

HELLAS

Percy Bysshe Shelley

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HELLAS

Percy Bysshe Shelley

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A LYRICAL DRAMA.

MANTIS EIM EZTHLON AGONUN.—OEDIP. COLON.

["Hellas" was composed at Pisa in the autumn of 1821, and dispatched to London, November 11. It was published, with the author's name, by C. &J. Ollier in the spring of 1822. A transcript of the poem by Edward Williams is in the Rowfant Library. Ollier availed himself of Shelley's permission to cancel certain passages in the notes; he also struck out certain lines of the text. These omissions were, some of them, restored in Galignani's one-volume edition of "Coleridge, Shelley and Keats", Paris, 1829, and also by Mrs. Shelley in the "Poetical Works", 1839. A passage in the "Preface", suppressed by Ollier, was restored by Mr. Buxton Forman (1892) from a proof copy of "Hellas" in his possession. The "Prologue to Hellas" was edited by Dr. Garnett in 1862 ("Relics of Shelley") from the manuscripts at Boscombe Manor.

Our text is that of the editio princeps, 1822, corrected by a list of "Errata" sent by Shelley to Ollier, April 11, 1822. The Editor's Notes at the end of Volume 3 should be consulted.]

TO HIS EXCELLENCY

PRINCE ALEXANDER MAVROCORDATO

LATE SECRETARY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS TO THE HOSPODAR OF WALLACHIA

THE DRAMA OF HELLAS IS INSCRIBED AS AN

IMPERFECT TOKEN OF THE ADMIRATION,

SYMPATHY, AND FRIENDSHIP OF

THE AUTHOR.

Pisa, November 1, 1821.

PREFACE.

The poem of "Hellas", written at the suggestion of the events of the moment, is a mere improvise, and derives its interest (should it be found to possess any) solely from the intense sympathy which the Author feels with the cause he would celebrate.

The subject, in its present state, is insusceptible of being treated otherwise than lyrically, and if I have called this poem a drama from the circumstance of its being composed in dialogue, the licence is not greater than

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that which has been assumed by other poets who have called their productions epics, only because they have been divided into twelve or twenty-four books.

The "Persae" of Aeschylus afforded me the first model of my conception, although the decision of the glorious contest now waging in Greece being yet suspended forbids a catastrophe parallel to the return of Xerxes and the desolation of the Persians. I have, therefore, contented myself with exhibiting a series of lyric pictures, and with having wrought upon the curtain of futurity, which falls upon the unfinished scene, such figures of indistinct and visionary delineation as suggest the final triumph of the Greek cause as a portion of the cause of civilisation and social improvement.

The drama (if drama it must be called) is, however, so inartificial that I doubt whether, if recited on the Thespian waggon to an Athenian village at the Dionysiaca, it would have obtained the prize of the goat. I shall bear with equanimity any punishment, greater than the loss of such a reward, which the Aristarchi of the hour may think fit to inflict.

The only "goat-song" which I have yet attempted has, I confess, in spite of the unfavourable nature of the subject, received a greater and a more valuable portion of applause than I expected or than it deserved.

Common fame is the only authority which I can allege for the details which form the basis of the poem, and I must trespass upon the forgiveness of my readers for the display of newspaper erudition to which I have been reduced. Undoubtedly, until the conclusion of the war, it will be impossible to obtain an account of it sufficiently authentic for historical materials; but poets have their privilege, and it is unquestionable that actions of the most exalted courage have been performed by the Greeks—that they have gained more than one naval victory, and that their defeat in Wallachia was signalized by circumstances of heroism more glorious even than victory.

The apathy of the rulers of the civilised world to the astonishing circumstance of the descendants of that nation to which they owe their civilisation, rising as it were from the ashes of their ruin, is something perfectly inexplicable to a mere spectator of the shows of this mortal scene. We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece. But for Greece—Rome, the instructor, the conqueror, or the metropolis of our ancestors, would have spread no illumination with her arms, and we might still have been savages and idolaters; or, what is worse, might have arrived at such a stagnant and miserable state of social institution as China and Japan possess.

The human form and the human mind attained to a perfection in Greece which has impressed its image on those faultless productions, whose very fragments are the despair of modern art, and has propagated impulses which cannot cease, through a thousand channels of manifest or imperceptible operation, to ennoble and delight mankind until the extinction of the race.

The modern Greek is the descendant of those glorious beings whom the imagination almost refuses to figure to itself as belonging to our kind, and he inherits much of their sensibility, their rapidity of conception, their enthusiasm, and their courage. If in many instances he is degraded by moral and political slavery to the practice of the basest vices it engenders—and that below the level of ordinary degradation—let us reflect that the corruption of the best produces the worst, and that habits which subsist only in relation to a peculiar state of social institution may be expected to cease as soon as that relation is dissolved. In fact, the Greeks, since the admirable novel of Anastasius could have been a faithful picture of their manners, have undergone most important changes; the flower of their youth, returning to their country from the universities of Italy, Germany, and France, have communicated to their fellow-citizens the latest results of that social perfection of which their ancestors were the original source. The University of Chios contained before the breaking out of the revolution eight hundred students, and among them several Germans and Americans. The munificence and energy of many of the Greek princes and merchants, directed to the renovation of their country with a spirit

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and a wisdom which has few examples, is above all praise.

The English permit their own oppressors to act according to their natural sympathy with the Turkish tyrant, and to brand upon their name the indelible blot of an alliance with the enemies of domestic happiness, of Christianity and civilisation.

Russia desires to possess, not to liberate Greece; and is contented to see the Turks, its natural enemies, and the Greeks, its intended slaves, enfeeble each other until one or both fall into its net. The wise and generous policy of England would have consisted in establishing the independence of Greece, and in maintaining it both against Russia and the Turk;—but when was the oppressor generous or just?

[Should the English people ever become free, they will reflect upon the part which those who presume to represent their will have played in the great drama of the revival of liberty, with feelings which it would become them to anticipate. This is the age of the war of the oppressed against the oppressors, and every one of those ringleaders of the privileged gangs of murderers and swindlers, called Sovereigns, look to each other for aid against the common enemy, and suspend their mutual jealousies in the presence of a mightier fear. Of this holy alliance all the despots of the earth are virtual members. But a new race has arisen throughout Europe, nursed in the abhorrence of the opinions which are its chains, and she will continue to produce fresh generations to accomplish that destiny which tyrants foresee and dread. (This paragraph, suppressed in 1822 by Charles Ollier, was first restored in 1892 by Mr. Buxton Forman ["Poetical Works of P. B. S.", volume 4 pages 40–41] from a proof copy of Hellas in his possession.)

The Spanish Peninsula is already free. France is tranquil in the enjoyment of a partial exemption from the abuses which its unnatural and feeble government are vainly attempting to revive. The seed of blood and misery has been sown in Italy, and a more vigorous race is arising to go forth to the harvest. The world waits only the news of a revolution of Germany to see the tyrants who have pinnacled themselves on its supineness precipitated into the ruin from which they shall never arise. Well do these destroyers of mankind know their enemy, when they impute the insurrection in Greece to the same spirit before which they tremble throughout the rest of Europe, and that enemy well knows the power and the cunning of its opponents, and watches the moment of their approaching weakness and inevitable division to wrest the bloody sceptres from their grasp.

PROLOGUE TO HELLAS.

HERALD OF ETERNITY:

It is the day when all the sons of God
Wait in the roofless senate—house, whose floor
Is Chaos, and the immovable abyss
Frozen by His steadfast word to hyaline

...

