

And they crossed themselves for fear,  
 All the knights at Camelot:  
 But Lancelot mused a little space;  
 He said, "She has a lovely face;  
 170 God in his mercy lend her grace,  
 The Lady of Shalott."

1831–32

1832, 1842

### The Lotos-Eaters<sup>1</sup>

"Courage!" he<sup>2</sup> said, and pointed toward the land,  
 "This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon."  
 In the afternoon they came unto a land<sup>3</sup>  
 In which it seemèd always afternoon.  
 5 All round the coast the languid air did swoon,  
 Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.  
 Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;  
 And, like a downward smoke, the slender stream  
 Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.

10 A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke,  
 Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn,<sup>o</sup> did go; *fine thin linen*  
 And some through wavering lights and shadows broke,  
 Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.  
 They saw the gleaming river seaward flow  
 15 From the inner land; far off, three mountaintops  
 Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,  
 Stood sunset-flushed; and, dewed with showery drops,  
 Up-clomb<sup>o</sup> the shadowy pine above the woven copse. *climbed up*

The charmèd sunset lingered low adown  
 20 In the red West; through mountain clefts the dale  
 Was seen far inland, and the yellow down<sup>4</sup>  
 Bordered with palm, and many a winding vale  
 And meadow, set with slender galingale;<sup>5</sup>  
 A land where all things always seemed the same!  
 25 And round about the keel with faces pale,

1. Based on a short episode from the *Odyssey* (9.82–97) in which the weary Greek veterans of the Trojan War are tempted by a desire to abandon their long voyage homeward. As Odysseus later reported: "On the tenth day we set foot on the land of the lotos-eaters who eat a flowering food. . . . I sent forth certain of my company [who] . . . mixed with the men of the lotos-eaters who gave . . . them of the lotos to taste. Now whosoever of them did eat the honey-sweet fruit of the lotos had no more wish to bring tidings nor to come back, but there he chose to abide . . . forgetful of his homeward way."

Tennyson expands Homer's brief account into an elaborate picture of weariness and the desire

for rest and death. The descriptions in the first stanzas are similar to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) 2.6 and employ the same stanza form. The final section derives, in part, from Lucretius's conception of the gods in *De Rerum Natura* (ca. 55 B.C.E.).

2. Odysseus (or Ulysses).

3. The repetition of "land" from line 1 was deliberate; Tennyson said that this "no rhyme" was "lazier" in its effect. This technique of repeating words, phrases, and sounds continues; cf. "afternoon" (lines 3–4) and the rhyming of "adown" and "down" (lines 19 and 21).

4. An open plain on high ground.

5. A plant resembling tall coarse grass.

Dark faces pale against that rosy flame,  
The mild-eyed melancholy Lotos-eaters came.

Branches they bore of that enchanted stem,  
Laden with flower and fruit, whereof they gave  
30 To each, but whoso did receive of them  
And taste, to him the gushing of the wave  
Far far away did seem to mourn and rave  
On alien shores; and if his fellow spake,  
His voice was thin, as voices from the grave;  
35 And deep-asleep he seemed, yet all awake,  
And music in his ears his beating heart did make.

They sat them down upon the yellow sand,  
Between the sun and moon upon the shore;  
And sweet it was to dream of Fatherland,  
40 Of child, and wife, and slave; but evermore  
Most weary seemed the sea, weary the oar,  
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam,  
Then some one said, "We will return no more";  
And all at once they sang, "Our island home<sup>o</sup>  
45 Is far beyond the wave; we will no longer roam."

*Ithaca*

*Choric Song*<sup>6</sup>

1

There is sweet music here that softer falls  
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,  
Or night-dews on still waters between walls  
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;  
50 Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,  
Than tired<sup>7</sup> eyelids upon tired eyes;  
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.  
Here are cool mosses deep,  
And through the moss the ivies creep,  
55 And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,  
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.

2

Why are we weighed upon with heaviness,  
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,  
While all things else have rest from weariness?  
60 All things have rest: why should we toil alone,  
We only toil, who are the first of things,  
And make perpetual moan,  
Still from one sorrow to another thrown;  
Nor ever fold our wings,

6. Sung by the mariners.

7. Tennyson wanted the word to be pronounced as *tie-yerd* rather than *tier'd* or *tire-èd*, thus

"making the word neither monosyllabic or disyllabic, but a dreamy child of the two."

65 And cease from wanderings,  
 Nor steep our brows in slumber's holy balm;  
 Nor harken what the inner spirit sings,  
 "There is no joy but calm!"—  
 Why should we only toil, the roof and crown of things?<sup>8</sup>

## 3

70 Lo! in the middle of the wood,  
 The folded leaf is wooed from out the bud  
 With winds upon the branch, and there  
 Grows green and broad, and takes no care,  
 Sun-steeped at noon, and in the moon  
 75 Nightly dew-fed; and turning yellow  
 Falls, and floats adown the air.  
 Lo! sweetened with summer light,  
 The full-juiced apple, waxing over-mellow,  
 Drops in a silent autumn night.  
 80 All its allotted length of days  
 The flower ripens in its place,  
 Ripens and fades, and falls, and hath no toil,  
 Fast-rooted in the fruitful soil.

