  
What a wild whirl ! what frenzy of delight,  
That dance immortal ! ”

Even while he spake,  
Gently the door he closed ; the golden key  
Turned gently ; and with soft, but rapid tread,  
Descended to the vault.

Awaiting there,  
The guards he found ; through nearest southern gate,  
Bade them for life to fly ; a blazing torch  
Seized eagerly ; the door flung wide ; strode in ;  
And, hoarsely laughing as again the blare  
Of the terrible trumpet rang,—beneath the pile  
Thrust the bright bickering flame.

Scarce swifter speeds  
The arrow from the bow, than, from the torch,

Through all the vast extent of that grim vault,  
Like a roused demon, the combustion ran ;  
And the thick tomb-like darkness instantly  
To furnace-light was changed !

Backward he drew ;  
One moment on the fiery lake looked round ;  
One moment trembled at the deed he had done ;  
At that he still must do ; then, hurriedly,  
Went forth : behind him, with a careful hand,  
The strong door locked, as though from every eye  
He would the act conceal ; and rapidly,  
But staggering, like to one with brain oppressed,  
Mounted the marble stairs.

The third loud clang  
Of the warning trumpet sounded, as he stood  
Before the door of that dread banquet hall,  
Listening the sounds of gentle mirth within,  
While underneath the palace was a hell  
Of fire intense, fast hasting all to draw  
Within its hideous jaws.

“ Ha, ha ! ” he cried,  
With ghastly mockery ; “ ye come in time :  
Right welcome, friends : warm greeting shall ye have.  
Enter ; and doff your mail ; and take your seats :  
Quick servants shall attend you ; and no fear  
Of cold formalities. But I would see  
My noble guests ; for, when we meet again,  
Or where, is doubtful.” With a hurried foot,  
While thus deriding, to a balcony  
That overlooked the court, he took his way.

The strong and gorgeous northern gate, from which,  
Gazed at and worshipped, he in all his pomp  
So oft had ridden forth,—now, while he looked,  
Expanded to admit his conquerors.  
And who were they ? Arbaces ? or the king  
Of Araby ; or the dark soldier-priest,  
With all their captains, and their men of war ?  
No : springing forward, like a hungry wolf  
That scents his prey, Rabсарis, all alone,  
Bounded within the court. A gleaming sword

Was in his hand; the shield upon his arm.  
Wildly he looked around; then cried, "Come forth;  
Tyrant! goat! ravisher! Where art thou hid?  
Come forth; and die at least as man should die,  
Nobly in equal fight. Come forth; or soon,  
Like hunted vermin, wilt thou meanly fall,  
Worried by all the pack. I hear them now,  
Close at the gate. Ha! curses on their speed!  
They rob me of my prey!"

As thus he spake,—  
Like torrent issuing from an opened sluice,  
Rushed in the court a stream of armed men,  
Maddened with victory; thirsting to pour out  
The despot's blood. With wild haste, here and there,  
And to and fro they ran; still calling loud,  
"Bring forth the tyrant! bring the murderer!  
Where hides he! bring him forth."

While these, confused  
And noisy, vainly toiled,—with secret step,  
Rabsaris sought at every well known door,  
Hoping for entrance: but, like rock stood all,  
Impregnable: nor saw he, any man,  
O whom to question.

While he paused, came sound,  
Not of the battle. Like the roar of waves  
Far off, it seemed; but swelling, deepening, soon,  
To voice more near and terrible. Long in doubt,  
With breath suspended, beating heart, he stood,  
Fixed as a statue. But, at length, assured  
Of the dire mischief, at his utmost speed  
Backward he ran,—still crying, "To the gate!  
Back to the gate! back! back!"

His voice, and look  
Of direful meaning, forced obedience prompt:  
And soon, close crowded by the gate, all stood,  
Waiting the issue.

To the captains then,  
Who gathered round, with voice of mystery,  
And face aghast, he spake. "Oh friends! beware!  
A stratagem most deep and damnable

Is laid to snare us ; and retire we must,  
Or perish every man. Hark ! Hear ye not ?  
A burning gulf awaits to swallow us !  
The king hath fled ; and every living thing  
Hath fled the palace ! Enter, and ye die !  
Like the waves boiling on a distant beach,  
Within the subterranean vault I heard  
The savage growling of the pent-up fire,  
Crouching to spring. . Wait patiently awhile,  
And ye will see the damnable intent  
Of the fell despot."

