

## CHAPTER XXVI

### POEMS ON NIGHT, THE MOON AND THE STARS

EARLY last term, one of my pupils asked me for a list of poems about the moon; and at that time I determined to give a lecture about moon poetry as soon as possible. But I did not find the material quite so easily as I expected. Even now I must tell you that I have given up the idea of attempting a separate lecture about moon poetry. The subject is, with Western poets, too intimately related to the subject of night for any separate treatment which could have much literary significance. So this lecture will be rather upon the subject of night, generally speaking, than about the lights of heaven. But you will find the best moon poems scattered through it, and afterwards you can separate them if you wish. But I do not think that will be worth doing.

Compared with the multitude of Japanese and of Chinese poems about the moon, the number of good English poems on the same subject is rather small. Of course one could make an anthology of parts of poems about the moon—single lines, or fragments of two or three lines long. But the literary value of such little fragments would be chiefly a value of adjectives and verbs; in other words, a value depending upon form and upon choice of words, rather than upon thought and feeling. For English students such a collection of small fragments might have word-value; for you it would have scarcely any value at all—because to you the worth of Western poetry must be in idea and in feeling, not in artistic word-carving.

So I shall quote complete poems only, and only those containing ideas of a striking character.

The subject of night is necessarily the most sublime of all possible poetry; for the most sublime of all sights is the sight of the night sky. Let me be sure, to begin with, that you clearly understand the meaning of the word "sublime." It is often used by students with a very imperfect knowledge of its significance. The sublime in nature, in art, or in utterance is not the beautiful, nor is it the great, nor is it the grand. It is much more than beautiful, than great, or than grand. It is that which gives the deepest and largest of all emotional feelings—a very deep pleasure and wonder, mingled with a sense of fear. Without the element of fear, there is no sense of the sublime. Many persons would prefer to use the word "awe"—not fear. But awe is fear—though this word is commonly applied to particular qualities or kinds of fear, such as religious fear or the fear of some tremendous power, like the power of the king. I prefer to use a word to which no special meanings are attached. Therefore I say fear. When you behold, whether in your mind only, or with your eyes, something so wonderful and so great and so beautiful that it makes you afraid to look at it and to think about it—that is an experience of the sublime. The sight of the sea in a great storm, or the sight of a tremendous range of mountains covered with eternal snow, may be called a sublime aspect. But how much more sublime is the sight of the sky at night, when there are no clouds, and all the stars appear sparkingly before you. A thousand years ago the night sky probably did not look so sublime to the eyes of man as it does to-day, because man then knew very little about the science of astronomy. But now through the acquisition of that science, we know that in looking at the starry sky we are looking into the infinite, and we know that each of those distant myriads of tiny points of light is really a far-off sun, probably surrounded by many worlds, more or less like our own. Then the thought of our relation to the monstrous and endless universe fills us with that profound emotion which is called sublime. Indeed the sight of the night sky required a special word or

term to describe; and the emotion that it gives us has been qualified by a particular psychological name. It is called Cosmic Emotion.

But even before men knew so much about the universe as every student in a middle school knows to-day, people wrote poems full of sublime feeling about the sky. I need not quote Biblical texts for various reasons—which I shall afterwards explain; I shall confine myself to modern poems. In all English literature I think that there is no poem about night much finer as to thought and feeling than a poem with a Latin title written by William Habington in the first half of the seventeenth century—or to be more exact, between the years 1605 and 1654:

NOX NOCTI INDICAT SCIENTIAM

(Night unto night showeth knowledge)

When I survey the bright  
 Celestial sphere;  
 So rich with jewels hung, that Night  
 Doth like an Ethiop bride appear:  
 My soul her wings doth spread  
 And heavenward flies,  
 Th' Almighty's mysteries to read  
 In the large volumes of the skies.  
 For the bright firmament  
 Shoots forth no flame  
 So silent, but is eloquent  
 In speaking the Creator's name.  
 No unregarded star  
 Contracts its light  
 Into so small a character,  
 Removed far from our human sight,  
 But if we steadfast look  
 We shall discern  
 In it, as in some holy book,  
 How man may heavenly knowledge learn.

It tells the conqueror  
     That far-stretch'd power,  
 Which his proud dangers traffic for,  
     Is but the triumph of an hour :  
  
 That from the farthest North,  
     Some nation may,  
 Yet undiscover'd, issue forth,  
     And o'er his new-got conquest sway :  
  
 Some nation yet shut in  
     With hills of ice  
 May be let out to scourge his sin,  
     Till they shall equal him in vice.  
  
 And then they likewise shall  
     Their ruin have ;  
 For as yourselves your empires fall,  
     And every kingdom hath a grave.  
  
 Thus those celestial fires,  
     Though seeming mute,  
 The fallacy of our desires  
     And all the pride of life confute :—  
  
 For they have watch'd since first  
     The World had birth :  
 And found sin in itself accurst,  
     And nothing permanent on Earth.

The most beautiful part of this fine poem consists in the last lines of the first stanza,—comparing the night, all sparkling with stars, to a beautiful black woman robed for her bridal. “Ethiop,” spelt differently from the manner in which we would spell the word to-day (Ethiope), is a short form of the word Ethiopian, belonging to the country of Ethiopia. The Romans called that part of Africa, which we to-day call Abyssinia, by the name of Ethiopia, and the word Ethiopia gradually became in poetry a general name for Africa. So the phrase “Ethiop bride” means simply an African bride, so far as the literal meaning goes. But there is another than the literal meaning; indeed, to appreciate

the comparison you should know something of the old-fashioned idea of Africa, the artistic idea of an Ethiopian bride as painted by the old-fashioned painters. In many old paintings and drawings the Queen of Sheba, visiting Solomon, was represented as a beautiful black woman; and some traditions so spoke of her. The Quaker poet Whittier, in our own time, re-echoes this legend in his poem about King Solomon and the ants. There he speaks of her as—

Comely, but black withal,  
To whom, perchance, belongs  
That wondrous Song of songs.

There is at least some justification for the use of the word Ethiopian in describing dark beauty. In certain parts of what used to be called Ethiopia there are some fine black races, whose women have a well deserved reputation for beauty. And among many dark races it is the custom to wear much jewelry,—gold and silver. The Indian women to-day save their money, not by putting it in a bank, but by turning it into ankle-rings, armlets, nose-rings, ear-rings, and other ornaments of gold and silver. The sight of a black woman thus decorated with glittering metal is certainly very picturesque, and might well suggest to a poet such a comparison as that of the poem which we have read.

