

## A YEAR'S BURDEN

1870

*αἴλιον αἴλιον εἶπέ, τὸ δ' εἶ νικάτω*

FIRE and wild light of hope and doubt and fear,  
 Wind of swift change, and clouds and hours that veer  
 As the storm shifts of the tempestuous year;  
 Cry wellaway, but well befall the right.

Hope sits yet hiding her war-wearied eyes,  
 Doubt sets her forehead earthward and denies,  
 But fear brought hand to hand with danger dies,  
 Dies and is burnt up in the fire of fight.

Hearts bruised with loss and eaten through with shame  
 Turn at the time's touch to devouring flame;  
 Grief stands as one that knows not her own name,  
 Nor if the star she sees bring day or night.

No song breaks with it on the violent air,  
 But shrieks of shame, defeat, and brute despair;  
 Yet something at the star's heart far up there  
 Burns as a beacon in our shipwrecked sight.

O strange fierce light of presage, unknown star,  
Whose tongue shall tell us what thy secrets are,  
What message trembles in thee from so far?

Cry wellaway, but well befall the right.

From shores laid waste across an iron sea  
Where the waifs drift of hopes that were to be,  
Across the red rolled foam we look for thee,  
Across the fire we look up for the light.

From days laid waste across disastrous years,  
From hopes cut down across a world of fears,  
We gaze with eyes too passionate for tears,  
Where faith abides though hope be put to flight.

Old hope is dead, the grey-haired hope grown blind  
That talked with us of old things out of mind,  
Dreams, deeds, and men the world has left behind;  
Yet, though hope die, faith lives in hope's despite.

Ay, with hearts fixed on death and hopeless hands  
We stand about our banner while it stands  
Above but one field of the ruined lands;  
Cry wellaway, but well befall the right.

Though France were given for prey to bird and beast,  
Though Rome were rent in twain of king and priest,  
The soul of man, the soul is safe at least  
That gives death life and dead men hands to smite.

Are ye so strong, O kings, O strong men ? Nay,  
Waste all ye will and gather all ye may,  
Yet one thing is there that ye shall not slay,  
Even thought, that fire nor iron can affright,

The woundless and invisible thought that goes  
Free throughout time as north or south wind blows,  
Far throughout space as east or west sea flows,  
And all dark things before it are made bright.

Thy thought, thy word, O soul republican,  
O spirit of life, O God whose name is man :  
What sea of sorrows but thy sight shall span ?  
Cry wellaway, but well befall the right.

With all its coils crushed, all its rings uncurled,  
The one most poisonous worm that soiled the world  
Is wrenched from off the throat of man, and hurled  
Into deep hell from empire's helpless height.

Time takes no more infection of it now ;  
Like a dead snake divided of the plough,  
The rotten thing lies cut in twain ; but thou,  
Thy fires shall heal us of the serpent's bite.

Ay, with red cautery and a burning brand  
Purge thou the leprous leaven of the land ;  
Take to thee fire, and iron in thine hand,  
Till blood and tears have washed the soiled limbs  
white.

We have sinned against thee in dreams and wicked  
sleep ;  
Smite, we will shrink not ; strike, we will not weep ;  
Let the heart feel thee ; let thy wound go deep ;  
Cry wellaway, but well befall the right.

Wound us with love, pierce us with longing, make  
Our souls thy sacrifices ; turn and take  
Our hearts for our sin-offerings lest they break,  
And mould them with thine hands and give them  
might.

Then, when the cup of ills is drained indeed,  
Will we come to thee with our wounds that bleed,  
With famished mouths and hearts that thou shalt feed,  
And see thee worshipped as the world's delight.

There shall be no more wars nor kingdoms won,  
But in thy sight whose eyes are as the sun  
All names shall be one name, all nations one,  
All souls of men in man's one soul unite.

O sea whereon men labour, O great sea  
That heaven seems one with, shall these things not be ?  
O earth, our earth, shall time not make us free ?  
Cry wellaway, but well befall the right.