Even while he spake,  
And while upon the palace every eye,  
Through the fast thickening, blackening atmosphere,  
Intently gazed ; and every ear was quick  
To catch the outburst,—on the pavement rang  
A sound as of an iron-headed dart,  
Hurled strongly. Many heard ; but marked it not ;  
For, at the lower windows, 'gan to gleam,  
Like flashes on the horizon seen at night,  
The first dim outbreak of the prisoned fire.

But a faint cry, and then a heavy fall,  
Aroused them ; and behold ! upon the ground  
A soldier smitten ; and with vain attempt,  
Struggling to rise,—a hailstone at his feet,  
Large as a man's closed hand !

Astonishment,  
And terror held them mute. Such thing, 'till then,  
Had no man seen, or heard of. But again  
An outcry, and a fall. Rabsaris, now,  
Himself was stricken : but his brazen helm,  
On which the ice-bolt fell, and glanced aside,  
From fatal harm preserved him. He arose,  
Though dizzy, and confused ; and toward the sky,  
Awe-struck, looked upward, as of heaven to ask  
The mystery of its will.

A harsh, wild laugh,  
As 'twere the answer of a demon, rang  
Above them through the court. All started ; looked.  
At that same moment, a broad lightning sheet,

Blazing and quivering long, lit up the sky :  
And lo ! upon a lofty balcony,  
Distinct as if in sunshine ; glittering bright  
In all his rich array of jewelled robes,—  
Assyria's wretched king ! From him came still  
That wild, unearthly laugh : and louder pealed,  
As, now, from out the lower windows burst,—  
With hideous pantings, as of some huge beast,—  
Billows of smoke ; and lapping tongues of flame,  
Impatient for their prey.

A cry of fear

And horror from the gazing soldiers broke :  
And him, whose life but now they burned to take,  
At peril of their own, they now would save.  
Forward they ran : with their collected might  
Thrust at the doors : again ; and yet again :  
Each called aloud on the other ; each his strength  
To the height put forth : again ! again ! again !

But not more vain against the solid wall  
Had been their battery : and each moment now,  
With gathering fury, roared and leaped the flames.  
They yielded, in despair ; and, falling back,  
Looked upward for the king. But he was gone :  
Mad, laughing, glorying o'er his baffled foes,  
Gone to the dance of death !

In silent awe,

The captains and the soldiers stood and looked ;  
Nor, when they saw that, at the northern gate,  
Led by Nebaioth and Sennacherib,  
Poured in a numerous band, all hot for fight,  
For vengeance clamoring,—'gainst them turned one man ;  
On that tremendous spectacle all thoughts,  
All feelings so were fixed.

Still up, and up,  
Brighter, and broader, louder, and more loud,  
Roaring and cracking, clomb the terrible flames.  
From end to end of that stupendous pile,  
At every lower window, streaming far  
And fiercely, as by furnace-blast impelled,  
Rushed out the Fury.

Still were some, who said  
That, even then, amid the din they heard  
Sounds of strange revelry ; sackbut, and harp,  
Clear-ringing cymbals, and the psaltery,  
As at a dance : yet others heard it not,  
And deemed it fancy.

But, at length, a sound,—  
Heard clearly and by all,—stopped breath, and heart,  
And stiffened them as stone ! It cut the ear  
Like a sharp iron entering ! 'Twas a shriek,  
Piercing, shrill, horrible ! Woman's wild shriek,  
In the death-agony !—A moment more,  
And all was silenced ; an appalling crash  
Made the ground tremble : and the fiend of fire,  
From the higher windows now, with tenfold rage,  
As mad with victory, shook his flaming flags !

Stopping their ears, all fled. They knew at once  
The dreadful truth ; yet feared again to hear  
That shriek horrific ! Hurriedly they fled.  
Thronging the gate, Mede and Assyrian mixed,  
They crowded out ; and no man thought of strife :  
Horror had quenched all enmity. The cause,  
The great prime cause of war, was now no more !  
All felt, though no man spake it.

But when, soon,  
In shadow of the lofty wall they came,  
Where the red flame-light reached them not, behold !  
Thick darkness was before them ; darkness thick  
As in a grave ; "*darkness that might be felt !*"

They saw it, and drew back ; afraid to walk  
Within its terrors. But, in little while,  
The eye, accustomed to the blackness, caught  
From the air above, fire-tinged, a dismal gleam,  
As of a dying ember in the dark,—  
And, like to blind men on a path unknown,  
With spear in hand, or sword, they felt their way,  
Fearfully groping. Whitherward they went,  
They knew not ; nor aught cared, so but a roof  
Might shelter them : for, ever and anon,  
Heard, but not seen, a fearful hailstone smote,

With stroke as of a hammer, on the ground :  
And still, at times, a cry or groan arose,  
Of one down smitten,—haply to the death !