I need not say much to you about the general thought of the composition, which needs little explanation. The sight of the night sky has given to the observer the sense of the impermanency of all earthly things. Those stars that he sees have been shining thus from before the beginning of the world; they have looked down upon all the changes that have taken place in the history of races and of empires. They remind us how fleeting are all things that we know. But then, being a religious poet, he attempts to explain the decay of kingdoms and of empires as the result of human folly and sin; and he remembers old Biblical prophecies about the future coming of a mighty race from the North, to punish and destroy luxurious nations. This northern

people, he thinks, will prevail, until they become morally corrupt themselves; and thereafter they too must be swept away. That is what the sky of the night taught the old-fashioned poet. It is interesting, in this connection, to remember the recent prediction of Spencer to the effect that the present European civilization,—the industrial civilization of the West,—will probably be destroyed by some ruder and more vigorous, but less civilized race.

Solemn prophecies are not inspired often in these days by the vision of the night sky. Most modern poets have become too wise to attempt prophecy; perhaps I may say too sceptical. But the sight of the sky must always continue to inspire deep emotion and awe; and we find that such feelings increase, rather than diminish, with wisdom. Here is a powerful and very recent poem, entitled "The Night Sky," by Charles G. D. Roberts:

O Deep of Heaven, 't is thou alone art boundless,  
 'T is thou alone our balance shall not weigh,  
 'T is thou alone our fathom-line finds soundless,—  
 Whose infinite our finite must obey!  
 Through thy blue realms and down thy starry reaches  
 Thought voyages forth beyond thy furthest fire,  
 And homing from no sighted shoreline, teaches  
 Thee measureless as is the soul's desire.  
 O Deep of Heaven! no beam of Pleiad ranging  
 Eternity may bridge thy gulf of spheres!  
 The ceaseless hum that fills thy sleep unchanging  
 Is rain of the innumerable years.  
 Our worlds, our suns, our ages,—these but stream  
 Through thine abiding like a dateless dream.

The author of the above poem is a professor of English literature in a Canadian university; and he has certainly made a fine effort. Here we have something a little in advance of the older religious poem which I quoted to you,—not in workmanship, but rather in thought—or, to put it still more exactly, in the quality of the emotion that the thought creates. The idea is simple, if you like; but the

simplicity is of that infinite kind which swallows up all details. The comparison of the infinite night, in which the sparkling of suns is no more than a glimmer of phosphorescence, to an ocean without bottom and without shore, is perhaps simple; but it is the very largest comparison which the human mind is capable of making. Notice that the use of sea terms in these lines—such as “soundless (unfathomable),” “shoreline,” etc., is not only tremendously effective, but even awful. Awful only because our modern minds have been enlarged by astronomic knowledge. Truly the night, as we see it now, represents the real Sea of Birth and Death, in which universes appear and disappear like those strange lights that we see among the waves in summer nights. And the sound of this sea, the poet likens to the sound of the fleeting of millions of centuries. Time itself, and Name, and Form, and all that we take for reality, is nothing at all but the shadow of passing waves in that eternal night or sea of space surrounding our tiny world.

But the poet stops at this thought. It is only, again, the thought of impermanency, expressed in a larger, because more modern, way than in the first poem. It is grand, it is awful; but it is not consoling, nor pleasing—except as regards the pleasure of fear. There is a cosmic emotion still larger than this, which may be awakened by the sight of the night sky; and there is an English poet who expresses it. The consoling way to consider the awfulness of the universe is to remember, when thinking about it, that we ourselves are a part of it, that the same life which is in us thrills also in the furthest visible stars, to remember that, as parts of one immeasurable whole, we must not be afraid of that vastness. It is George Meredith who best teaches us this lesson in verse, in his poem entitled “Meditation Under Stars.” He begins by asking the right question—What is our relation to the stars?

What links are ours with orbs that are  
 So resolutely far:  
 The solitary asks, and they

Give radiance as from a shield:  
 Still at the death of day,  
 The seen, the unrevealed.

What relation have we with those orbs which remain so unmercifully, so frightfully far away from us? That is the question which every lonely thinker asks himself; but the stars do not answer it readily. They send their light to us, cold and bright, like the glittering of a shield—the shield of mystery, harder to pierce than adamant. Always, of clear evenings, after the sinking of the sun, we see them shining; but always the mystery of them remains exactly the same as before.

Implacable they shine  
 To us who would of Life obtain  
 An answer for the life we strain,  
     To nourish with one sign.  
 Nor can imagination throw  
 The penetrative shaft: we pass  
 The breath of thought, who would divine  
     If haply they may grow  
 As Earth; have our desire to know;  
 If life comes there to grain from grass,  
 And flowers like ours of toil and pain;  
     Has passion to beat bar,  
     Win space from cleaving brain;  
     The mystic link attain,  
 Whereby star holds on star.

Without pity those stars seem to shine,—without pity for us who exhaust our strength and our knowledge in the desperate effort to obtain one little hint of the meaning of the mystery of life. They tell us nothing. Even our imagination cannot really help us to know the meaning of that life of stars. When we try merely to reason about the universe, we only waste our intellectual power—because the riddle is beyond the range of human thought. And yet we want to know whether those far-away suns may not some day become worlds like this world,—and whether there will be races in

those other worlds anxious to know what we are anxious to know,—and whether life upon those worlds passes, or will pass, through the same evolution as it has passed in our world, and through the same forms of struggle and pain. We want to know also whether, in those other worlds that are, or that may become, passion must be controlled as it is here our duty to control it. Will the people of other worlds be obliged to obtain wisdom by conquering themselves; or will they be able to learn the tremendous secret of communicating between world and world? Will they be able to discover the secret relation between star and star?

It is no use, he tells us, merely to reason about these things. The stars will not answer human questions. We can understand our relation to the universe only by trust, by faith, by love:

To deeper than this ball of sight  
Appeal the lustrous people of the night.  
Fronting yon shoreless, sown with fiery sails,  
It is our ravenous that quails,  
Flesh by its craven thirsts and fears distraught.  
The spirit leaps alight,  
Doubts not in them is he.