## 4

Hateful is the dark blue sky,  
 85 Vaulted o'er the dark blue sea.  
 Death is the end of life; ah, why  
 Should life all labor be?  
 Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast,  
 And in a little while our lips are dumb.  
 90 Let us alone. What is it that will last?  
 All things are taken from us, and become  
 Portions and parcels of the dreadful past.  
 Let us alone. What pleasure can we have  
 To war with evil? Is there any peace  
 95 In ever climbing up the climbing wave?  
 All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave  
 In silence—ripen, fall, and cease:  
 Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.<sup>9</sup>

## 5

How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,  
 100 With half-shut eyes ever to seem  
 Falling asleep in a half-dream!  
 To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,  
 Which will not leave the myrrh-bush<sup>1</sup> on the height;

8. Cf. *The Faerie Queene* 2.6.17: "Why then dost thou, O man, that of them all / Art Lord, and eke of nature Sovereaine, / Wilfully . . . wast thy joyous houres in needlesse paine?"

9. Cf. *The Faerie Queen* 1.9.40: "Sleepe after

toyle, port after stormie seas, / Ease after warre, death after life does greatly please."

1. Myrrh, a resin used in perfume and incense, is associated with sweetness and comfort.

To hear each other's whispered speech;  
 105 Eating the Lotos day by day,  
 To watch the crisping<sup>o</sup> ripples on the beach, *curling*  
 And tender curving lines of creamy spray;  
 To lend our hearts and spirits wholly  
 To the influence of mild-minded melancholy;  
 110 To muse and brood and live again in memory,  
 With those old faces of our infancy  
 Heaped over with a mound of grass,  
 Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass!

## 6

Dear is the memory of our wedded lives,  
 115 And dear the last embraces of our wives  
 And their warm tears; but all hath suffered change;  
 For surely now our household hearths are cold,  
 Our sons inherit us,<sup>o</sup> our looks are strange, *succeed us as our heirs*  
 And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy.  
 120 Or else the island princes<sup>2</sup> overbold  
 Have eat our substance, and the minstrel sings  
 Before them of the ten years' war in Troy,  
 And our great deeds, as half-forgotten things.  
 Is there confusion in the little isle?  
 125 Let what is broken so remain.  
 The Gods are hard to reconcile;  
 'Tis hard to settle order once again.  
 There *is* confusion worse than death,  
 Trouble on trouble, pain on pain,  
 130 Long labor unto aged breath,  
 Sore tasks to hearts worn out by many wars  
 And eyes grown dim with gazing on the pilot-stars.

## 7

But, propped on beds of amaranth and moly,<sup>3</sup>  
 How sweet—while warm airs lull us, blowing lowly—  
 135 With half-dropped eyelid still,  
 Beneath a heaven dark and holy,  
 To watch the long bright river drawing slowly  
 His waters from the purple hill—  
 To hear the dewy echoes calling  
 140 From cave to cave through the thick-twined vine—  
 To watch the emerald-colored water falling  
 Through many a woven acanthus<sup>4</sup> wreath divine!  
 Only to hear and see the far-off sparkling brine,  
 Only to hear were sweet, stretched out beneath the pine.

2. The suitors of Penelope, Odysseus's wife; during his long absence they have settled themselves as guests in his hall as they pressure her to remarry.

3. A flower with magical properties mentioned by Homer. "Amaranth": a legendary unfading flower.

4. A plant resembling a thistle. Its leaves were the model for ornaments on Corinthian columns.

## 8

145 The Lotos blooms below the barren peak,  
 The Lotos blows by every winding creek;  
 All day the wind breathes low with mellower tone;  
 Through every hollow cave and alley lone  
 Round and round the spicy downs the yellow Lotos dust is blown.  
 150 We have had enough of action, and of motion we,  
 Rolled to starboard, rolled to larboard, when the surge was seething free,  
 Where the wallowing monster spouted his foam-fountains in the sea.  
 Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind,  
 In the hollow Lotos land to live and lie reclined  
 155 On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind.  
 For they lie beside their nectar, and the bolts<sup>o</sup> are hurled *thunderbolts*  
 Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds are lightly curled  
 Round their golden houses, girdled with the gleaming world;  
 Where they smile in secret, looking over wasted lands,  
 160 Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring deeps and fiery sands,  
 Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking ships, and praying hands.  
 But they smile, they find a music centred in a doleful song  
 Steaming up, a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong,  
 Like a tale of little meaning though the words are strong;  
 165 Chanted from an ill-used race of men that cleave the soil,  
 Sow the seed, and reap the harvest with enduring toil,  
 Storing yearly little dues of wheat, and wine and oil;  
 Till they perish and they suffer—some, 'tis whispered—down in hell  
 Suffer endless anguish, others in Elysian valleys dwell,  
 170 Resting weary limbs at last on beds of asphodel.<sup>5</sup>  
 Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore  
 Than labor in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar;  
 O, rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.

1832, 1842

Ulysses<sup>1</sup>

It little profits that an idle king,  
 By this still hearth, among these barren crags,  
 Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole  
 Unequal laws<sup>2</sup> unto a savage race,

5. A yellow lilylike flower supposed to grow in Elysium—in classical mythology a paradise for heroes favored by the gods.

1. According to Dante, after the fall of Troy, Ulysses never returned to his island home of Ithaca. Instead he persuaded some of his followers to seek new experiences by a voyage of exploration westward out beyond the Strait of Gibraltar. In his inspiring speech to his aging crew he said: "Consider your origin: you were not made to live as brutes, but to pursue virtue and knowledge" (*Inferno* 26). Tennyson modified

Dante's 14th-century version by combining it with Homer's account (*Odyssey* 19–24). Thus Tennyson has Ulysses make his speech in Ithaca some time after he has returned home; reunited with his wife, Penelope, and his son, Telemachus; and, presumably, resumed his administrative responsibilities involved in governing his kingdom.

Tennyson stated that this poem expressed his own "need of going forward and braving the struggle of life" after the death of Arthur Hallam.

2. Measure out rewards and punishments.