So on they went—a supernatural awe  
Freezing their blood, as when, at dead of night,  
A spirit passes. And, when once again  
In open space they came, and full in view  
Of the great conflagration ;—though so nigh,  
That, like the hot breath from a furnace-mouth,  
It scorched their flesh,—yet, through the thick, dark air,  
As but a dull red storm-cloud it appeared,  
Seen after sunset, when the Wintry Night,  
In his black armour clad, from the eastern sky,  
With Tempest at his back, comes lowering up.

## BOOK THE THIRTIETH.

BUT, in the thronged, and roaring streets, meantime,  
Direful had been the conflict. By the glare  
Of numerous fires, had Death his grim work done :  
But, chiefly, in the square of Jupiter,  
Fit battle-field for thousands, raged the strife.  
Fiercer than tigers fighting for their young,  
Assyria's bravest captains, foot by foot,  
Drew back, yet scorned to yield. With rage as hot,  
The Medes pressed on them.

But their mightiest foe,  
Arbaces, in mid battle sheathed his sword :  
For pity moved him that, in hopeless cause,  
One valiant man should fall. With lifted voice,  
Clear as a clarion, urgently and oft,  
Upon the hostile leaders did he call,—  
Imploring them to yield. Not more in vain  
Might the tossed seaman bid the waves be still.  
They knew all lost : they knew the stern decree,  
Death to the king denouncing ; and with him,  
Resolute stood to die,—but, dying, slay.

Nought knew they of the palace then in flames :  
A broader, redder light, for brief time glowed ;  
But that they heeded not : the fatal hail,  
In solitary bolts, shot here and there ;  
But that they saw not ; where so many fell,  
None marked the weapon.

But, by swift degrees,

The air 'gan thicken : the red glow of fires  
Was blotted out : a midnight darkness, soon,  
Shut out their foes. Thicker, and thicker still,  
It gathered round them ; pressed upon their flesh,  
Like a wrapped mantle. No man his own hand  
Uplifted, now could see. Perforce all stood,  
Astonished, motionless : nor sound was heard,  
Save, soft and muffled,—as of chariot wheels  
Amid deep snow,—the roar and crack of fires.

But, in that hush, erelong, like stroke of spear,  
Or brazen dart, at lessening intervals,  
Upon their armour rang the hailstone's blow.  
At every stroke, a smothered cry was heard,  
A struggle, and a fall. As fell each bolt,  
Above them in the air a sound was heard,  
As of an arrow-cloud ; yet no man guessed  
Whence came the invisible mischief.

But, erelong,  
The fearful truth all knew. Like thunder-drops,  
Singly descending, first, and wide apart,  
But, speedily, in cataracts, out-poured,—  
Came down at length, in torrent-flood, the hail.  
Wild cries from thousands rose ; yet, such the din,  
No man his own uplifted voice could hear.  
As though upon a myriad anvils clanged  
A myriad ponderous hammers,—on the roofs,  
The stony pavement, and the armour, rang  
So loud the awful hail.

Beneath their shields  
The soldiers cowered : yet even the strongest fell.  
The Median archers, in light armour fenced,  
And shieldless, all had perished 'neath the weight  
Of that dread battery, but that, far behind,  
Nigh to the breach, for closer fight unfit,—  
Thus ordered,—they had stayed, and refuge found.

Of the Assyrians also, the unarmed,  
Or lightly fended, at the first dread frown  
Of that strange darkness, all had shelter sought  
So life preserved ; for even the helmed head

Was smitten to the death ; the battered shield  
Driven with the strong man flat upon the ground :  
Rider, and mail-clad horse, reeled to and fro,  
Then sank together. Whomso smote the hail,  
Sorely it wounded, even if death he 'scaped.

And, haply, all on whom its fury fell  
At length had perished, but that, as it came,  
Even so the Terror passed. First harbinger  
Of change at hand,—midst of both armies fell  
A thunderbolt, that, in a thousand streams  
Of dazzling fire, amid the hailstones flashed ;  
Then left a thicker darkness. Who stood nigh,  
Were blinded by the glare ; and many slain :  
But, through that Stygian night, to the eye remote,  
Even the sky-kindling bolt of Jupiter,  
Seemed but as torch's glimmer. With the shaft,  
Came the deep peal on peal ; but thick, and hoarse,  
As by the black air muffled. Still again  
The lightning smote ; again the thunder spake ;  
Again, and yet again ; each bolt more bright,  
Each thunder-roll more loud and terrible.  
Like a retreating lion, the dread hail  
Its fury stayed, and surlily drew off.  
The slumbering wind awakened ; and the pall  
Of solid blackness, slowly 'gan to move.