By “ball of sight” the poet means the human eye. He says that the stars, the bright people of the night, as he calls them, appeal to something deeper within us than our bodily eyes. Why are we afraid when we look at the shoreless infinite of the night sky? Why do we tremble in thought at the immensity of that ocean, with its sails of fire (constellations)? Merely because of our poor weak bodies. The sight of the universe frightens our bodies, reminding them how weak and how ephemeral they are. The cowardly desires of our bodies for enjoyment, and the cowardly fear which our bodies have of death—that only makes us afraid. Our flesh is afraid, because it is perishable. Our fear of the infinite is a mere animal fear—therefore unworthy. But the spirit that is within us is not perishable; and a man whose

spirit is enlightened is not afraid of the infinite; he is not afraid of the stars. When he looks up at the stars he feels sure that he belongs to them quite as much as he belongs to this world—he knows that his real soul is thrilling at once within his earthly body and also in the light of the most distant stars. This is another way of saying that the spirit of man itself is really infinite, being a part of the infinite life.

So may we read, and little find them cold:  
Not frosty lamps illumining dead space,  
Not distant aliens, not senseless Powers.  
The fire is in them whereof we are born;  
The music of their motion may be ours.  
Spirit shall deem them beckoning Earth and voiced  
Sisterly to her, in her beams rejoiced.

That is to say: if we think of the universe as a part of ourselves and of ourselves as a part of the universe and the universal life,—then the stars will not seem to us either awful or cold. No more will we think of them as of far-away strangers; nor will we think of them as merely representing masses of force or centres of gravitation. We shall remember that their light represents the very same light that is in ourselves. The poet says that we have been born of fire. I need scarcely tell you that this is scientifically quite true. All the life existing upon this earth, as well as the earth itself, originally came from the sun. The poet is only reminding us that all worlds are born in fire. And you know that they will all die in fire. But the principle of deepest life, that is older than any sun and will continue after millions of suns have passed away—the one eternal life is unchangeable; the stars and the universes are only passing manifestations of it. And that unchangeable and eternal life is also ours. When we look at the far-away stars, they should remind us of the fact that we are eternal, and that the light of them represents only a symbol of the universal life which is at once in us and in millions of suns. When we think in this way, observes the poet, how much more

beautiful does the universe appear!

Half strange seems Earth, and sweeter than her flowers.

And Meredith partly repeats the thought of Shelley, suggesting that the spirit of the universe is love. I believe that this is the deepest modern poem on the subject of night. It has one literary defect; it is so obscure in passages that I cannot attempt to quote the whole of it. Browning often has the same defect in the midst of otherwise beautiful work.

Further than this, cosmic emotion cannot go in poetry. But after all, the subject is rather a heavy one for the class room; and I prefer to turn now to night poetry of a somewhat lighter kind. I may begin this departure by some quotations from Wordsworth. He has two pieces of poetry about night which may, and ought to, please you. The first is merely descriptive, but it is description in which Wordsworth has never been surpassed. It is called "A Night-piece." I shall not quote the whole, only the finest lines. The poet is representing a traveller walking along at night under a cloudy sky. The night is what we would call in Japan *oborodzukiyo*. But all at once the clouds are scattered; and the traveller stops to look up with delight at the sudden spectacle of the moon and stars:

He looks up—the clouds are split  
 Asunder,—and above his head he sees  
 The clear Moon, and the glory of the heavens.  
 There, in a black-blue vault she sails along,  
 Followed by multitudes of stars, that, small  
 And sharp, and bright, along the dark abyss  
 Drive as she drives: how fast they wheel away,  
 Yet vanish not!—the wind is in the tree,  
 But they are silent;—still they roll along  
 Immeasurably distant; and the vault,  
 Built round by those white clouds, enormous clouds,  
 Still deepens its unfathomable depth.  
 At length the Vision closes; and the mind,  
 Not undisturbed by the delight it feels,

Which slowly settles into peaceful calm,  
Is left to muse upon the solemn scene.

It is said that Tennyson was partly inspired by this poem when he wrote his famous "Passing of Arthur." You should understand what the poet here means to describe before you can properly appreciate the poem. The whole sky was at first covered with white clouds; but later on an open space appeared in the middle of the sky, just above the traveller's head. What is the effect of looking at a circular space of clear sky surrounded by white clouds? The optical effect is to make the vision of sky appear deeper than it does at any other time, very much deeper than if there were no clouds at all. Also the space of clear sky, thus ringed round with white clouds, looks blacker than it does at any other time, very much blacker than if there were no clouds; and stars and moon would consequently seem to glitter much more brightly than usual. So what Wordsworth is here describing for us is not the usual but the unusual; and he produces the glittering effect as well as the dark effect by the use of the very simplest words. And how admirably does he do it! Notice the adjectives used for the stars,— "small, and sharp, and bright;" what could be simpler, yet what could give the effect better to the imagination? "Sharp" is exactly a proper word; for even under the ordinary telescope the stars always remain only as points of light to the human eye. I need not explain any more, except to remind you that the word "drive" is used here in the sense of drifting, or blown,—as a ship before the wind. Then you will ask, "Is not this wrong?" How can the stars appear to drift in such a way? Only because of the motion of the clouds. The stars themselves are not moving—at least not moving in such a way that a human eye could perceive their movement. But the drifting of the clouds before the wind actually makes the moon and stars appear to have a motion which they actually have not.

The poem is essentially descriptive. But Wordsworth scarcely ever confines himself to pure description; he is a

meditative poet, and even here we have a little bit of reflection. The closing lines give us the emotional effect which the sight of a glorious night makes upon the poet's mind. These are really the most important lines of the composition. If you think a little about them, you will feel how true they are. The sight of a very beautiful night sky, when the winds are still, makes within us a particular feeling of pleasure impossible to describe better by any other term than "peaceful calm." A beautiful spring day, you all know, fills us with delight,—gives us a sense of gladness which we cannot feel under a gloomy sky. If you ask some great physiologist to tell you the reason of the joy that we feel on a beautiful day, he will very probably reply: "It has been shown very clearly that the effect of sunshine is to stimulate circulation." That is to say, the sunlight makes our hearts beat more quickly. But a great psychologist would tell you that this can only be a partial explanation; that the experience of the race has also something to do with our pleasure on bright days; that we inherit something of the joy of past humanity in the sight of blue sky and pure air. At all events, here is the fact that the sight of a beautiful night sky certainly produces in our minds a great pleasure and peace; and this could not be explained by the effect of star light or moon light upon circulation!