The shadow of God, and delegate _5
Of that before whose breath the universe
Is as a print of dew.
Hierarchs and kings

HELLAS

HELLAS

Who from your thrones pinnacled on the past
Sway the reluctant present, ye who sit
Pavilioned on the radiance or the gloom _10
Of mortal thought, which like an exhalation
Steaming from earth, conceals the ... of heaven
Which gave it birth. ... assemble here
Before your Father's throne; the swift decree
Yet hovers, and the fiery incarnation _15
Is yet withheld, clothed in which it shall
annul
The fairest of those wandering isles that gem
The sapphire space of interstellar air,
That green and azure sphere, that earth enwrapped _20
Less in the beauty of its tender light
Than in an atmosphere of living spirit
Which interpenetrating all the ...
it rolls from realm to realm
And age to age, and in its ebb and flow _25
Impels the generations
To their appointed place,
Whilst the high Arbiter
Beholds the strife, and at the appointed time
Sends His decrees veiled in eternal... _30

Within the circuit of this pendent orb
There lies an antique region, on which fell
The dews of thought in the world's golden dawn
Earliest and most benign, and from it sprung
Temples and cities and immortal forms _35
And harmonies of wisdom and of song,
And thoughts, and deeds worthy of thoughts so fair.
And when the sun of its dominion failed,
And when the winter of its glory came,
The winds that stripped it bare blew on and swept _40
That dew into the utmost wildernesses
In wandering clouds of sunny rain that thawed
The unmaternal bosom of the North.
Haste, sons of God, ... for ye beheld,
Reluctant, or consenting, or astonished, _45
The stern decrees go forth, which heaped on Greece
Ruin and degradation and despair.
A fourth now waits: assemble, sons of God,
To speed or to prevent or to suspend,
If, as ye dream, such power be not withheld, _50
The unaccomplished destiny.

NOTE:

HELLAS

_8 your Garnett; yon Forman, Dowden.

...

CHORUS:

The curtain of the Universe
Is rent and shattered,
The splendour-winged worlds disperse
Like wild doves scattered. _55

Space is roofless and bare,
And in the midst a cloudy shrine,
Dark amid thrones of light.
In the blue glow of hyaline
Golden worlds revolve and shine. _60
In ... flight
From every point of the Infinite,
Like a thousand dawns on a single night
The splendours rise and spread;
And through thunder and darkness dread _65
Light and music are radiated,
And in their pavilioned chariots led
By living wings high overhead
The giant Powers move,
Gloomy or bright as the thrones they fill. _70

...

A chaos of light and motion
Upon that glassy ocean.

...

The senate of the Gods is met,
Each in his rank and station set;
There is silence in the spaces— _75
Lo! Satan, Christ, and Mahomet

HELLAS

Start from their places!

CHRIST:

Almighty Father!

Low-kneeling at the feet of Destiny

...

There are two fountains in which spirits weep _80
When mortals err, Discord and Slavery named,
And with their bitter dew two Destinies
Filled each their irrevocable urns; the third
Fiercest and mightiest, mingled both, and added
Chaos and Death, and slow Oblivion's lymph, _85
And hate and terror, and the poisoned rain

...

The Aurora of the nations. By this brow
Whose pores wept tears of blood, by these wide wounds,
By this imperial crown of agony,
By infamy and solitude and death, _90
For this I underwent, and by the pain
Of pity for those who would ... for me
The unremembered joy of a revenge,
For this I felt—by Plato's sacred light,
Of which my spirit was a burning morrow— _95
By Greece and all she cannot cease to be.
Her quenchless words, sparks of immortal truth,
Stars of all night—her harmonies and forms,
Echoes and shadows of what Love adores
In thee, I do compel thee, send forth Fate, _100
Thy irrevocable child: let her descend,
A seraph-winged Victory [arrayed]
In tempest of the omnipotence of God
Which sweeps through all things.

From hollow leagues, from Tyranny which arms _105
Adverse miscreeds and emulous anarchies

HELLAS

HELLAS

To stamp, as on a winged serpent's seed,
Upon the name of Freedom; from the storm
Of faction, which like earthquake shakes and sickens
The solid heart of enterprise; from all _110
By which the holiest dreams of highest spirits
Are stars beneath the dawn...
She shall arise
Victorious as the world arose from Chaos!
And as the Heavens and the Earth arrayed
Their presence in the beauty and the light _115
Of Thy first smile, O Father,—as they gather
The spirit of Thy love which paves for them
Their path o'er the abyss, till every sphere
Shall be one living Spirit,—so shall Greece—

SATAN:

Be as all things beneath the empyrean, _120
Mine! Art thou eyeless like old Destiny,
Thou mockery—king, crowned with a wreath of thorns?
Whose sceptre is a reed, the broken reed
Which pierces thee! whose throne a chair of scorn;
For seest thou not beneath this crystal floor _125
The innumerable worlds of golden light
Which are my empire, and the least of them
which thou wouldst redeem from me?
Know'st thou not them my portion?
Or wouldst rekindle the ... strife _130
Which our great Father then did arbitrate
Which he assigned to his competing sons
Each his apportioned realm?
Thou Destiny,
Thou who art mailed in the omnipotence
Of Him who tends thee forth, whate'er thy task, _135
Speed, spare not to accomplish, and be mine
Thy trophies, whether Greece again become
The fountain in the desert whence the earth
Shall drink of freedom, which shall give it strength
To suffer, or a gulf of hollow death _140
To swallow all delight, all life, all hope.
Go, thou Vicegerent of my will, no less
Than of the Father's; but lest thou shouldst faint,
The winged hounds, Famine and Pestilence,
Shall wait on thee, the hundred—forked snake _145
Insatiate Superstition still shall...
The earth behind thy steps, and War shall hover
Above, and Fraud shall gape below, and Change
Shall flit before thee on her dragon wings,
Convulsing and consuming, and I add _150
Three vials of the tears which daemons weep

HELLAS

HELLAS

When virtuous spirits through the gate of Death
Pass triumphing over the thorns of life,
Sceptres and crowns, mitres and swords and snares,
Trampling in scorn, like Him and Socrates. _155
The first is Anarchy; when Power and Pleasure,
Glory and science and security,
On Freedom hang like fruit on the green tree,
Then pour it forth, and men shall gather ashes.
The second Tyranny--

CHRIST:

Obdurate spirit! _160
Thou seest but the Past in the To-come.
Pride is thy error and thy punishment.
Boast not thine empire, dream not that thy worlds
Are more than furnace-sparks or rainbow-drops
Before the Power that wields and kindles them. _165
True greatness asks not space, true excellence
Lives in the Spirit of all things that live,
Which lends it to the worlds thou callest thine.

...

MAHOMET:

...Haste thou and fill the waning crescent
With beams as keen as those which pierced the shadow _170
Of Christian night rolled back upon the West,
When the orient moon of Islam rode in triumph
From Tmolus to the Acroceraunian snow.

...

Wake, thou Word
Of God, and from the throne of Destiny _175
Even to the utmost limit of thy way
May Triumph

...

HELLAS

Be thou a curse on them whose creed
Divides and multiplies the most high God.

HELLAS.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

MAHMUD.

HASSAN.

DAOOD.

AHASUERUS, A JEW.

CHORUS OF GREEK CAPTIVE WOMEN.

[THE PHANTOM OF MAHOMET II. (OMITTED, EDITION 1822.)]

MESSENGERS, SLAVES, AND ATTENDANTS.

SCENE:

CONSTANTINOPLE.

TIME: SUNSET.

SCENE:

A TERRACE ON THE SERAGLIO.

MAHMUD SLEEPING,

AN INDIAN SLAVE SITTING BESIDE HIS COUCH.

CHORUS OF GREEK CAPTIVE WOMEN:

We strew these opiate flowers

On thy restless pillow,—

They were stripped from Orient bowers,

By the Indian billow.

Be thy sleep _5

Calm and deep,

Like theirs who fell—not ours who weep!

HELLAS

INDIAN:

Away, unlovely dreams!
Away, false shapes of sleep
Be his, as Heaven seems, _10
Clear, and bright, and deep!
Soft as love, and calm as death,
Sweet as a summer night without a breath.

CHORUS:

Sleep, sleep! our song is laden
With the soul of slumber; _15
It was sung by a Samian maiden,
Whose lover was of the number
Who now keep
That calm sleep
Whence none may wake, where none shall weep. _20

INDIAN:

I touch thy temples pale!
I breathe my soul on thee!
And could my prayers avail,
All my joy should be
Dead, and I would live to weep, _25
So thou mightst win one hour of quiet sleep.