The ice-strewed ground now flamed and glittered  
bright  
To the incessant lightnings. Then was seen  
The wreck of that dire tempest : steeds, and men,  
Stretched numerous on the earth ; some, stiff in death ;  
Some, wounded, and yet struggling to arise ;  
Helms sorely battered ; lighter shields burst through ;  
The strongest beaten in, as by the blow  
Of ponderous stones.

Awhile, o'er both hosts hung  
A stupor, like to that of shipwrecked men  
Just rescued from the waves, and doubtful yet  
If dreaming, or awake. But still, as passed  
The blackness off, more bright and red appeared

The glow of fires around, and from above,—  
As from a furnace roof reflected down,—  
More loud and fearful was their roaring heard.

As, at the early morn, the growing light,  
And sounds without, from his deep slumber stir  
The dreamer, till his senses all are roused,—  
So, from their waking dream, the din and glare  
Of conflagration, and the sights of woe,  
And havoc, moved at length the astonished hosts.  
Foe looked on foe, yet not an arm was stirred :  
Wrath was extinguished ; or the might of man,  
The pomp, and noise, and fury of his war,  
So poor appeared, when heaven's artillery  
But just had ceased. The very hand of God  
Seemed to have hung in anger over them !  
To have hurled direct that supernatural hail,  
And shot the fiery bolts ! His threatening voice  
Had spoken thunder ; and his frown of wrath  
Sent down thick darkness ! So both hosts awhile,  
Mute and unmoving stood.

At length, alone,  
His shield, sword, spear, and battle-axe laid down ;  
His head unhelmed, his hands in friendly guise  
Extended toward his foes,—Arbaces walked,  
And stood before them. Silent, for a time,  
And motionless, he stood : with calm tone then,—  
Not as a victor, but as one who sues  
For but strict justice, equal unto all,—  
Thus spake. “ Ah ! wherefore should we longer strive  
In wasteful battle ! Glory is it none,  
To tread out life : the form divine of man,  
Of living, breathing, feeling, thinking man,  
To change into a clod, a loathsome clod,  
More vile than common clay ! Could we create  
From the dull earth, one living, sentient thing,  
Though humblest far of all that breathe and move,—  
That were indeed true glory. To destroy,  
Is but the act of the unreasoning brute,  
Urged by a blind, fierce instinct ; to preserve,  
Is attribute of deity. And, see,—

If still ye think of war and glory joined,—  
How pitiful the boasted might of man ;  
His sword, spear, helmet, shield, and armour bright ;  
His war-horse, and his chariot ! There they lie,  
The strong, and weak, alike ! Who smote them down ?  
What more than mortal warrior, in the pomp  
And splendor of the battle ; with an arm  
Strong as of banded giants ; clothed in mail  
Brilliant as sunshine, hard as adamant ;  
His eye of lightning, thunder his dread voice,—  
Who strewed the ground with dead ? Alack ! alack !  
The hailstone, that scarce hurts the butterfly,  
A little larger moulded, crushes man ;  
Strong, valiant, boastful, glory-loving man !  
Such, through the simplest means, the power of God !

“ Herein may we not read the will of heaven  
That our poor war should end ? Oh ! be it so !  
Hard strife hath made us victors ; and the terms  
Of peace ye know. Plain justice must be done :  
No more we ask, though powerful all to take.  
Then answer me ; and let this night be peace,  
Firm peace betwixt us ; now, and evermore.”

He paused ; and turned his eye from chief to chief,  
Expectant of reply. Awhile none spake.  
At length, before the rest stepped Jerimoth ;  
And, with drooped head, and reverential look,  
Like one before some higher nature bowed,  
Sadly thus spake. “ Arbaces, thy great soul  
More than thy valour conquers. For myself,  
Death, rather than dishonor, would I meet :  
And, with but ten resolvèd men, would stand  
In arms to oppose, if still thy stern award  
To the last link of our long chain of kings  
Be ruthless as at first. But I have looked  
From face to face among my boldest friends,  
And all are vanquished. Let me then depart,  
That mine eyes see not that which must be done ;  
Lest madness seize me, and I do a deed  
To shame myself, and all !”

While thus he spake,

Voices in lamentation loud were heard,  
From distance coming : and Nebaioth soon,  
Sennacherib, and many valiant chiefs,  
By wailing thousands followed, toward them walked.

