

ODE ON THE ASCENT OF THE ALPS.

1.

ALL night as in my dreams I lay  
The shout of torrents without number  
Was in mine ears—' Away, away,  
No time have we for slumber !  
The star-beams in our eddies play—  
The moon is set : away, away !'  
And round the hills in tumult borne  
Through echoing caves and gorges rocking,  
The voices of the night and morn  
Are crying louder in their scorn,  
My tedious languor mocking.  
Alas ! in vain man's mortal limbs would rise  
To join in elemental ecstasies !

2.

' But thou, O Muse, our heavenly mate,  
Unclogged art thou by fleshly weight !  
Ascend, appearing my desire  
Among the mountains high and higher !  
Leap from the glen upon the forest ;  
Leap from the forest on the snow :  
And while from snow to cloud thou soarest  
Send back thy song below !'

3.

I spake—Behold her o'er the broad lake flying :  
Like a great Angel missioned to bestow  
Some boon on men beneath in sadness lying :  
The waves are murmuring silver murmurs low :  
Beneath the curdling wind  
Green through the shades the waters rush and roll,  
Or whitened only by the unfrequent shoal ;—  
Lo ! two dark hills, with darker yet behind,  
Confront them, purple mountains almost black,  
Each behind each self-folded and withdrawn  
Beneath the umbrage of yon cloudy rack—  
That orange gleam ! 'tis dawn !  
Onward ! the swan's flight with yon eagle's blending,  
On, winged Muse ; still forward and ascending !

4.

That mighty sweep, one orbit of her flight,  
Has over-curved the mountain's barrier height :  
She sinks, she speeds, on prosperous wing prevailing  
(Broad lights below and changeful shadows sailing)  
Over a vale upon whose breadth may shine  
Not noontide suns alone, but suns of even,  
Warming the rich fields in their red decline,  
The pale streams flushing with the hues of heaven.  
In vain those Shepherds call ; they cannot wake  
The echoes on this wide and cultured plain,  
Where spreads the river now into a lake,  
Now curves through walnut meads its golden chain,  
In-ising here and there some spot  
With orchard, hive, and one fair cot ;  
Or children dragging from their boat  
Into the flood some reverend goat—  
O happy valley ! cradle soft and deep\*  
For blissful life, calm sleep,  
And leisure, and affections free and wide,  
Give me yon plough, that I with thee may bide,  
Or climb those stages, cot-bestrown  
Vast steps of Summer's mountain-throne,  
Terrace o'er terrace rising, line o'er line,  
Swathed in the light wreaths of the elaborate vine.  
On yonder loftiest steep, the last  
From whose green base the grey rocks rise,  
In random circle idly cast  
A happy household lies.  
Not far there sits the plighted maid ;  
Her locks a lover's fingers braid—  
Fair, fearless maiden ! cause for fear  
Is none, though he alone were near :

Indulge at will thy sweet security!  
He doth but that bold front incline  
And all those wind-tossed curls on thine  
To catch from thy wild lips their mountain purity!

5.

Up to lonelier, narrower valleys  
Winds an intricate ravine  
Whence the latest snow-blast sallies  
Through black firs scarce seen.  
I hear through clouds the Hunter's hollo—  
I hear, but scarcely dare to follow  
'Mid chaotic rocks and woods,  
Such as in her lyric moods  
Nature, like a Bacchante, flings  
From half-shaped imaginings.  
There lie two prostrate trunks entangled  
Like intertwisted dragons strangled:  
Yon glacier seems a prophet's robes;  
While broken sceptres, thrones, and globes  
Are strewn, as left by rival States  
Of elemental Potentates.  
Pale floats the mist, a wizard's shroud:  
There looms the broad crag from the cloud:—  
A thunder-graven Sphinx's head, half blind,  
Gazing on far lands through the freezing wind!

6.

My song grows smoother, hearing  
A smooth-voiced female hymn,  
In verse alternate cheering  
The pass above me dim.  
Behold them now; a band  
Of maids descending hand in hand,

Singing softly, singing proudly  
Low-toned anthems echoed loudly—  
Martyr sufferings, mountain pleasures,  
Grave, religious, sweet affections,  
Tuned with notes of ancient measures,  
Linked with patriot recollections!  
The land is strong when such as these  
Inspire their lovers and their brothers:  
The land is strong with such as these  
Her heroes' destined mothers!  
Freedom from every hut  
Sends down a separate root:  
And when base swords her branches cut  
With tenfold might they shoot.  
Her Temples are of pine-woods made,  
Not Tyrian gold or Parian stone  
With roofs of cedar gem-inlaid:  
There sits she; thence alone  
To those dispensing her large love  
Who share her solemn feast above,  
Nor fear her icy halls, or zone  
Of clouds with which she girds her own!

7.

Mount higher, mount higher!  
With rock-girdled gyre  
Behind each grey ridge  
And pine-feathered ledge  
A vale is suspended; mount higher, mount higher!  
From rock to rock leaping  
The wild goats, they bound;  
The resinous odours  
Are wafted around;

The clouds, disentangled,  
With blue gaps are spangled;  
Green isles of the valley with sunshine are crowned.