The mere pleasure of such vision is seldom unaccompanied by reflection. A beautiful moon, a beautiful starry sky, suggest many thoughts and fancies,—sometimes philosophic, sometimes merely esthetic, sometimes melancholy. One of the most common thoughts in moon poetry is that of the moral simile afforded by the sight of clouds passing over the moon. I need not remind you how often this thought has been expressed by Japanese poets,—and not in one form only, but in many. Perhaps you will be surprised to hear that our Western poets chiefly regard this appearance, in their poems, as a simile of hope, rather than of impermanency or sadness. Here is an example from Coleridge;—and I shall presently offer you other examples. The poem is a

sonnet, and is entitled "To the Autumnal Moon."

Mild Splendour of the various-vested Night!  
 Mother of wildly-working visions! hail!  
 I watch thy gliding, while with watery light  
 Thy weak eye glimmers through a fleecy veil;  
 And when thou lovest thy pale orb to shroud  
 Behind the gathered blackness lost on high;  
 And when thou dartest from the wind-rent cloud  
 Thy placid lightning o'er the awakened sky.  
 Ah! such is Hope! as changeful and as fair!  
 Now dimly peering on the wistful sight;  
 Now hid behind the dragon-winged Despair;  
 But soon emerging in her radiant might  
 She o'er the sorrow-clouded breast of Care  
 Sails, like a meteor kindling in its flight.

First let us notice a few of the peculiar expressions in the poem. You must remember that night is personified; and that the term "various-vested," signifying "clad or dressed in many different kinds of dresses," has a double value—referring both to the personification, and to the natural fact that night appears to us in a great many different aspects. By the expression "wildly-working vision" you may simply understand "dream." Night has often been termed poetically the mother of dreams; and the extraordinary and impossible element in our dreams is properly qualified in the poet's use of the adverb "wildly." In the fourth line please notice the word "fleecy;" it is very commonly used by Western poets in speaking of light, white clouds, because their curly and imponderable appearance suggests that of a fleece of wool. Eastern poets have not been, in old times at least, sufficiently familiar with the appearance of sheep's wool to make use of a like comparison. But I believe that they have often used an equally good simile, that of cotton or silk. In the last line of the poem, please observe that the natural fact is very exactly described. The meteor or shooting star is described as "kindling *in* its flight"—and you must understand the preposition "in"

to have the value of "during." As a fact, small meteors are said to become incandescent at the moment of entering our atmosphere; they appear to take fire as they fly.

Before we take another fine example of the same sort from Wordsworth, I may as well offer you an example of pure description of night scenery—description without any meditation whatever, without any reflection or sentiment. Such poetry may have occasional value. Whether it has value or not will chiefly depend upon the quality of suggestiveness that may be in it. If poetry can make us think and feel, without itself actually expressing any definite thought or feeling, it is true poetry; and it may be even great poetry. This poem has no title.

The clouds have left the sky,  
The wind hath left the sea,  
The half-moon up on high  
Shrinketh her face of dree.

She lightens on the comb  
Of leaden waves, that roar  
And thrust their hurried foam  
Up on the dusky shore.

Behind the western bars  
The shrouded day retreats,  
And unperceived the stars  
Steal to their sovran seats.

And whiter grows the foam,  
The small moon lightens more;  
And as I turn me home,  
My shadow walks before.

This poem, which is by Robert Bridges, forms one of those vivid appeals to memory which only a master poet can make. In the first stanza there is nothing particular to notice except the use of the old obsolete word "dree," signifying sadness or sorrow. It is a still night, with a young moon in the sky; and a heavy surf is rolling in, slowly. Notice the

use of the word "comb" in the second stanza. You must have observed, at certain times, the resemblance of the lines on the sides of the moving wave to the lines in combed hair. Sailors often speak of waves as "combing," when the foam on the top of the crests is so even, and the lines of the curve below so regular, as to make one think of wool being passed through a comb. A more artistic though very simple word in the same stanza is "leaden," used to convey the grey metallic aspect of waves under moonlight. Though the waves themselves move slowly, the foam is not slow; it runs up the beach very fast after the fall of the wave; and this the poet suggests excellently by the use of two words, "thrust" and "hurried." Watch slow waves breaking, and you will see how true these words are of bursting foam. It moves as if it had been given a sudden thrust or push after falling, and then runs as if in a great hurry. There is nothing more to notice or explain; the rest of the poem speaks for itself. But of course the full impression comes only with the last line, describing the shadow of the man walking home in front of him. After you have read that, the memory of many a night at sea must return to you. That is, if you have often been at the seashore, you can get the whole sensation of the night in the little picture; the appearance of the new moon, and the first sparkling of the stars, the colour and the form, as well as the sounds of the great waves—lastly, the cool sensation of the homeward walk, and that sense of loneliness which impels a man to find interest even in the movements of his own shadow.

But poetry like this, good as it is, depends very much for its effect upon the experience of the reader. That is true of all suggestive poetry. If you have not had the experience, then you cannot feel the poem. And the experience of the seacoast at night is not altogether what we might call a common experience. Thousands of us do not go to the sea. In America, for example, there are probably several millions of people who never have seen and probably never will see the sea. But there is nobody, with eyes, who has

not seen the moon, and who cannot feel the poetry of a Wordsworth or a Coleridge writing about the moon. Here is an example of the use by Wordsworth of the very same thought that inspired Coleridge, with some original variations:

Lo! where the Moon along the sky  
Sails with her happy destiny;  
Oft is she hid from mortal eye  
Or dimly seen,  
But when the clouds asunder fly  
How bright her mien!

Far different we—a froward race,  
Thousands though rich in Fortune's grace  
With cherished sullenness of pace  
Their way pursue,  
Ingrates who wear a smileless face  
The whole year through.

If kindred humours e'er would make  
My spirit droop for drooping's sake,  
From Fancy following in thy wake,  
Bright ship of heaven!  
A counter impulse let me take  
And be forgiven.

Paraphrased this signifies: See the happy moon moving through the sky—how beautiful she is! It often happens that clouds hide her from us, or half conceal her. But those clouds break at last; and then how glorious the moon shines!