With head upon the breast, face horror-struck,  
Advancing from the rest, the leaders came,  
And 'twixt the hosts stood silent. For a time,  
None questioned them : so did a secret awe  
Of some enormous evil freeze their blood.

At length Arbaces thus : " Nebaioth, speak :  
We ask for peace : thy message, if aright  
Thy looks I read, more eloquently far  
Than subtlest tongue of orator, will move  
Your hearts to give it. The great cause of strife  
Hath been removed : Assyria's king hath fallen :  
Bravely, at last, in battle hath he fallen :  
Haply so best ; for him ; perchance for all !  
Answer Nebaioth ; have I read aright ! "

Dropping his spear and shield upon the ground,  
Nebaioth covered with both hands his face,  
Bowed down his head, and wept. " Alas ! alas ! "  
Burst forth at length ; " the king indeed hath fallen !  
Yet not in battle : fearfully hath fallen !  
Boldly, but madly fallen ! With him, too,—  
Horror on horror !—have his beauteous dames,  
His harmless minstrels, perished ! His own hand  
The palace fired ! The music of the dance  
Mixed with the death-shriek ! All is lost ! all ! all !  
Assyria is no more ! " By grief convulsed,  
Again he bowed ; with both hands hid his face ;  
And wept out bitterly. As some loved friend  
He mourned for, even Arbaces drooped the head,  
And heaved the heart-wrung sigh.

But Jerimoth,  
The first recovering, silence broke at length.  
Standing before the Mede, from his own head  
The helm he took, the sword from off his loins,  
And placed them on the earth : then, at the feet  
Of his great adversary kneeling, said,  
And loud that all might hear ; " Arbaces, thou

Thy last and fellest foe hast overcome.  
 Thine arm in fight was terrible ; thy soul  
 In peace is mightier far : 'gainst *that* I warred,  
 To *this* I bow. Assyria's king hath fallen ;  
 But still Assyria lives ; and gloriously  
 Yet long shall live ; for, surely, on thy head  
 The gods will place her crown ; to thy just hands,  
 Her sceptre will they give. Then, as the last  
 In arms to oppose, the first be I to bend,  
 And hail thee king.

“ Brethren in arms,” he cried,  
 Uprising to his feet, and with strong voice  
 The Assyrian chiefs addressing, “ War is o'er !  
 The gods, all-wise, all-powerful, have decreed  
 The fall of this great city : to our foes,—  
 But foes no longer,—have resistless might  
 Given to subdue us : nay, with their own hands,  
 Have sped our downfall : deluge, earthquake, fire,  
 Have sent against us : and our king, the last,  
 With madness smitten, that his own life, he,  
 With his own hand hath taken ! Vanquished thus,  
 What common foe would not exult, and scoff,  
 And grind us to the earth ; and, of our men,  
 Make slaves ; and, of our women, concubines ;  
 And, of our city, lairs for beasts of prey !  
 But our great victor, godlike in his might,  
 And his high soul, doth, even at the last,  
 Ask peace, when, with a word, he might let loose  
 Utter destruction ! Strongest to o'ercome,  
 The strongest he to save ; and this great realm  
 In glory yet uphold. Cry, then, so loud,  
 That the great voice may reach the heaven-throned gods,  
 ‘ Long live Arbaces ! king of kings, long live ! ’ ”

His ardent tone and look, in every heart  
 Like fervor waked : as with one voice, cried out  
 The Assyrian chiefs, “ Long live Arbaces, king !  
 King of Assyria ; king of kings, long live ! ”

The soldiers from their leaders caught the word,  
 And onward sent it. Peal on peal it rose :

From street to street, from wall to wall, it ran  
Throughout the fated city.

Yet the Medes,  
Nigh to Arbaces, joined not in the cry ;  
For he his hand uplift, admonishing.  
But, when the Assyrian leaders now were still ;  
And when, in token of allegiance, all  
Had bared the head, and bent upon the knee,  
Thus briefly spake he to them.

“ Rise, my friends,—  
That posture to the gods.—Arise, arise.  
Yet not the less I thank you ; thank you most  
That blood shall cease to flow.

“ But now no time,  
Even with consent of all who have the voice,  
For dealing crown and sceptre. To a day  
More calm, and greater leisure, be it left.  
Action demands us now ; and every hand  
Must labor at the work ; for fiercely rage  
Fires numerous through the city ; and best aid  
May be too late to quench them. Let the chiefs  
Of every country gather instantly  
Their soldiers round them ; and, in ordered bands,  
Toil unrelaxing. Neither day, nor night,  
Must there be pause. Meantime, that all may know,  
Let heralds of each nation go with speed  
Throughout the city ; and make full proclaim,  
That war is ended ; and that every man,  
In every man, must henceforth hail a friend.”