CHORUS:

Breathe low, low
The spell of the mighty mistress now!
When Conscience lulls her sated snake,
And Tyrants sleep, let Freedom wake. _30
Breathe low—low
The words which, like secret fire, shall flow
Through the veins of the frozen earth—low, low!

SEMICHORUS 1:

Life may change, but it may fly not;
Hope may vanish, but can die not; _35
Truth be veiled, but still it burneth;
Love repulsed,—but it returneth!

SEMICHORUS 2:

Yet were life a charnel where
 Hope lay confined with Despair;
 Yet were truth a sacred lie, _40
 Love were lust—

SEMICHORUS 1:

If Liberty
 Lent not life its soul of light,
 Hope its iris of delight,
 Truth its prophet's robe to wear,
 Love its power to give and bear. _45

CHORUS:

In the great morning of the world,
 The Spirit of God with might unfurled
 The flag of Freedom over Chaos,
 And all its banded anarchs fled,
 Like vultures frightened from Imaus, _50
 Before an earthquake's tread.—
 So from Time's tempestuous dawn
 Freedom's splendour burst and shone:—
 Thermopylae and Marathon
 Caught like mountains beacon-lighted, _55
 The springing Fire.—The winged glory
 On Philippi half-alighted,
 Like an eagle on a promontory.
 Its unwearied wings could fan
 The quenchless ashes of Milan. _60
 From age to age, from man to man,
 It lived; and lit from land to land
 Florence, Albion, Switzerland.

Then night fell; and, as from night,
 Reassuming fiery flight, _65
 From the West swift Freedom came,
 Against the course of Heaven and doom.
 A second sun arrayed in flame,
 To burn, to kindle, to illumine.
 From far Atlantis its young beams _70
 Chased the shadows and the dreams.
 France, with all her sanguine steams,
 Hid, but quenched it not; again
 Through clouds its shafts of glory rain

HELLAS

From utmost Germany to Spain. _75
As an eagle fed with morning
Scorns the embattled tempest's warning,
When she seeks her aerie hanging
In the mountain-cedar's hair,
And her brood expect the clanging _80
Of her wings through the wild air,
Sick with famine:—Freedom, so
To what of Greece remaineth now
Returns; her hoary ruins glow
Like Orient mountains lost in day; _85
Beneath the safety of her wings
Her renovated nurslings prey,
And in the naked lightnings
Of truth they purge their dazzled eyes.
Let Freedom leave—where'er she flies, _90
A Desert, or a Paradise:
Let the beautiful and the brave
Share her glory, or a grave.

NOTES:

_77 tempest's]tempests edition 1822.

_87 prey edition 1822; play editions 1839.

SEMICHORUS 1:

With the gifts of gladness
Greece did thy cradle strew; _95

SEMICHORUS 2:

With the tears of sadness
Greece did thy shroud bedew!

SEMICHORUS 1:

With an orphan's affection
She followed thy bier through Time;

SEMICHORUS 2:

And at thy resurrection _100
Reappeareth, like thou, sublime!

HELLAS

SEMICHORUS 1:

If Heaven should resume thee,
To Heaven shall her spirit ascend;

SEMICHORUS 2:

If Hell should entomb thee,
To Hell shall her high hearts bend. _105

SEMICHORUS 1:

If Annihilation--

SEMICHORUS 2:

Dust let her glories be!
And a name and a nation
Be forgotten, Freedom, with thee!

INDIAN:

His brow grows darker--breathe not--move not! _110
He starts--he shudders--ye that love not,
With your panting loud and fast,
Have awakened him at last.

MAHMUD [STARTING FROM HIS SLEEP]:

Man the Seraglio-guard! make fast the gate!
What! from a cannonade of three short hours? _115
'Tis false! that breach towards the Bosphorus
Cannot be practicable yet--who stirs?
Stand to the match; that when the foe prevails
One spark may mix in reconciling ruin
The conqueror and the conquered! Heave the tower _120
Into the gap--wrench off the roof!
[ENTER HASSAN.]
Ha! what!
The truth of day lightens upon my dream
And I am Mahmud still.

HASSAN:

Your Sublime Highness

HELLAS

Is strangely moved.

MAHMUD:

The times do cast strange shadows
 On those who watch and who must rule their course, _125
 Lest they, being first in peril as in glory,
 Be whelmed in the fierce ebb:--and these are of them.
 Thrice has a gloomy vision hunted me
 As thus from sleep into the troubled day;
 It shakes me as the tempest shakes the sea, _130
 Leaving no figure upon memory's glass.
 Would that--no matter. Thou didst say thou knewest
 A Jew, whose spirit is a chronicle
 Of strange and secret and forgotten things.
 I bade thee summon him:--'tis said his tribe _135
 Dream, and are wise interpreters of dreams.

HASSAN:

The Jew of whom I spake is old,--so old
 He seems to have outlived a world's decay;
 The hoary mountains and the wrinkled ocean
 Seem younger still than he;--his hair and beard _140
 Are whiter than the tempest-sifted snow;
 His cold pale limbs and pulseless arteries
 Are like the fibres of a cloud instinct
 With light, and to the soul that quickens them
 Are as the atoms of the mountain-drift _145
 To the winter wind:--but from his eye looks forth
 A life of unconsumed thought which pierces
 The Present, and the Past, and the To-come.
 Some say that this is he whom the great prophet
 Jesus, the son of Joseph, for his mockery, _150
 Mocked with the curse of immortality.
 Some feign that he is Enoch: others dream
 He was pre-adamite and has survived
 Cycles of generation and of ruin.
 The sage, in truth, by dreadful abstinence _155
 And conquering penance of the mutinous flesh,
 Deep contemplation, and unwearied study,
 In years outstretched beyond the date of man,
 May have attained to sovereignty and science
 Over those strong and secret things and thoughts _160
 Which others fear and know not.

MAHMUD:

HELLAS

HELLAS

I would talk
With this old Jew.

HASSAN:

Thy will is even now
Made known to him, where he dwells in a sea-cavern
'Mid the Demonesi, less accessible
Than thou or God! He who would question him _165
Must sail alone at sunset, where the stream
Of Ocean sleeps around those foamless isles,
When the young moon is westering as now,
And evening airs wander upon the wave;
And when the pines of that bee-pasturing isle, _170
Green Erebinthus, quench the fiery shadow
Of his gilt prow within the sapphire water,
Then must the lonely helmsman cry aloud
'Ahasuerus!' and the caverns round
Will answer 'Ahasuerus!' If his prayer _175
Be granted, a faint meteor will arise
Lighting him over Marmora, and a wind
Will rush out of the sighing pine-forest,
And with the wind a storm of harmony
Unutterably sweet, and pilot him _180
Through the soft twilight to the Bosphorus:
Thence at the hour and place and circumstance
Fit for the matter of their conference
The Jew appears. Few dare, and few who dare
Win the desired communion—but that shout _185
Bodes—

[A SHOUT WITHIN.]

MAHMUD:

Evil, doubtless; Like all human sounds.
Let me converse with spirits.

HASSAN:

That shout again.

MAHMUD:

This Jew whom thou hast summoned—

HELLAS

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HASSAN:

Will be here---

MAHMUD:

When the omnipotent hour to which are yoked
He, I, and all things shall compel--enough! _190
Silence those mutineers--that drunken crew,
That crowd about the pilot in the storm.
Ay! strike the foremost shorter by a head!
They weary me, and I have need of rest.
Kinks are like stars--they rise and set, they have _195
The worship of the world, but no repose.

[EXEUNT SEVERALLY.]

CHORUS:

Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
From creation to decay,
Like the bubbles on a river
Sparkling, bursting, borne away. _200
But they are still immortal
Who, through birth's orient portal
And death's dark chasm hurrying to and fro,
Clothe their unceasing flight
In the brief dust and light _205
Gathered around their chariots as they go;
New shapes they still may weave,
New gods, new laws receive,
Bright or dim are they as the robes they last
On Death's bare ribs had cast. _210

A power from the unknown God,
A Promethean conqueror, came;
Like a triumphal path he trod
The thorns of death and shame.
A mortal shape to him _215
Was like the vapour dim
Which the orient planet animates with light;
Hell, Sin, and Slavery came,
Like bloodhounds mild and tame,

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Nor preyed, until their Lord had taken flight; _220
The moon of Mahomet
Arose, and it shall set:
While blazoned as on Heaven's immortal noon
The cross leads generations on.