Human beings ought to imitate the moon in one regard. We ought to show happy faces whenever our troubles have passed, just as the moon looks always bright when the vapours have passed her. But many people, even though rich and fortunate in their circumstances, refuse to be pleasant and contented. They are never grateful, never glad.

(The last stanza is addressed directly to the moon.) If I were one of those who could become needlessly sad—melancholy without reason—then I should pray to you, O beau-

tiful moon, bright ship of heaven, to teach me better. My imagination as I watch you waxing and waning, becoming clouded and yet always becoming bright again, reminds me that we should always hope.

I do not want to give you a great number of poems of the same kind at the same time, for fear that you might lose interest in the subject. Let me therefore vary examples by giving you one illustration of love poetry in relation to the moon. The most beautiful love poem of this kind that I happen to know of, in English at least, is by an American—James Russell Lowell, one of the very few American poets who have made a name in English literature. He was at one time minister to England. His idea in this poem appears to me, if not exactly new, to be at least expressed in quite a novel way. The principal fancy is suggested by the scientific fact of the action of the moon upon the tides of the sea. Now, if you substitute the soul for the sea, its passions and emotions for the tides, and love for the moon, you can perceive at once what a fine opportunity is offered to poetry by the suggestion. I think that Lowell has used it very beautifully. This poem is entitled “The Moon.”

My soul was like the sea,  
 Before the moon was made,  
 Moaning in vague immensity,  
 Of its own strength afraid,  
 Unrestful and unstaid.  
 Through every rift it foamed in vain,  
 About its earthly prison,  
 Seeking some unknown thing in pain,  
 And sinking restless back again,  
 For yet no moon had risen:  
 Its only voice a vast dumb moan,  
 Of utterless anguish speaking,  
 It lay unhopefully alone,  
 And lived but in an aimless seeking.

So was my soul; but when 'twas full

Of unrest to o'erloading,  
 A voice of something beautiful  
 Whispered a dim foreboding,  
 And yet so soft, so sweet, so low,  
 It had not more of joy than woe;  
 And, as the sea doth oft lie still,  
 Making its waters meet,  
 As if by an unconscious will,  
 For the moon's silver feet,  
 So lay my soul within mine eyes  
 When thou, its guardian moon, didst rise.

And now, howe'er its waves above  
 May toss and seem uneasyful,  
 One strong, eternal law of Love,  
 With guidance sure and peaceful,  
 As calm and natural as breath,  
 Moves its great deeps through life and death.

This almost takes us back in spirit to the Elizabethan age. But I need not remind you that the scientific fancy is only playfully used. We may be quite certain that the sea is not older than the moon, and that the sea did not exist at any time before the moon. What the poet really wishes to suggest is the condition of affairs upon a planet, having an atmosphere but no moon. That is a question which has lately interested many astronomers, and especially the son of the great Charles Darwin, who has published a work upon the relation of tidal action to the revolution of planetary bodies. There would be tides upon the face of this earth, even if there were no moon; for there are what we call solar tides. But these are very slight movements compared with those which the moon causes. A man living without love might well compare himself to a sea without any moon to direct its tides, but I need scarcely tell you that this fancy cannot be exhausted by any one poem. It can be used in a thousand ways, and I recommend any of my hearers who compose poetry to think about it.

Shelley has written a number of poems about the moon,

but nearly all were unfinished at the time of his death. They exist only as fragments, and none of them are worth quoting to you. But let me remind you that he made a beautiful translation of the ancient hymn of Homer to the moon; and if any of you should ever write an essay about moon poetry, I hope you will not forget this beautiful translation. I cannot quote it in this class, unfortunately, because of the very great number of mythological allusions, which would require too much time to explain. But Shelley has written perhaps the most beautiful English poem in existence on the more general subject of night, and I can quote freely from that. The poem on night is written after the Greek fashion, night being personified as a beautiful dark-haired woman. Also this poem shows some traces of the old Greek poet Menander. Menander was a delightful poet; we have lost a great number of his compositions, but enough remains to make us regret for ever that anything written by such a poet should perish. He was very fond of solitude and study; and he wrote a beautiful invocation to night which is famous,—somewhat to this effect:

O holy Night, come thou hither and comfort me. To me thou art all perfume, all sweetness, all peace!

This is the devotion of the happy old Greek scholar to solitude and calm and the silence required for thought. I imagine that Shelley must have been inspired by Menander; but that does not affect the original worth of his poem, which is wonderfully beautiful.

#### TO NIGHT

Swiftly walk o'er the western wave,  
Spirit of Night!  
Out of the misty eastern cave,  
Where, all the long and lone daylight,  
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,  
Which make thee terrible and dear,—  
Swift be thy flight!

Wrap thy form in a mantle gray,  
 Star-inwrought!  
 Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day;  
 Kiss her until she be wearied out,  
 Then wander o'er city, and sea, and land,  
 Touching all with thine opiate wand—  
 Come, long-sought!

When I arose and saw the dawn,  
 I sighed for thee;  
 When light rode high, and the dew was gone,  
 And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,  
 And the weary Day turned to his rest,  
 Lingering like an unloved guest,  
 I sighed for thee.

Thy brother Death came, and cried,  
 Wouldst thou me?  
 Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,  
 Murmured like a noontide bee,  
 Shall I nestle near thy side?  
 Wouldst thou me?—And I replied,  
 No, not thee!

Death will come when thou art dead,  
 Soon, too soon—  
 Sleep will come when thou art fled;  
 Of neither would I ask the boon  
 I ask of thee, belovèd Night—  
 Swift be thine approaching flight,  
 Come soon, soon!

The poet is praying to the night to give him inspiration and calm,—not sleep. But before we go any further,—and before I can explain the poem at all, I must talk to you about the Greek mythology in it. Otherwise you cannot perfectly understand it.

In Greek mythology Night was a virgin goddess, daughter of Chaos. She gave birth, virgin-birth, to many children having no father; and among these children were Death, Sleep, and Dream. Also she was said to live in a cave at

the end of the world. Day lived in the same cave. When Night came out of the cave, Day went in. This is the most ancient story about her. But Greek mythology is an exceedingly difficult subject, because it changes at almost every period of Greek literature. And you will not be surprised therefore when I tell you that different Greek poets, at different times, gave very different and very contradictory accounts of Night. Some poets called her the sister, not the mother, of Death; some said her cave was in the North; most of them said that it was in the West; but a Roman poet spoke of it as being in the East,—and Shelley follows him in this poem. All that is essential to remember is the association of Night with Death, Sleep, and Dream,—and the fact of her being a virgin goddess.