Three days, two nights, the labor was pursued :  
For food, or rest, was intermission scant.  
The out-worn briefly slept, while toiled the strong ;  
Then rose, and took their place ; while those, for sleep,  
An hour perchance, retired ; and woke again,  
Again in vain to toil : for still the flames,  
In one part quenched, as if with doubled rage  
Striving for mastery, in another burst ;  
Roaring triumphant ; and their myriad flags

Shaking in mockery.

Throughout all that time,  
With eyes that never closed, from place to place,—  
As chief directing, now,—with his own hand  
Now, as a peasant toiling ;—warning, now,—  
And, now, encouraging,—Arbaces went ;  
And with him victory. But the flames, subdued  
Before him, still behind him burst anew ;  
Nor, save a flood from heaven, might aught avail  
To stop the fiery plague. Like brethren, strove  
The soldiers, and the chiefs, so lately foes,  
Each, in bold act and vigour, to outdo  
His daring comrade.

One man only, stood  
Inactive, unapproving,—the dark priest  
Belesis. He, the hand direct of heaven  
Beheld, the solemn doom accomplishing  
Of that proud city : and but smiled, in scorn  
Of man's poor hope to stay it.

To the camp,  
The women, children, all the sick, the aged,  
The feeble,—on the first day had been sent :  
The treasures also, gold, and precious stones,  
And costly merchandise,—a sumless store,—  
Had been borne forth : and, as the fires increased,  
With utter ruin threatening,—household goods,  
Apparel for the wealthy, and the poor ;  
Oxen, and sheep, and goats ; corn, oil, and wine,  
A twelvemonth's full provision ; priestly robes,  
Ashres, and cherubim ; the altars rich ;  
The images, in silver and in gold ;—  
All which the hand of man might bear away,  
Had to the camp been taken.

The third night,  
Arbaces to the mound of Ninus climbed ;  
That over all the city he might look,  
And mark if much the Fury had been stayed ;  
Or if all hope were vain.

Descending quick,  
A hurried council with the chiefs at hand

He called, and briefly thus.

“Alas ! my friends,

Our toil is lost ! the gods assist us not !  
The lowering clouds, three days did promise rain ;  
The winds all slumbered ; and no idle hope  
Upheld us, that heaven's fountains once again  
Might open, and give forth a second flood,  
To stay this burning : but, since set the sun,  
Hath come a perilous change ! In one dense mass,  
The cloud-sea hath moved off, and left clear sky,  
And flashing starlight : token that the winds  
In earnest have awakened. Not as yet  
Their breath is felt below : but, on the mound  
Of Ninus, the high branches give a sound  
Of wailing ; and along the horizon's marge,  
Rugged, and black, the storm-clouds lift their heads.  
Not surer follows light upon the sun,  
Than on such signs the tempest. 'Mid these fires  
Whomso the blast shall find,—him will it leave  
Graved there ; or whirl in ashes on its wings.  
Labor then useless, danger imminent,  
I urge that all, through nearest gates, should speed  
To leave the city ; every living thing ;  
From man, unto the lowest that draws breath.  
Should the relenting gods their purpose change ;  
Hold back the winds, and let heaven's flood-gates loose,  
We still shall be at hand ; still prompt to act ;  
And stronger for brief rest.”

The outworn chiefs

With voice unanimous his words approved ;  
And hastily dispersed. From wall to wall,  
Throughout the city, trumpets quickly spake  
The appointed signal : and, like flooded streams,  
Through every gate the affrighted myriads ran.

Safe distance gained at length, the multitudes,  
Panting and trembling, stopped, and turned to gaze.

As yet was calm portentous : man on man,  
Looked awe-struck, silent, marvelling what should come.  
Straight upward from the city rose the flames ;  
Thick wreaths of smoke, like a huge blood-stained pall,

Above them heavily hanging.

But not long  
Endured that stillness,—the tornado's crouch,  
Before its deadly spring. In the western sky  
A dark cloud rose ; and every instant waxed  
Huger, and blacker. As within it fought  
Legions of fiery fiends,—anon it gleamed  
With inward lightnings, dense as arrow-showers  
In mortal battle. Nearer as it drew,—  
Thick as the snaky hairs on Gorgon's head,  
On every side out leaped the forked flames ;  
Some spent in air ; some in the heart of earth  
Plunging to kindred fires. Yet still stirred not  
One breath of wind ; the flames still upward soared.  
But well the signs were known ; and to the earth  
Fell down the multitudes : so best to abide  
The coming of the Terror.