Swift as the radiant shapes of sleep _225
From one whose dreams are Paradise
Fly, when the fond wretch wakes to weep,
And Day peers forth with her blank eyes;
So fleet, so faint, so fair,
The Powers of earth and air _230
Fled from the folding-star of Bethlehem:
Apollo, Pan, and Love,
And even Olympian Jove
Grew weak, for killing Truth had glared on them;
Our hills and seas and streams, _235
Dispeopled of their dreams,
Their waters turned to blood, their dew to tears,
Wailed for the golden years.

[ENTER MAHMUD, HASSAN, DAOOD, AND OTHERS.]

MAHMUD:

More gold? our ancestors bought gold with victory,
And shall I sell it for defeat?

DAOOD:

The Janizars _240
Clamour for pay.

MAHMUD:

Go! bid them pay themselves
With Christian blood! Are there no Grecian virgins
Whose shrieks and spasms and tears they may enjoy?
No infidel children to impale on spears?
No hoary priests after that Patriarch _245
Who bent the curse against his country's heart,
Which clove his own at last? Go! bid them kill,
Blood is the seed of gold.

HELLAS

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DAOOD:

It has been sown,
And yet the harvest to the sicklemen
Is as a grain to each.

MAHMUD:

Then, take this signet, _250
Unlock the seventh chamber in which lie
The treasures of victorious Solyman,—
An empire's spoil stored for a day of ruin.
O spirit of my sires! is it not come?
The prey—birds and the wolves are gorged and sleep; _255
But these, who spread their feast on the red earth,
Hunger for gold, which fills not.—See them fed;
Then, lead them to the rivers of fresh death.
[EXIT DAOOD.]
O miserable dawn, after a night
More glorious than the day which it usurped! _260
O faith in God! O power on earth! O word
Of the great prophet, whose o'ershadowing wings
Darkened the thrones and idols of the West,
Now bright!—For thy sake cursed be the hour,
Even as a father by an evil child, _265
When the orient moon of Islam rolled in triumph
From Caucasus to White Ceraunia!
Ruin above, and anarchy below;
Terror without, and treachery within;
The Chalice of destruction full, and all _270
Thirsting to drink; and who among us dares
To dash it from his lips? and where is Hope?

HASSAN:

The lamp of our dominion still rides high;
One God is God—Mahomet is His prophet.
Four hundred thousand Moslems, from the limits _275
Of utmost Asia, irresistibly
Throng, like full clouds at the Sirocco's cry;
But not like them to weep their strength in tears:
They bear destroying lightning, and their step
Wakes earthquake to consume and overwhelm, _280
And reign in ruin. Phrygian Olympus,
Tmolus, and Latmos, and Mycale, roughen
With horrent arms; and lofty ships even now,
Like vapours anchored to a mountain's edge,
Freighted with fire and whirlwind, wait at Scala _285
The convoy of the ever—veering wind.

HELLAS

Samos is drunk with blood;—the Greek has paid
Brief victory with swift loss and long despair.
The false Moldavian serfs fled fast and far
When the fierce shout of 'Allah-illa-Allah!' _290
Rose like the war-cry of the northern wind
Which kills the sluggish clouds, and leaves a flock
Of wild swans struggling with the naked storm.
So were the lost Greeks on the Danube's day!
If night is mute, yet the returning sun _295
Kindles the voices of the morning birds;
Nor at thy bidding less exultingly
Than birds rejoicing in the golden day,
The Anarchies of Africa unleash
Their tempest-winged cities of the sea, _300
To speak in thunder to the rebel world.
Like sulphurous clouds, half-shattered by the storm,
They sweep the pale Aegean, while the Queen
Of Ocean, bound upon her island-throne,
Far in the West, sits mourning that her sons _305
Who frown on Freedom spare a smile for thee:
Russia still hovers, as an eagle might
Within a cloud, near which a kite and crane
Hang tangled in inextricable fight,
To stoop upon the victor;—for she fears _310
The name of Freedom, even as she hates thine.
But recreant Austria loves thee as the Grave
Loves Pestilence, and her slow dogs of war
Fleshed with the chase, come up from Italy,
And howl upon their limits; for they see _315
The panther, Freedom, fled to her old cover,
Amid seas and mountains, and a mightier brood
Crouch round. What Anarch wears a crown or mitre,
Or bears the sword, or grasps the key of gold,
Whose friends are not thy friends, whose foes thy foes? _320
Our arsenals and our armouries are full;
Our forts defy assault; ten thousand cannon
Lie ranged upon the beach, and hour by hour
Their earth-convulsing wheels affright the city;
The galloping of fiery steeds makes pale _325
The Christian merchant; and the yellow Jew
Hides his hoard deeper in the faithless earth.
Like clouds, and like the shadows of the clouds,
Over the hills of Anatolia,
Swift in wide troops the Tartar chivalry _330
Sweep;—the far flashing of their starry lances
Reverberates the dying light of day.
We have one God, one King, one Hope, one Law;
But many-headed Insurrection stands
Divided in itself, and soon must fall. _335

NOTES:

_253 spoil edition 1822; spoils editions 1839.
_279 bear edition 1822; have editions 1839.
_322 assault edition 1822; assaults editions 1839.

MAHMUD:

Proud words, when deeds come short, are seasonable:
Look, Hassan, on yon crescent moon, emblazoned
Upon that shattered flag of fiery cloud
Which leads the rear of the departing day;
Wan emblem of an empire fading now! _340
See how it trembles in the blood-red air,
And like a mighty lamp whose oil is spent
Shrinks on the horizon's edge, while, from above,
One star with insolent and victorious light
Hovers above its fall, and with keen beams, _345
Like arrows through a fainting antelope,
Strikes its weak form to death.

HASSAN:

Even as that moon
Renews itself--

MAHMUD:

Shall we be not renewed!
Far other bark than ours were needed now
To stem the torrent of descending time: _350
The Spirit that lifts the slave before his lord
Stalks through the capitals of armed kings,
And spreads his ensign in the wilderness:
Exults in chains; and, when the rebel falls,
Cries like the blood of Abel from the dust; _355
And the inheritors of the earth, like beasts
When earthquake is unleashed, with idiot fear
Cower in their kingly dens--as I do now.
What were Defeat when Victory must appal?
Or Danger, when Security looks pale?-- _360
How said the messenger--who, from the fort
Islanded in the Danube, saw the battle
Of Bucharest?--that--

NOTES:

HELLAS

_351 his edition 1822; its editions 1839.

_356 of the earth edition 1822; of earth editions 1839.

HASSAN:

Ibrahim's scimitar

Drew with its gleam swift victory from Heaven,

To burn before him in the night of battle-- _365

A light and a destruction.

MAHMUD:

Ay! the day

Was ours: but how?--

HASSAN:

The light Wallachians,

The Arnaut, Servian, and Albanian allies

Fled from the glance of our artillery

Almost before the thunderstone alit. _370

One half the Grecian army made a bridge

Of safe and slow retreat, with Moslem dead;

The other--

MAHMUD:

Speak--tremble not.--

HASSAN:

Islanded

By victor myriads, formed in hollow square

With rough and steadfast front, and thrice flung back _375

The deluge of our foaming cavalry;

Thrice their keen wedge of battle pierced our lines.

Our baffled army trembled like one man

Before a host, and gave them space; but soon,

From the surrounding hills, the batteries blazed, _380

Kneading them down with fire and iron rain:

Yet none approached; till, like a field of corn

Under the hook of the swart sickleman,

The band, intrenched in mounds of Turkish dead,

Grew weak and few.--Then said the Pacha, 'Slaves, _385

Render yourselves--they have abandoned you--

What hope of refuge, or retreat, or aid?