Now you will understand better what Shelley means by speaking of the “misty eastern cave” and about “Night weaving dreams.” Also you will better understand the description of her as bending down to cover the face of Day with her long black hair, and kissing her as one woman might caress another. And Shelley speaks of Day in the second stanza as feminine—he is not referring to Helios, the later sun god, but to Eos, or Aurora, the goddess of dawn. In the same stanza the word “opiate” used as an adjective signifies “sleep giving.” After this you can easily comprehend the reference to Death and Sleep in the succeeding stanza. Each asks the weary poet, “Shall not I be able to comfort you as well as Night?” But the poet wishes for neither the rest of Death nor the rest of Sleep. To Sleep he makes answer, “No, I do not wish for Death. He will come sooner or later, when you cannot come. And I do not wish to sleep; Sleep will come to me even when you have no more power to comfort me.” It is the peace and inspiration of Night that he wants, in order to compose his verses.

As I told you, the influence of Menander appears in this poem,—especially in the use of the phrase “beloved Night.” But it appears much more in a famous poem to night written

by Longfellow. Longfellow has composed five remarkable poems on the subject of night and moonlight; he was especially a poet of moonlight. Although the composition to which I have just referred is an early one, nevertheless it is beautiful enough and brief enough to quote in this place—at least the best of it:

I heard the trailing garments of the Night  
 Sweep through her marble halls.  
 I saw her sable skirts all fringed with light  
 From the celestial walls!

I felt her presence, by its spell of might,  
 Stoop o'er me from above;  
 The calm, majestic presence of the Night,  
 As of the one I love.

. . . .

O holy Night! from thee I learn to bear  
 What man has borne before!  
 Thou layest thy finger on the lips of Care,  
 And they complain no more.

Peace! Peace! Orestes-like I breathe this prayer!  
 Descend with broad-winged flight,  
 The welcome, the thrice-prayed-for, the most fair,  
 The best-beloved Night!

The beautiful parts of this poem are almost literally translated from the Greek. It was Menander especially who addressed the night with the words, "O holy Night!" The reference to Orestes in the last stanza belongs to the Greek tragedy of Orestes,—it was dramatically treated both by Sophocles and Æschylus. The story of Orestes is the terrible story of a man who, having killed his own mother because she had killed his father, is nevertheless punished by the gods for his offence against filial piety. The story afforded a great moral problem to the ancient dramatists. Filial piety was the indispensable virtue in Greek life; but Orestes was placed in the strange position of a man who had to confront two contradictory aspects of the moral law.

As a son, he was bound to avenge his father; yet, as the enemy of his father was his own mother, he could not avenge his father without offending against the law—against the very law which it was his duty to obey. And the gods punished him by sending the Furies to torment him. At last they forgave him—because his case was such a very exceptional one. He had to bear only half the punishment. During the time when the Furies tormented him, he used to pray to Night and Sleep and Death to save him—to give him a moment's rest, or to destroy him utterly. This is the prayer that Longfellow speaks of; and the beautiful phrases in the last stanza are literally taken from the Greek.

The same poet has given us a much later poem on the subject of night as the giver of peace and forgetfulness. This is much more serious, but an equally beautiful composition; and one of the comparisons in it deserves particular notice for its curious beauty.

#### NIGHT

Into the darkness and the hush of night  
 Slowly the landscape sinks, and fades away,  
 And with it fade the phantoms of the day,  
 The ghosts of men and things, that haunt the light.  
 The crowd, the clamour, the pursuit, the flight,  
 The unprofitable splendour and display,  
 The agitations, and the cares that prey  
 Upon our hearts, all vanish out of sight.  
 The better life begins; the world no more  
 Molests us; all its records we erase  
 From the dull commonplace-book of our lives  
 That like a palimpsest is written o'er  
 With trivial incidents of time and place,  
 And lo! the ideal, hidden beneath, revives.

There are two things especially to notice in this poem, before we speak of the general meaning. The first is the somewhat unfamiliar description of the landscape "sinking into darkness." Much more commonly do we find poets describing the darkness as coming down upon the landscape;

scarcely ever do we find an English poet speaking of the landscape as descending into the darkness. Yet this unusual comparison is quite correct,—even more correct than the other. But you should be somewhere among mountains to understand how true it is. If you happened to be in a valley about sunset time with great peaks rising all about you, you would see that the darkness of the night does not “come down” at all. Quite the contrary. First the bottom of the valley becomes dark; then the blackness covers the smaller hill. The tops of the trees still catch the light; but the lower part of the trees cannot be distinctly seen. Gradually the tops of the trees also disappear; and the darkness covers all except the very highest mountain peaks. One peak after another becomes black; then at last the very highest mountain top is also swallowed up by the flood of darkness. So that it is from the ground upwards that the night appears to grow. The effect, to the eye, is like that of a black flood rising up, or of the land itself sinking down into the dark. What poets have written about night descending from the sky is simply all wrong, and not at all true to observation. If you are ever among mountains at sunset time, please observe the effect, and see whether I have not correctly described it.

The other matter to which I want to call your attention is the beautiful comparison about the palimpsest. Perhaps some of you may not know what a palimpsest is; and unless you know, you cannot see the beauty of this poem. A palimpsest is the name given to an ancient Greek or Roman manuscript, written upon parchment, from which the original writing was scraped off in order that the same parchment could be used again for the writing of another manuscript. Mediæval Christianity had no liking for the old Greek or Roman literature. The monks thought that all pagan literature was wicked, and when they happened to find a beautiful Greek or Roman manuscript they would scrape off all the writing, and use the parchment to copy some religious text upon it. But, by doing this, they preserved for us many

things that would otherwise have been lost, for modern science discovered a way of removing the modern writing from the palimpsest and restoring the old Roman or Greek texts. And in this way we have been able to recover a considerable number of Greek poems and Latin texts. Remember only that these twice written parchments are called palimpsests. The poet tells us in this poem that the real life of the mind is not of the day, but of the night. When we can, we should think only about good and beautiful and happy things. But during the daytime we have very little leisure to do as we like, and can only do what we must. We have to earn a living; we have to perform many duties that are painful or disagreeable; we have to think about eating and drinking and paying money and arranging for the necessities of existence. It is only when the night comes that we are quite free to think about what is beautiful and what is good. And when this peaceful and happy darkness comes, then our minds suddenly become freed from all the memories and trifling details of the life of effort—just as the leaves of a palimpsest become freed from the mediæval writing which concealed the beautiful Greek or Latin thought. Then the true intellectual beauty can show itself, the ideal in the soul of man.