A loud blare  
Of thunder's trumpet told its coming on :  
And, in a moment,—as, from prow to stern,  
A great wave sweeps the ship,—o'er all the plain,—  
Crushing the thunder 'neath its avalanche roar,—  
At once the enormous hurricane-billow swept.

So hard it struck that, like one monstrous torch,  
The darkened city might have seemed blown out.  
But, like an active wrestler, after fall,  
Upspringing to his feet,—again the flames  
Leaped up to battle. Staggering they appeared  
Beneath the onset. Back they sank, and rose,  
And sank, and rose again : but fiercer still  
With every instant waxing. Not such roar  
Goes up from storm-lashed ocean, 'gainst the rocks  
Shattered to mist, as from that fiery lake,  
Writhing and racked by the mad hurricane.

On all sides round the city, myriads lay,  
Panting, and trembling : for, from every gate,—  
The highest chosen still,—had crowds poured forth.

But they who on the eastern plain reclined,  
Not long remained ; for, streaming on the blast,  
Came choking smoke in clouds ; huge flakes of fire ;

And scorching heat, as from an oven's mouth,  
That headlong drove them, at their swiftest speed,  
Trembling, and terrified, and screaming loud,  
To 'scape the torturing plague. Yet many fell,  
Blown prostrate,—or by fear unnerved and faint;  
And in that agony had perished there,  
But that the wind, with sudden fitfulness,  
Like wild beast on new prey, sprang to and fro;  
Now south; now east; north now; and now again  
From westward roaring. With each rapid change,  
They on whom turned the Fury, shrieking flew:  
Oxen ran bellowing; maddened steeds broke loose;  
And dogs fled howling.

Settling, at the last,  
Their discord,—as if leagued how best to bring  
Swiftest destruction,—in one awful whirl  
The winds combined; and round the city tore,  
As they would rend it piecemeal; or, as hell  
The demons had let loose, earth's fire to urge  
To her own ardor.

Temple, pinnacle,  
Tower, battlement,—whatever highest stood,—  
At once was overthrown. Descending then,  
Whole streets the blast laid prostrate.

The huge pile  
Of Ninus,—which, for thrice five hundred years,  
Unharmed had stood, as though defying Time  
To lay his rebel-hand on its great state,—  
Proud, and erect, yet held its regal front;  
Though, by the whirlwind, and the storm of fire,  
All else within the girding walls had sunk,—  
But felt, at last, its doom. The century-beat  
Of the Time-cycle's mighty pendulum,—  
Measuring the dates of empires and of worlds,—  
Swept by, and boomed its knell. Shuddering at heart,—  
Like some o'erbeetling cliff, on ocean's marge,  
Thousands of years by billows undermined,  
And worn by storms,—it bent its giant knees;  
Bowed its great head; and, death-struck, in a heap  
Sank down together!

As though mad with joy  
At that great overthrow,—its viewless arms,  
Terrific in their strength, the whirlwind stretched;  
And,—over all the city lifting up  
The burning ruins,—in one monstrous wheel,  
High in the air upbore them. Ponderous stones,  
Red-hot; huge blazing timbers, tall as masts,—  
In that tremendous vortex, even like straws  
On eddying wind were tossed,—like brilliant motes  
In sunbeam, fiercely battled: now aloft,  
A clear red burning,—now, in waves of smoke,  
And fiery driftings, like the dust of hell,  
All swallowed up, and lost.

The walls alone,  
Those Titan walls, deemed lasting as the hills,  
Yet stood; the banks of that terrific lake,  
Lashed into fire-foam. But their hour was come.  
The death-shriek of the whirlwind rose at last;  
Strongest in dying. As from the huge throat  
Of torn volcano in its agony,  
Resounded the dire roaring.

That dread voice  
Called up the awaiting Earthquake. He arose  
In his deep regions; and the plains and hills  
With a sharp tremor shook; for well they knew  
His terrible footstep. Gathering up his strength,  
He stretched his vast, far-reaching arms, and shook  
The solid earth, as winds the deep sea shake,  
In long, slow-rolling waves.

