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JETSAM

In Memory of the Sinking of the “Titanic”

Zoned by what dread immensity
Is thy horizon, once so free,
That intermittent in thine eyes
Thou harborest grief for all that dies —
Thou who hast come among these hills
For strength and solace from all ills?
'Tis but a year hence we o'erscanned
The circumjacent leagues of land
From these copse-cinctured, cliff-perched towers,
And reckoned every rapture ours.
What one of that smooth round of hours
Could thus with unimagined shock
Thy wonted gates of gladness lock,
And set beyond the bounds we see
New challenge in Infinity?

Why should I not from these thy hills,
Thou askst, find balm for all my ills?
Thy untried soul divineth not
How Fate's Vandalic stroke can blot
Life's ordered manuscript, and sweep
The unwitting scribe to endless sleep,
Choosing to snatch his fluent pen
From jest and song and schemes of men.

Why may I glean not from thy hills
The comfort craved for crowding ills?
Because from out these uplands wide
Is conjured forth a swelling tide.
Whereon each wooded ridge and knoll
Heaves suddenly, as if to roll
With Titan rage against these walls,
And lash them till their ruin falls,
Gulfed deeper than thy deepest dell:
Aye, even to the maw of hell —
That hell I glimpsed once, months ago;
That hell I evermore must know:
When man's last steel leviathan,
Vain prodigy of thousand eyes

And funnels belching to the skies,
^Proved, at Fate's touch, his pygmy span,
And joined, on sands where none explore,
Sea-caravans stalled evermore!
Nay, each of those snow-mantled peaks
Of doom inexorable speaks:
In each I watch a Phantom rear,
Waiting till man draw hapless near,
To turn his awe to sudden fear,
His levity to panic screams;
And drop upon his futile dreams,
His puny and presumptuous stir,
A ruthless, last extinguisher.

When on this tower the wind-flails shiver,
I feel again the doomed boat quiver.
And see a dim white mass rush by,
Grim with the writ of Destiny
Launched careless from the unseen Pole
By the unheeding Over-Soul!

The ripping of our flank I hear;
The jests and laughter quenched in fear;
The davits' squeak of boats swung out;
The surging murmur; thunderous shout;
The rush of multitudinous feet;
The pistols' crack; morose retreat;
The shrieks of wounded on the deck;
The women's cries men soothe and check;
The stoic band, who, sinking, play
Their own and others' pangs away;
The creak of ropes and splash of keels
Far down the dark abreast, whence swells
A sound of moanings and farewells,
And beat of oars that fainter steals.
That Hope's deceiving beads still tells
For women whose self-sentenced men
Shall never clasp their hands again,
But, yielding life in sight of them,
Accept the sea's stern requiem!

Aye, shudder, friend! Thou canst not know
In all thy days a tithe the woe
That surged to birth on that sea-waste
In anguished thousands ghastly-faced,

Trapped in their floating manse of pride.
Magnate and pauper side by side :
Both, bubbles whom the dread point nears
Of Fate's inexorable shears :
Some, throe-wrung, shrieking, praying vain,
Cursing the Summoner's disdain;
Some, wives sublimely fate-defiant,
In husbands' circling arms reliant.
Steeled with staunch faith through choking breath
To eye unmoved the stare of Death:
Thrust through the portals long before
Their crushed shells reach the unfathomed floor,
To seek the tombless millions sped:
The aeons' covenantless dead.

How I, sucked down in the abysm,
Passed shriven through the cataclysm.
Loosening Death's fingers from my hair,
Scarce am I fully now aware.
I feel Leviathan's last heave
With frightful hiss and roar, as cleave
The swirling waters upward . . . then
Half doubting, I breathe air again,
Rave up to Heaven compassionate.
Battle eternal moments, and
Cramp to some rower's pitying hand.
Swooning that unto ghoulish Fate
Stark, spectral arms still supplicate.

And when Dawn final rescue brings.
The world is one of new-charged things,
For o'er the sea's sepulchral path
Broods Desolation's aftermath.

Thus, friend, thy soft and radiant hills
Lend but scant solace for my ills;
O'er their serenity I yet
See Destiny's dark riddle set.

Why hast Thou, Over-Soul, Force, God,
Made chaff of our aspiring clod?
Let Death in plans securest lurk,
Mocking our proudest handiwork?
Wouldst Thou with purging stroke impress
Athwart Man's pride his nothingness.

And from the elements' expanse
Shape rods for his arch-arrogance?
Wouldst Faith restore unto her own,
Since baffled Reason flees her throne?
Or wouldst Thou of Man's carnal sense
Strip the veneer and the pretense,
To show beneath how he is Thine,
Strung of a fibre still divine,
Which harper Death's rapt finger-tips
Sweep to sublime apocalypse?