HELLAS

HELLAS

We grant your lives.' 'Grant that which is thine own!'
Cried one, and fell upon his sword and died!
Another—'God, and man, and hope abandon me; _390
But I to them, and to myself, remain
Constant:'—he bowed his head, and his heart burst.
A third exclaimed, 'There is a refuge, tyrant,
Where thou dardest not pursue, and canst not harm
Shouldst thou pursue; there we shall meet again.' _395
Then held his breath, and, after a brief spasm,
The indignant spirit cast its mortal garment
Among the slain—dead earth upon the earth!
So these survivors, each by different ways,
Some strange, all sudden, none dishonourable, _400
Met in triumphant death; and when our army
Closed in, while yet wonder, and awe, and shame
Held back the base hyaenas of the battle
That feed upon the dead and fly the living,
One rose out of the chaos of the slain: _405
And if it were a corpse which some dread spirit
Of the old saviours of the land we rule
Had lifted in its anger, wandering by;—
Or if there burned within the dying man
Unquenchable disdain of death, and faith _410
Creating what it feigned;—I cannot tell—
But he cried, 'Phantoms of the free, we come!
Armies of the Eternal, ye who strike
To dust the citadels of sanguine kings,
And shake the souls throned on their stony hearts, _415
And thaw their frostwork diadems like dew;—
O ye who float around this clime, and weave
The garment of the glory which it wears,
Whose fame, though earth betray the dust it clasped,
Lies sepulchred in monumental thought;— _420
Progenitors of all that yet is great,
Ascribe to your bright senate, O accept
In your high ministrations, us, your sons—
Us first, and the more glorious yet to come!
And ye, weak conquerors! giants who look pale _425
When the crushed worm rebels beneath your tread,
The vultures and the dogs, your pensioners tame,
Are overgorged; but, like oppressors, still
They crave the relic of Destruction's feast.
The exhalations and the thirsty winds _430
Are sick with blood; the dew is foul with death;
Heaven's light is quenched in slaughter: thus, where'er
Upon your camps, cities, or towers, or fleets,
The obscene birds the reeking remnants cast
Of these dead limbs,—upon your streams and mountains, _435
Upon your fields, your gardens, and your housetops,
Where'er the winds shall creep, or the clouds fly,
Or the dews fall, or the angry sun look down

HELLAS

With poisoned light—Famine, and Pestilence,
And Panic, shall wage war upon our side! _440
Nature from all her boundaries is moved
Against ye: Time has found ye light as foam.
The Earth rebels; and Good and Evil stake
Their empire o'er the unborn world of men
On this one cast;—but ere the die be thrown, _445
The renovated genius of our race,
Proud umpire of the impious game, descends,
A seraph-winged Victory, bestriding
The tempest of the Omnipotence of God,
Which sweeps all things to their appointed doom, _450
And you to oblivion!—More he would have said,
But—

NOTE:

_384 band edition 1822; bands editions 1839.

MAHMUD:

Died—as thou shouldst ore thy lips had painted
Their ruin in the hues of our success.
A rebel's crime, guilt with a rebel's tongue!
Your heart is Greek, Hassan.

HASSAN:

It may be so: _455
A spirit not my own wrenched me within,
And I have spoken words I fear and hate;
Yet would I die for—

MAHMUD:

Live! oh live! outlive
Me and this sinking empire. But the fleet—

HASSAN:

Alas!—

MAHMUD:

The fleet which, like a flock of clouds _460

HELLAS

HELLAS

Chased by the wind, flies the insurgent banner!
Our winged castles from their merchant ships!
Our myriads before their weak pirate bands!
Our arms before their chains! our years of empire
Before their centuries of servile fear! _465
Death is awake! Repulse is on the waters!
They own no more the thunder-bearing banner
Of Mahmud; but, like hounds of a base breed,
Gorge from a stranger's hand, and rend their master.

NOTE:

_466 Repulse is "Shelley, Errata", edition 1822; Repulsed edition 1822.

HASSAN:

Latmos, and Ampelos, and Phanae saw _470
The wreck—

MAHMUD:

The caves of the Icarian isles
Told each to the other in loud mockery,
And with the tongue as of a thousand echoes,
First of the sea-convulsing fight—and, then,—
Thou darest to speak—senseless are the mountains: _475
Interpret thou their voice!

NOTE:

_472 Told Errata, Wms. transcript; Hold edition 1822.

HASSAN:

My presence bore
A part in that day's shame. The Grecian fleet
Bore down at daybreak from the North, and hung
As multitudinous on the ocean line,
As cranes upon the cloudless Thracian wind. _480
Our squadron, convoying ten thousand men,
Was stretching towards Nauplia when the battle
Was kindled.—
First through the hail of our artillery
The agile Hydriote barks with press of sail _485
Dashed:—ship to ship, cannon to cannon, man
To man were grappled in the embrace of war,

HELLAS

HELLAS

Inextricable but by death or victory.
The tempest of the raging fight convulsed
To its crystalline depths that stainless sea, _490
And shook Heaven's roof of golden morning clouds,
Poised on an hundred azure mountain-isles.
In the brief trances of the artillery
One cry from the destroyed and the destroyer
Rose, and a cloud of desolation wrapped _495
The unforeseen event, till the north wind
Sprung from the sea, lifting the heavy veil
Of battle-smoke---then victory---victory!
For, as we thought, three frigates from Algiers
Bore down from Naxos to our aid, but soon _500
The abhorred cross glimmered behind, before,
Among, around us; and that fatal sign
Dried with its beams the strength in Moslem hearts,
As the sun drinks the dew.--What more? We fled!--
Our noonday path over the sanguine foam _505
Was beacons,--and the glare struck the sun pale,--
By our consuming transports: the fierce light
Made all the shadows of our sails blood-red,
And every countenance blank. Some ships lay feeding
The ravening fire, even to the water's level; _510
Some were blown up; some, settling heavily,
Sunk; and the shrieks of our companions died
Upon the wind, that bore us fast and far,
Even after they were dead. Nine thousand perished!
We met the vultures legions in the air _515
Stemming the torrent of the tainted wind;
They, screaming from their cloudy mountain-peaks,
Stooped through the sulphurous battle-smoke and perched
Each on the weltering carcass that we loved,
Like its ill angel or its damned soul, _520
Riding upon the bosom of the sea.
We saw the dog-fish hastening to their feast.
Joy waked the voiceless people of the sea,
And ravening Famine left his ocean cave
To dwell with War, with us, and with Despair. _525
We met night three hours to the west of Patmos,
And with night, tempest--

NOTES:

_503 in edition 1822; of editions 1839.

_527 And edition 1822; As editions 1839.

MAHMUD:

Cease!

HELLAS

[ENTER A MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER:

Your Sublime Highness,
That Christian hound, the Muscovite Ambassador,
Has left the city.—If the rebel fleet
Had anchored in the port, had victory _530
Crowned the Greek legions in the Hippodrome,
Panic were tamer.—Obedience and Mutiny,
Like giants in contention planet-struck,
Stand gazing on each other.—There is peace
In Stamboul.—

MAHMUD:

Is the grave not calmer still? _535
Its ruins shall be mine.

HASSAN:

Fear not the Russian:
The tiger leagues not with the stag at bay
Against the hunter.—Cunning, base, and cruel,
He crouches, watching till the spoil be won,
And must be paid for his reserve in blood. _540
After the war is fought, yield the sleek Russian
That which thou canst not keep, his deserved portion
Of blood, which shall not flow through streets and fields,
Rivers and seas, like that which we may win,
But stagnate in the veins of Christian slaves! _545

[ENTER SECOND MESSENGER.]