The enormous walls,  
Like a fast-sinking ship, rocked heavily;  
Writhing, and twisting, as they knew the hand  
Of death had struck them. Like a riven scroll,  
From summit to foundation-stone they gaped,  
A hundred hideous fissures. Still they stood;  
The ruin of a moment, yet so firm  
In their vast bulk, that ages long had lived  
The ghastly grandeur yet,—but that again  
The Earthquake shook; and lo! from north to south,—  
Like some gigantic billow, eagle-swift,

Running aslant in thunder and in foam  
Along the howling beach,—the eastern wall,  
Through all its length rolled inward. To the clouds  
Upflew the fiery spray. The surging ground,—  
Tossing the burning lake, as it went on,  
In waves of fiercer flame,—the western wall,  
All that yet stood, next lifted, and cast down.

As though with havoc satiate, rested then  
The dread Earthshaker. But his task not yet  
Was all accomplished : still, to south, and north,  
As in defiance of his power, stood fixed  
The cliff-like barriers : he but summoned up,  
For the great final overthrow his might.

By buried thunder heralded, it came.  
As he would burst the globe's strong ceiling in,  
And to the eye of day the depths disclose  
Of the dread realms beneath,—the Demon shook,  
And heaved, and smote the ground. No moment stood  
Before that shock the walls. Sheer down they went,  
With headlong plunge ; as if, in mad despair,  
To hasten their own doom.

The work was done.  
The fitful whirlwind, like a bird of prey  
Full gorged, soared upwards, bearing on its wings  
Dense smoke, and clouds of fire. Far off it flew,  
Angrily murmuring ; and in distance died.  
The earth no more was shaken : save the voice  
Of the great conflagration, all was still.

When, far as eye could pierce, the millions looked,—  
No stone upon another seemed to stand !  
Where, in the pride of power, and boundless pomp,  
Long ages had been throned the Eastern Queen,  
Raged now a sea of flame unquenchable !

Awe-struck, and sad, the gathered nations gazed ;  
Then, as one soul had ruled them, turned aside,  
Bent down the head, and wept. The crown of earth,  
Her glory, and her sunshine, seemed at once  
Shattered, and quenched ; the brightest star of heaven  
Darkened, and fallen !

As through forest vast,  
The plaintive moaning of the wintry wind,

Pervading far and wide, through midnight sounds,—  
So, from that countless multitude, the voice  
Of wailing, and of lamentation deep,  
Rose on the stirless air.

One man alone,  
Erect, exulting, on the ruin gazed,—  
The priest Belesis; for, accomplished now,  
The visions and the prophecies of years  
He saw before him. On the arm he touched  
The sorrowing Mede; and, with an eye of fire,  
And countenance of triumph glowing bright,  
Pointed, and proudly smiled. Arbaces looked,  
Yet breathed no word; but shook the head, and wept.

Throughout the night was heard the voice of woe:  
None to his fellows, save in whisper, spake:  
None from his place removed.

Day dawned at length;  
And then, like mourners who long time have bent  
O'er the dark grave, and bid the last farewell,  
To needful tasks they went.

Nine days and nights,  
Streamed up the flames; and still the downcast hosts  
Lingered to watch, and weep. But, on the morn  
Of the tenth day,—toward Babylon, new seat  
Of Eastern power, the human sea 'gan flow.

On the broad summits of the southern hills,  
At eve the nations camped; still full in view  
Of that great burning. But the flames no more  
Their hands triumphant lifted. One vast sheet,  
As 'twere a lake of molten iron, lay,  
Voiceless, and motionless; with glare intense,  
Dyeing eve's sober raiment!

At deep night,  
Heaven's flood-gates wide were opened; and came down  
Heavy, incessant rain. Down, down, straight down  
As sinking plummet's line,—the broad, close drops  
Unceasingly came down.

Day rose; but dark  
As Polar twilight: still was heard no sound,  
Save the great boiling of the ponderous flood.

Noon came,—a deep eclipse ! yet stirred no man.  
Eve passed : and night—a pitchy blackness—fell ;  
Yet still down, down, the unremitting rain  
Poured in thick torrents down !

Another dawn ;

Another noon, and eve,—another night  
Of Stygian blackness,—and still ceaselessly,  
As from wide-opened fountains in the sky,  
The roaring deluge fell.

On the third morn

Again heaven's flood-gates closed ; and, when gray light  
Stole o'er the sky,—from their close shelter came  
The wearied millions, and looked forth. But lo !  
The spacious plain seemed now an inland sea :  
In midst thereof,—with one high mound alone  
Upstanding yet,—an island, low and dark,  
And like a cauldron steaming. Where, so late,  
The dwellings of the millions, pleasure-steeped ;  
Palace, and tower, and temple, battlement,  
And rock-like wall, eternal deemed, had stood,—  
One huge black waste of smouldering ashes lay !

So sank, to endless night, that glorious Nineveh !

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