I shall not quote all of Longfellow's poems about night; it would require too much time. But I may quote to you a beautiful piece about moonlight. Longfellow has two pieces of great beauty about moonlight. One is called "The Harvest Moon;" but it is not, I think, the better. I much prefer the simpler piece entitled "Moonlight" because of the thought that is in it:

As a pale phantom with a lamp  
Ascends some ruin's haunted stair,  
So glides the moon along the damp  
Mysterious chambers of the air.

Now hidden in cloud, and now revealed,  
As if this phantom, full of pain,  
Were by the crumbling walls concealed,  
And at the windows seen again.

Until at last, serene and proud,  
 In all the splendour of her light,  
 She walks the terraces of cloud,  
 Supreme as Empress of the Night.

The allusion to the ghost with a lamp at once suggests to an English reader many traditions of his native country. But it is necessary to tell you that almost every ancient castle in England has its ghost story and its particular ghost. Usually the ghost is the figure of a woman in white, who is seen to climb up the broken stairways of some ruined tower at night. She walks where there are no more steps, and sometimes she can be seen looking out of the window of the room which has no floor. This is the comparison intended by Longfellow. But the latter part of the poem is the beautiful part—

I look, but recognize no more  
 Objects familiar to my view;  
 The very pathway to my door  
 Is an enchanted avenue.

All things are changed. One mass of shade,  
 The elm-trees drop their curtains down;  
 By palace, park, and colonnade  
 I walk as in a foreign town.

The very ground beneath my feet  
 Is clothed with a diviner air;  
 White marble paves the silent street  
 And glimmers in the empty square.

Moonlight changes and makes beautiful even common and ugly things. Japanese poets speak of snow as making a silver robe; Western poets speak of moonlight only as doing this. Western poets do not find snow very beautiful; snowy landscapes are usually spoken of in relation to death and silence only; snow is often called the death-shroud of the world, or the funeral robe of the earth. The reason is that in Western countries the winter is not really beautiful; and the reason why it is not beautiful is that there are very few evergreen trees. But in Japan evergreen trees form a great

part of the landscape scenery; evergreen trees look very beautiful when the snow lies upon them—whereas most of our Western trees are deciduous, and become, as our poets say, “skeleton trees” in winter. So we do not find beauty in snow. But all that the Japanese poets find beautiful in snowy landscapes, Western poets find in moonlight landscapes. You remember Tennyson’s delightful lines :

Silver sails all out of the west  
Under the silver moon.\*

So we speak of the moon making a silver sea, silver rivers, silver waves. We speak of her as flooding the world with silver light. We speak of her as a great witch, who transforms all things by touching them. So the poet here tells us how at night even the street reaching to his house becomes enchanted under the light of the moon. The common clay is turned to silver dust; the common pavement is changed into white marble. The familiar town is so beautiful and so different under that magic light that it looks like a foreign town, and even the air appears to have become in some way divine. Now listen to the moral of the poem :

Illusion! Underneath there lies  
The common life of every day;  
Only the spirit glorifies  
With its own tints the sober gray.

In vain we look, in vain uplift  
Our eyes to heaven, if we are blind;  
We see but what we have the gift  
Of seeing; what we bring we find.

This is as true as it is fine. The beautiful moonlight does not really change anything; it only seems to change the world; it is an illusion. The truth is that the beauty of this silver scenery exists only in our minds. But that is true of everything in our lives. Whoever wishes to see beauty will always be able to find it if he has a beautiful soul, a beautiful mind. He who has not a beautiful mind, will

\* *Princess*, iii, 14-5

never be able to enjoy the world. A person without imagination is very much like a man without eyes; he cannot see the charming illusions which nature everywhere prepares for him.

You have all heard of Professor Gosse, a great authority on English literature, a charming writer of prose, and in his leisure hours a poet. Most of his poems are very scholarly—mere studies in different forms of verse; I am not sure that they could interest you. But he has translated from the Swedish a very pretty composition about the moon, expressing the same thought uttered by Coleridge and Wordsworth, in a somewhat different way. The poem is entitled “Luna”—which you know to be the Latin name of the moon. It is a sonnet.

Deep slumber hung o'er sea and hill and plain;  
 With pale pink cheek fresh from her watery caves  
 Slow rose the moon out of the midnight waves,  
 Like Venus out of ocean born again;  
 Then blazed Olympian on the dark blue main;  
 “So shall my star,” hark how my weak hope raves!  
 “My happy star ascend the sea that laves  
 Its shores with grief, and silence all my pain!”  
 With that there sighed a wandering midnight breeze,  
 High up among the topmost tufted trees,  
 And o'er the moon's face blew a veil of cloud;  
 And in the breeze my genius spake and said,  
 “While thy heart stirs, thy glimmering hope has fled,  
 And like the moon lies muffled in a shroud.”

The mythological allusions need explanation perhaps. Remember that the Goddess of Love was called in Greek mythology the foam-born, because she was supposed to have been made out of the foam of the sea. In the fourth line of the poem the poet compares the moon, rising from the sea, to Venus born a second time. The adjective “Olympian” used in the Greek sense means god-like; the gods were supposed to dwell upon the mountain Olympus, and they are called therefore the Olympians. In the third line from the end of the poem, please notice the word “genius;” this term is also used in the classic sense, and means a guardian spirit;

it has nothing to do with the modern meaning which we give to the word. Altogether this is a good example of a contemporary classic poem. And I suppose Mr. Gosse translated it only as an example of the classic style. But it is good, and I think that you can easily see the meaning of it. The solitary thinker observing the moon rise brightly out of the bitter sea thinks to himself that it is a happy omen. "Some time in the future," he says, "my life will be illuminated by a success, by a gladdening, as now the sea is illuminated by the moon." But even while he speaks thus to himself, a wind arises and blows a cloud across the moon. Then the guardian spirit of the man mocks him for depending thus upon so uncertain an omen. Even while your heart had only time to beat once, that hope of yours is gone; it is all darkened, like the moon by a cloud.