SECOND MESSENGER:

Nauplia, Tripolizza, Mothon, Athens,
Navarin, Artas, Monembasia,
Corinth, and Thebes are carried by assault,
And every Islamite who made his dogs
Fat with the flesh of Galilean slaves _550
Passed at the edge of the sword: the lust of blood,

HELLAS

Which made our warriors drunk, is quenched in death;
But like a fiery plague breaks out anew
In deeds which make the Christian cause look pale
In its own light. The garrison of Patras _555
Has store but for ten days, nor is there hope
But from the Briton: at once slave and tyrant,
His wishes still are weaker than his fears,
Or he would sell what faith may yet remain
From the oaths broke in Genoa and in Norway; _560
And if you buy him not, your treasury
Is empty even of promises—his own coin.
The freedman of a western poet—chief
Holds Attica with seven thousand rebels,
And has beat back the Pacha of Negropont: _565
The aged Ali sits in Yanina
A crownless metaphor of empire:
His name, that shadow of his withered might,
Holds our besieging army like a spell
In prey to famine, pest, and mutiny; _570
He, bastioned in his citadel, looks forth
Joyless upon the sapphire lake that mirrors
The ruins of the city where he reigned
Childless and sceptreless. The Greek has reaped
The costly harvest his own blood matured, _575
Not the sower, Ali—who has bought a truce
From Ypsilanti with ten camel—loads
Of Indian gold.

NOTE:

_563 freedman edition 1822; freeman editions 1839.

[ENTER A THIRD MESSENGER.]

MAHMUD:

What more?

THIRD MESSENGER:

The Christian tribes
Of Lebanon and the Syrian wilderness
Are in revolt;—Damascus, Hems, Aleppo _580
Tremble;—the Arab menaces Medina,
The Aethiop has intrenched himself in Sennaar,
And keeps the Egyptian rebel well employed,

HELLAS

HELLAS

Who denies homage, claims investiture
As price of tardy aid. Persia demands _585
The cities on the Tigris, and the Georgians
Refuse their living tribute. Crete and Cyprus,
Like mountain-twins that from each other's veins
Catch the volcano-fire and earthquake-spasm,
Shake in the general fever. Through the city, _590
Like birds before a storm, the Santons shriek,
And prophesyings horrible and new
Are heard among the crowd: that sea of men
Sleeps on the wrecks it made, breathless and still.
A Dervise, learned in the Koran, preaches _595
That it is written how the sins of Islam
Must raise up a destroyer even now.
The Greeks expect a Saviour from the West,
Who shall not come, men say, in clouds and glory,
But in the omnipresence of that Spirit _600
In which all live and are. Ominous signs
Are blazoned broadly on the noonday sky:
One saw a red cross stamped upon the sun;
It has rained blood; and monstrous births declare
The secret wrath of Nature and her Lord. _605
The army encamped upon the Cydaris
Was roused last night by the alarm of battle,
And saw two hosts conflicting in the air,
The shadows doubtless of the unborn time
Cast on the mirror of the night. While yet _610
The fight hung balanced, there arose a storm
Which swept the phantoms from among the stars.
At the third watch the Spirit of the Plague
Was heard abroad flapping among the tents;
Those who relieved watch found the sentinels dead. _615
The last news from the camp is, that a thousand
Have sickened, and--

[ENTER A FOURTH MESSENGER.]

MAHMUD:

And thou, pale ghost, dim shadow
Of some untimely rumour, speak!

FOURTH MESSENGER:

One comes
Fainting with toil, covered with foam and blood:
He stood, he says, on Chelonites' _620

HELLAS

HELLAS

Promontory, which o'erlooks the isles that groan
Under the Briton's frown, and all their waters
Then trembling in the splendour of the moon,
When as the wandering clouds unveiled or hid
Her boundless light, he saw two adverse fleets _625
Stalk through the night in the horizon's glimmer,
Mingling fierce thunders and sulphureous gleams,
And smoke which strangled every infant wind
That soothed the silver clouds through the deep air.
At length the battle slept, but the Sirocco _630
Awoke, and drove his flock of thunder-clouds
Over the sea-horizon, blotting out
All objects--save that in the faint moon-glimpse
He saw, or dreamed he saw, the Turkish admiral
And two the loftiest of our ships of war, _635
With the bright image of that Queen of Heaven,
Who hid, perhaps, her face for grief, reversed;
And the abhorred cross--

NOTE:

_620 on Chelonites']on Chelonites "Errata";
upon Clelonite's edition 1822;
upon Clelonit's editions 1839.

[ENTER AN ATTENDANT.]

ATTENDANT:

Your Sublime Highness,
The Jew, who--

MAHMUD:

Could not come more seasonably:
Bid him attend. I'll hear no more! too long _640
We gaze on danger through the mist of fear,
And multiply upon our shattered hopes
The images of ruin. Come what will!
To-morrow and to-morrow are as lamps
Set in our path to light us to the edge _645
Through rough and smooth, nor can we suffer aught
Which He inflicts not in whose hand we are.

[EXEUNT.]

SEMICHORUS 1:

Would I were the winged cloud
Of a tempest swift and loud!
I would scorn _650
The smile of morn
And the wave where the moonrise is born!
I would leave
The spirits of eve
A shroud for the corpse of the day to weave _655
From other threads than mine!
Bask in the deep blue noon divine.
Who would? Not I.

NOTE:

_657 the deep blue "Errata", Wms. transcript; the blue edition 1822 .

SEMICHORUS 2:

Whither to fly?

SEMICHORUS 1:

Where the rocks that gird th' Aegean _660
Echo to the battle paeon
Of the free—
I would flee
A tempestuous herald of victory!
My golden rain
For the Grecian slain _665
Should mingle in tears with the bloody main,
And my solemn thunder—knell
Should ring to the world the passing—bell
Of Tyranny! _670

SEMICHORUS 2:

Ah king! wilt thou chain
The rack and the rain?
Wilt thou fetter the lightning and hurricane?
The storms are free,
But we— _675

CHORUS:

O Slavery! thou frost of the world's prime,
 Killing its flowers and leaving its thorns bare!
 Thy touch has stamped these limbs with crime,
 These brows thy branding garland bear,
 But the free heart, the impassive soul _680
 Scorn thy control!

SEMICHORUS 1:

Let there be light! said Liberty,
 And like sunrise from the sea,
 Athens arose!—Around her born,
 Shone like mountains in the morn _685
 Glorious states;—and are they now
 Ashes, wrecks, oblivion?

SEMICHORUS 2:

Go,
 Where Thermae and Asopus swallowed
 Persia, as the sand does foam:
 Deluge upon deluge followed, _690
 Discord, Macedon, and Rome:
 And lastly thou!

SEMICHORUS 1:

Temples and towers,
 Citadels and marts, and they
 Who live and die there, have been ours,
 And may be thine, and must decay; _695
 But Greece and her foundations are
 Built below the tide of war,
 Based on the crystalline sea
 Of thought and its eternity;
 Her citizens, imperial spirits, _700
 Rule the present from the past,
 On all this world of men inherits
 Their seal is set.

SEMICHORUS 2:

Hear ye the blast,

HELLAS

Whose Orphic thunder thrilling calls
From ruin her Titanian walls? _705
Whose spirit shakes the sapless bones
Of Slavery? Argos, Corinth, Crete
Hear, and from their mountain thrones
The daemons and the nymphs repeat
The harmony.

SEMICHORUS 1:

I hear! I hear! _710

SEMICHORUS 2:

The world's eyeless charioteer,
Destiny, is hurrying by!
What faith is crushed, what empire bleeds
Beneath her earthquake-footed steeds?
What eagle-winged victory sits _715
At her right hand? what shadow flits
Before? what splendour rolls behind?
Ruin and renovation cry
'Who but We?'

SEMICHORUS 1:

I hear! I hear!
The hiss as of a rushing wind, _720
The roar as of an ocean foaming,
The thunder as of earthquake coming.
I hear! I hear!
The crash as of an empire falling,
The shrieks as of a people calling _725
'Mercy! mercy!'—How they thrill!
Then a shout of 'kill! kill! kill!'
And then a small still voice, thus—

SEMICHORUS 2:

For
Revenge and Wrong bring forth their kind,
The foul cubs like their parents are, _730
Their den is in the guilty mind,
And Conscience feeds them with despair.

NOTE:

_728 For edition 1822, Wms. transcript;
Fear cj. Fleay, Forman, Dowden. See Editor's Note.

SEMICHORUS 1:

In sacred Athens, near the fane
Of Wisdom, Pity's altar stood:
Serve not the unknown God in vain. _735
But pay that broken shrine again,
Love for hate and tears for blood.

[ENTER MAHMUD AND AHASUERUS.]