The birches new budded  
Make pink the green copse;  
From the briar and hazel  
The golden rain drops;  
As he climbs, the boughs shaking,  
Nest-seeking, branch-breaking,  
Beneath the white ash-boughs the shepherd-boy stops.

How happy that shepherd!  
How happy the lass!  
How freshly beside them  
The pure Zephyrs pass!  
Sing, sing! From the soil  
Springs bubble and boil,  
And sun-smitten torrents fall soft on the grass.

Once more on every turf-clad stage  
Peeps forth some household hermitage;  
Once more from tracts serene and high  
The young lambs bleat, the dams reply.  
From echoing trunks I hear the dash  
Of headlong stream or 'Rans des Vaches.'  
Lo! from thickets lightly springing,  
An old church spire! around its base  
Devotions ever upward winging,  
That find in Heaven their resting-place!  
Around it grey-haired votaries kneel,  
Who look along it to the skies,  
And babes with imitative zeal  
Kissing their lip-worn rosaries.  
Not soon the mountain Faith grows cold:  
Yon hamlet is six centuries old!

8.

Mount higher, mount higher,  
To the cloudland nigher;  
To the regions we climb  
Of our long-buried prime—  
In the skies it awaits us—Up higher, up higher!  
Loud Hymn and clear Pæan  
From caverns are rolled:  
Far below us is Summer—  
We have slipped from her fold;  
We have passed, like a breath,  
To new life without death—  
The Spring and our Childhood all round we behold.

9.

What are toils to men who scorn them?  
Peril what to men who dare?  
Chains to hands that once have torn them  
Thenceforth are chains of air!  
The winds above the snow-plains fleet—  
Like them I race with winged feet:  
My bonds are dropped; my spirit thrills,  
A Freeman of the Eternal Hills!  
Each cloud by turns I make my tent;  
I run before the radiance sent  
From every mountain's silver mail  
Across dark gulfs from vale to vale:  
The curdling mist in smooth career,  
A lovely phantom fleeting by,  
As silent sails through yon pale mere  
That shrines its own blue sky;  
The sun that mere makes now its targe,  
And rainbow vapours tread its marge:

A whisper, such as lovers use,  
 Far off on those still heights were heard ;  
 But here was never sound of bird ;  
 No wild bee lets its murmur loose  
 O'er those blue flowers in rocky cleft  
 Their unvoluptuous eyes that lift  
 From feathery tufts of spangled moss  
 Pure as the snows which they emboss.  
 Lo! like the foam of wintry ocean,  
 The clouds beneath my feet are curled ;  
 Dividing now with solemn motion  
 They give me back the world.  
 No veil I fear, no visual bond  
 In this aerial diamond :  
 My head o'er crystal bastions bent,  
 'Twixt star-crowned spire and battlement  
 I see the river of green ice  
 From precipice to precipice  
 Wind earthward slow, with blighting breath  
 Blackening the vales below like death.  
 Far, far beneath in sealike reach  
 Receding to the horizon's rim,  
 I see the woods of pine and beech,  
 By their own breath made dim :  
 I see the land which heroes trod ;  
 I see the land where Virtue chose  
 To live alone, and live to God ;  
 The land she gave to those  
 Who know that on the hearth alone  
 True Freedom rears her fort and throne.

10.

Lift up, not only hand and eye,  
 Lift up, O Man, thy heart on high :

Or downward gaze once more ; and see  
 How spiritual dust can be !  
 Then far into the Future dive,  
 And ask if there indeed survive,  
 When fade the worlds, no primal shapes  
 Of disembodied hills and capes,  
 Types meet to shadow Godhead forth ;  
 Dread antitypes of shapes on earth ?  
 O Earth ! thou shalt not wholly die,  
 Of some ' new Earth ' the chrysalis  
 Predestined from Eternity,  
 Nor seldom seen through this ;  
 On which, in glory gazing, we  
 Perchance shall oft remember thee,  
 And trace through it thine ancient frame  
 Distinct, like flame espied through flame,  
 Or like our earliest friends, above  
 Not lost, though merged in heavenlier love—  
 How changed, yet still the same !

11.

Here rest, my Soul, from meteor dreams ;  
 And thou, my Song, find rest. The streams  
 That left at morn yon mountain's brow  
 Are sleeping with Locarno now.  
 Earth seeks perforce from joy release ;  
 But Heaven in rapture finds her peace.  
 Gaze on those skies at once o'er all the earth  
 Dissolving in a bath of purple dews,  
 And spread thy soul abroad as widely forth  
 Till Love thy soul, as Heaven the snows, suffuse.  
 The sun is set—but upwards without end  
 Two mighty beams, diverging,  
 Like hands in benediction raised, extend ;  
 From the great deep a crimson mist is surging :  
 The peaks are pyres where Day doth lie  
 Like Indian widows proud to die ;  
 Strange gleams, each moment ten times bright,  
 Shoot round, transfiguring as they smite  
 All spaces of the empyreal height—  
 Deep gleams, high Words which God to man doth  
 speak,  
 From peak to solemn peak in order driven  
 They speed—A loftier vision dost thou seek ?  
 Rise then—to Heaven !