MAHMUD:

Thou art a man, thou sayest, even as we.

AHASUERUS:

No more!

MAHMUD:

But raised above thy fellow-men
By thought, as I by power.

AHASUERUS:

Thou sayest so. _740

MAHMUD:

Thou art an adept in the difficult lore
Of Greek and Frank philosophy; thou numberest
The flowers, and thou measurest the stars;
Thou severest element from element;
Thy spirit is present in the Past, and sees _745
The birth of this old world through all its cycles
Of desolation and of loveliness,
And when man was not, and how man became
The monarch and the slave of this low sphere,

HELLAS

And all its narrow circles—it is much— _750
I honour thee, and would be what thou art
Were I not what I am; but the unborn hour,
Cradled in fear and hope, conflicting storms,
Who shall unveil? Nor thou, nor I, nor any
Mighty or wise. I apprehended not _755
What thou hast taught me, but I now perceive
That thou art no interpreter of dreams;
Thou dost not own that art, device, or God,
Can make the Future present—let it come!
Moreover thou disdainest us and ours; _760
Thou art as God, whom thou contemplatest.

AHASUERUS:

Disdain thee?—not the worm beneath thy feet!
The Fathomless has care for meaner things
Than thou canst dream, and has made pride for those
Who would be what they may not, or would seem _765
That which they are not. Sultan! talk no more
Of thee and me, the Future and the Past;
But look on that which cannot change—the One,
The unborn and the undying. Earth and ocean,
Space, and the isles of life or light that gem _770
The sapphire floods of interstellar air,
This firmament pavilioned upon chaos,
With all its cressets of immortal fire,
Whose outwall, bastioned impregnably
Against the escape of boldest thoughts, repels them _775
As Calpe the Atlantic clouds—this Whole
Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,
With all the silent or tempestuous workings
By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
Is but a vision;—all that it inherits _780
Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams;
Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less
The Future and the Past are idle shadows
Of thought's eternal flight—they have no being:
Nought is but that which feels itself to be. _785

NOTE:

_762 thy edition 1822; my editions 1839.

MAHMUD:

What meanest thou? Thy words stream like a tempest
Of dazzling mist within my brain—they shake

HELLAS

The earth on which I stand, and hang like night
On Heaven above me. What can they avail?
They cast on all things surest, brightest, best, _790
Doubt, insecurity, astonishment.

AHASUERUS:

Mistake me not! All is contained in each.
Dodona's forest to an acorn's cup
Is that which has been, or will be, to that
Which is--the absent to the present. Thought _795
Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,
Reason, Imagination, cannot die;
They are, what that which they regard appears,
The stuff whence mutability can weave
All that it hath dominion o'er, worlds, worms, _800
Empires, and superstitions. What has thought
To do with time, or place, or circumstance?
Wouldst thou behold the Future?--ask and have!
Knock and it shall be opened--look, and lo!
The coming age is shadowed on the Past _805
As on a glass.

MAHMUD:

Wild, wilder thoughts convulse
My spirit--Did not Mahomet the Second
Win Stamboul?

AHASUERUS:

Thou wouldst ask that giant spirit
The written fortunes of thy house and faith.
Thou wouldst cite one out of the grave to tell _810
How what was born in blood must die.

MAHMUD:

Thy words
Have power on me! I see--

AHASUERUS:

What hearest thou?

MAHMUD:

A far whisper—
Terrible silence.

AHASUERUS:

What succeeds?

MAHMUD:

The sound
As of the assault of an imperial city, _815
The hiss of inextinguishable fire,
The roar of giant cannon; the earthquaking
Fall of vast bastions and precipitous towers,
The shock of crags shot from strange enginery,
The clash of wheels, and clang of armed hoofs, _820
And crash of brazen mail as of the wreck
Of adamantine mountains—the mad blast
Of trumpets, and the neigh of raging steeds,
The shrieks of women whose thrill jars the blood,
And one sweet laugh, most horrible to hear, _825
As of a joyous infant waked and playing
With its dead mother's breast, and now more loud
The mingled battle—cry,—ha! hear I not
'En touto nike!' 'Allah—illa—Allah!'

AHASUERUS:

The sulphurous mist is raised—thou seest—

MAHMUD:

A chasm, _830
As of two mountains in the wall of Stamboul;
And in that ghastly breach the Islamites,
Like giants on the ruins of a world,
Stand in the light of sunrise. In the dust
Glimmers a kingless diadem, and one _835
Of regal port has cast himself beneath
The stream of war. Another proudly clad
In golden arms spurs a Tartarian barb
Into the gap, and with his iron mace
Directs the torrent of that tide of men, _840
And seems—he is—Mahomet!

AHASUERUS:

What thou seest
 Is but the ghost of thy forgotten dream.
 A dream itself, yet less, perhaps, than that
 Thou call'st reality. Thou mayst behold
 How cities, on which Empire sleeps enthroned, _845
 Bow their towered crests to mutability.
 Poised by the flood, e'en on the height thou holdest,
 Thou mayst now learn how the full tide of power
 Ebbs to its depths.—Inheritor of glory,
 Conceived in darkness, born in blood, and nourished _850
 With tears and toil, thou seest the mortal throes
 Of that whose birth was but the same. The Past
 Now stands before thee like an Incarnation
 Of the To-come; yet wouldst thou commune with
 That portion of thyself which was ere thou _855
 Didst start for this brief race whose crown is death,
 Dissolve with that strong faith and fervent passion
 Which called it from the uncreated deep,
 Yon cloud of war, with its tempestuous phantoms
 Of raging death; and draw with mighty will _860
 The imperial shade hither.

[EXIT AHASUERUS.]

[THE PHANTOM OF MAHOMET THE SECOND APPEARS.]

MAHMUD:

Approach!

PHANTOM:

I come
 Thence whither thou must go! The grave is fitter
 To take the living than give up the dead;
 Yet has thy faith prevailed, and I am here.
 The heavy fragments of the power which fell _865
 When I arose, like shapeless crags and clouds,
 Hang round my throne on the abyss, and voices
 Of strange lament soothe my supreme repose,
 Wailing for glory never to return.—
 A later Empire nods in its decay: _870
 The autumn of a greener faith is come,

HELLAS

And wolfish change, like winter, howls to strip
The foliage in which Fame, the eagle, built
Her aerie, while Dominion whelped below.
The storm is in its branches, and the frost _875
Is on its leaves, and the blank deep expects
Oblivion on oblivion, spoil on spoil,
Ruin on ruin:—Thou art slow, my son;
The Anarchs of the world of darkness keep
A throne for thee, round which thine empire lies _880
Boundless and mute; and for thy subjects thou,
Like us, shalt rule the ghosts of murdered life,
The phantoms of the powers who rule thee now—
Mutinous passions, and conflicting fears,
And hopes that sate themselves on dust, and die!— _885
Stripped of their mortal strength, as thou of thine.
Islam must fall, but we will reign together
Over its ruins in the world of death:—
And if the trunk be dry, yet shall the seed
Unfold itself even in the shape of that _890
Which gathers birth in its decay. Woe! woe!
To the weak people tangled in the grasp
Of its last spasms.

MAHMUD:

Spirit, woe to all!
Woe to the wronged and the avenger! Woe
To the destroyer, woe to the destroyed! _895
Woe to the dupe, and woe to the deceiver!
Woe to the oppressed, and woe to the oppressor!
Woe both to those that suffer and inflict;
Those who are born and those who die! but say,
Imperial shadow of the thing I am, _900
When, how, by whom, Destruction must accomplish
Her consummation!

PHANTOM:

Ask the cold pale Hour,
Rich in reversion of impending death,
When HE shall fall upon whose ripe gray hairs
Sit Care, and Sorrow, and Infirmity— _905
The weight which Crime, whose wings are plumed with years,
Leaves in his flight from ravaged heart to heart
Over the heads of men, under which burthen
They bow themselves unto the grave: fond wretch!
He leans upon his crutch, and talks of years _910
To come, and how in hours of youth renewed
He will renew lost joys, and—

VOICE WITHOUT:

Victory! Victory!

[THE PHANTOM VANISHES.]

MAHMUD:

What sound of the importunate earth has broken
My mighty trance?

VOICE WITHOUT:

Victory! Victory!

MAHMUD:

Weak lightning before darkness! poor faint smile _915
Of dying Islam! Voice which art the response
Of hollow weakness! Do I wake and live?
Were there such things, or may the unquiet brain,
Vexed by the wise mad talk of the old Jew,
Have shaped itself these shadows of its fear? _920
It matters not!—for nought we see or dream,
Possess, or lose, or grasp at, can be worth
More than it gives or teaches. Come what may,
The Future must become the Past, and I
As they were to whom once this present hour, _925
This gloomy crag of time to which I cling,
Seemed an Elysian isle of peace and joy
Never to be attained.—I must rebuke
This drunkenness of triumph ere it die,
And dying, bring despair. Victory! poor slaves! _930

[EXIT MAHMUD.]

VOICE WITHOUT:

Shout in the jubilee of death! The Greeks
Are as a brood of lions in the net
Round which the kingly hunters of the earth

HELLAS

Stand smiling. Anarchs, ye whose daily food
Are curses, groans, and gold, the fruit of death, _935
From Thule to the girdle of the world,
Come, feast! the board groans with the flesh of men;
The cup is foaming with a nation's blood,
Famine and Thirst await! eat, drink, and die!

SEMICHORUS 1:

Victorious Wrong, with vulture scream, _940
Salutes the rising sun, pursues the flying day!
I saw her, ghastly as a tyrant's dream,
Perch on the trembling pyramid of night,
Beneath which earth and all her realms pavilioned lay
In visions of the dawning undelight. _945
Who shall impede her flight?
Who rob her of her prey?

VOICE WITHOUT:

Victory! Victory! Russia's famished eagles
Dare not to prey beneath the crescent's light.
Impale the remnant of the Greeks! despoil! _950
Violate! make their flesh cheaper than dust!

SEMICHORUS 2:

Thou voice which art
The herald of the ill in splendour hid!
Thou echo of the hollow heart
Of monarchy, bear me to thine abode _955
When desolation flashes o'er a world destroyed:
Oh, bear me to those isles of jagged cloud
Which float like mountains on the earthquake, mid
The momentary oceans of the lightning,
Or to some toppling promontory proud _960
Of solid tempest whose black pyramid,
Riven, overhangs the founts intensely bright'ning
Of those dawn-tinted deluges of fire
Before their waves expire,
When heaven and earth are light, and only light _965
In the thunder-night!

NOTE:

_958 earthquake edition 1822; earthquakes editions 1839.

VOICE WITHOUT:

Victory! Victory! Austria, Russia, England,
 And that tame serpent, that poor shadow, France,
 Cry peace, and that means death when monarchs speak.
 Ho, there! bring torches, sharpen those red stakes, _970
 These chains are light, fitter for slaves and poisoners
 Than Greeks. Kill! plunder! burn! let none remain.

SEMICHORUS 1:

Alas! for Liberty!
 If numbers, wealth, or unfulfilling years,
 Or fate, can quell the free! _975
 Alas! for Virtue, when
 Torments, or contumely, or the sneers
 Of erring judging men
 Can break the heart where it abides.
 Alas! if Love, whose smile makes this obscure world splendid, _980
 Can change with its false times and tides,
 Like hope and terror,—
 Alas for Love!
 And Truth, who wanderest lone and unbefriended,
 If thou canst veil thy lie—consuming mirror _985
 Before the dazzled eyes of Error,
 Alas for thee! Image of the Above.

SEMICHORUS 2:

Repulse, with plumes from conquest torn,
 Led the ten thousand from the limits of the morn
 Through many an hostile Anarchy! _990
 At length they wept aloud, and cried, 'The Sea! the Sea!
 Through exile, persecution, and despair,
 Rome was, and young Atlantis shall become
 The wonder, or the terror, or the tomb
 Of all whose step wakes Power lulled in her savage lair: _995
 But Greece was as a hermit-child,
 Whose fairest thoughts and limbs were built
 To woman's growth, by dreams so mild,
 She knew not pain or guilt;
 And now, O Victory, blush! and Empire, tremble _1000
 When ye desert the free—
 If Greece must be
 A wreck, yet shall its fragments reassemble,
 And build themselves again impregnably
 In a diviner clime, _1005
 To Amphionic music on some Cape sublime,
 Which frowns above the idle foam of Time.

SEMICHORUS 1:

Let the tyrants rule the desert they have made;
Let the free possess the Paradise they claim;
Be the fortune of our fierce oppressors weighed _1010
With our ruin, our resistance, and our name!

SEMICHORUS 2:

Our dead shall be the seed of their decay,
Our survivors be the shadow of their pride,
Our adversity a dream to pass away--
Their dishonour a remembrance to abide! _1015

VOICE WITHOUT:

Victory! Victory! The bought Briton sends
The keys of ocean to the Islamite.--
Now shall the blazon of the cross be veiled,
And British skill directing Othman might,
Thunder-strike rebel victory. Oh, keep holy _1020
This jubilee of unrevenged blood!
Kill! crush! despoil! Let not a Greek escape!

SEMICHORUS 1:

Darkness has dawned in the East
On the noon of time:
The death-birds descend to their feast _1025
From the hungry clime.
Let Freedom and Peace flee far
To a sunnier strand,
And follow Love's folding-star
To the Evening land! _1030

SEMICHORUS 2:

The young moon has fed
Her exhausted horn
With the sunset's fire:
The weak day is dead,
But the night is not born; _1035
And, like loveliness panting with wild desire
While it trembles with fear and delight,
Hesperus flies from awakening night,

HELLAS

And pants in its beauty and speed with light
Fast—flashing, soft, and bright. _1040
Thou beacon of love! thou lamp of the free!
Guide us far, far away,
To climes where now veiled by the ardour of day
Thou art hidden
From waves on which weary Noon _1045
Faints in her summer swoon,
Between kingless continents sinless as Eden,
Around mountains and islands inviolably
Pranked on the sapphire sea.

SEMICHORUS 1:

Through the sunset of hope, _1050
Like the shapes of a dream.
What Paradise islands of glory gleam!
Beneath Heaven's cope,
Their shadows more clear float by—
The sound of their oceans, the light of their sky, _1055
The music and fragrance their solitudes breathe
Burst, like morning on dream, or like Heaven on death,
Through the walls of our prison;
And Greece, which was dead, is arisen!

NOTE:

_1057 dream edition 1822; dreams editions 1839.

CHORUS:

The world's great age begins anew, _1060
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn:
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam,
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream. _1065

A brighter Hellas rears its mountains
From waves serener far;
A new Peneus rolls his fountains
Against the morning star.
Where fairer Tempes bloom, there sleep _1070
Young Cyclads on a sunnier deep.

HELLAS

A loftier Argo cleaves the main,
Fraught with a later prize;
Another Orpheus sings again,
And loves, and weeps, and dies. _1075
A new Ulysses leaves once more
Calypso for his native shore.

Oh, write no more the tale of Troy,
If earth Death's scroll must be!
Nor mix with Laian rage the joy _1080
Which dawns upon the free:
Although a subtler Sphinx renew
Riddles of death Thebes never knew.

Another Athens shall arise,
And to remoter time _1085
Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
The splendour of its prime;
And leave, if nought so bright may live,
All earth can take or Heaven can give.

Saturn and Love their long repose _1090
Shall burst, more bright and good
Than all who fell, than One who rose,
Than many unsubdued:
Not gold, not blood, their altar dowers,
But votive tears and symbol flowers. _1095

Oh, cease! must hate and death return?
Cease! must men kill and die?
Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
Of bitter prophecy.
The world is weary of the past, _1100
Oh, might it die or rest at last!

NOTES:

_1068 his edition 1822; its editions 1839.

_1072 Argo]Argos edition 1822.

_1091–_1093 See Editor's note.

_1091 bright editions 1839; wise edition 1829 (ed. Galignani).

HELLAS

_1093 unsubdued editions 1839; unwithstood edition 1829 (ed. Galignani).