It has frequently been observed by Japanese poets as well as by Western poets, that the aspects of nature, and the sounds of nature, affect us pleurably or otherwise very much according to the state of our mind at the time that we see her beauties or hear her voices. The last poem about the moon indicated a melancholy state of mind on the part of the poet; but often poets have been made much more sad by the sight of the moon, or have been impelled to express still more melancholy fancies. The most melancholy of all Western poems on the subject of night and the moon are those of the Italian Leopardi; but they need not concern us here, for English poets can give us numerous examples of melancholy thought on the subject. Christina Rossetti, the very first of English female poets in point of excellence and correct taste, has actually compared the sight of the heavens at night to the sight of a funeral. I quote one stanza from her little poem entitled "Death-Watches:"

The cloven East brings forth the sun,  
The cloven West doth bury him  
What time his gorgeous race is run  
And all the world grows dim;  
A funeral moon is lit in heaven's hollow,  
And pale the star-lights follow.

Of course this is a play of fancy upon the old poetical idea of sunset as representing the death of the day. By this time you must have become familiar with such English poetical idioms as "the dying day," "the dying sun," "sun-death," "the red death of the day-star," "the sanguine West," "the waters dyed with the blood-red of the sinking sun." All these expressions sound strange, I think, to your ears; but they have been common in Europe for many centuries. I think that Miss Rossetti was, however, one of the first to carry out the whole idea of the sun's funeral in this way,—representing the moon as a funeral lamp, and the procession of stars as a long train of mourners carrying lights. Yet there is a much more effective way in poetry of expressing the real romance of the moon. Do you not remember an old Chinese poem about a lover looking at the moon, far away from home, and suddenly thinking to himself that the same moon is now shining upon the home of the person whom he loves, thousands of miles away? This kind of sentiment in poetry is really one of the very finest that mankind has yet been able to express—I mean the consciousness of the relation between the emotion and the nature that inspires it. Really, nature in herself is almost nothing. The thing that we should try to express in poetry is the feeling which nature creates in us. No matter how cleverly you try to describe a landscape, you never can exactly paint it in words. But you can do something much better than that. You can express the thoughts and feelings that you have while looking at it. Now there is a very famous English poem in which the whole effect is made by the very same method as that used by the old Chinese poet of whom I spoke to you a little time ago. When I was a boy everybody used to learn that little poem; and it used to be recited in classes of oratory. I think that some of you may know it; so it will not be necessary to quote the whole of it; for it is rather long. But I want to quote to you so much of it as will illustrate that rule of literary art which I have suggested,—about describing the emotion caused by some natural spectacle rather than trying

to describe the spectacle in itself. The name of the little poem is "Bingen on the Rhine." It was written by an English lady, Mrs. Caroline Elizabeth Norton, and it is one of the few things that keep her memory fresh in the pages of popular anthologies.

For the benefit of any of you who may not happen to know the poem, I want to say something about the Foreign Legion. The French Foreign Legion, as it is called, is one of the most famous and the most curious military bodies in existence. It formerly consisted, I think, of only two legions; but in later years some changes have been made; I believe that the forces are stronger than they were before. The Foreign Legion was not composed of French soldiers, nor was it formed by conscription. All the men who belonged to it were volunteers—men from every nation and almost every country. Men did not join the Foreign Legion in the hope of glory or gain, as a general rule. They entered it, at least many of them, in the hope of throwing their lives away in an honourable fashion. When a man entered the Foreign Legion he changed his name, and he was thereafter probably dead to society. Nobody ever asked who he was or what he used to do. He was only asked to do his duty as a soldier; and the discipline was very severe. Men who had done some great wrong for which society would not forgive them, men who had committed some folly of which they were ashamed, men who had lost their fortunes in gambling,—refugees, desperate men of all kinds, used to enter that legion. It was a kind of fashionable way of committing suicide. And the mixture was a very strange one. Some of the common soldiers had once been great lords; others, perhaps, had only been brigands. A few may have served for pay only,—the pay was high. The Legion was foreign in both senses of the word; it was not used for home duty, but kept chiefly in the colonies, and sent to the ends of the earth on desperate expeditions. When there was something very terrible to do, something that required hundreds to sacrifice their lives, appeal was generally made to

the Foreign Legion.

A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers,  
 There was lack of woman's nursing, there was dearth of woman's tears;  
 But a comrade stood beside him, while his life-blood ebbed away,  
 And bent, with pitying glances, to hear what he might say.  
 The dying soldier faltered, and he took that comrade's hand,  
 And he said, "I nevermore shall see my own, my native land:  
 Take a message, and a token to some distant friends of mine;  
 For I was born at Bingen,—at Bingen on the Rhine.

"Tell my brothers and companions, when they meet and crowd around,  
 To hear my mournful story, in the pleasant vineyard ground,  
 That we fought the battle bravely, and when the day was done  
 Full many a corse lay ghastly pale beneath the setting sun;  
 And mid the dead and the dying were some grown old in wars,—  
 The death-wound on their gallant breasts, the last of many scars;  
 And some were young, and suddenly beheld life's morn decline,—  
 And one had come from Bingen,—fair Bingen on the Rhine.

"Tell my mother that her other son shall comfort her old age;  
 For I was still a truant bird, that thought his home a cage,  
 For my father was a soldier, and even as a child  
 My heart leaped forth to hear him tell of struggles fierce and wild;  
 And when he died, and left us to divide his scanty hoard,  
 I let them take whate'er they would,—but kept my father's sword!  
 And with boyish love I hung it where the bright light used to shine,  
 On the cottage wall at Bingen,—calm Bingen on the Rhine.

"Tell my sister not to weep for me, and sob with drooping head,  
 When the troops come marching home again, with glad and gallant tread,  
 But to look upon them proudly with a calm and steadfast eye,  
 For her brother was a soldier, too, and not afraid to die;  
 And if a comrade seek her love, I ask her in my name,  
 To listen to him kindly, without regret or shame,  
 And to hang the old sword in its place (my father's sword and mine),  
 For the honour of old Bingen,—dear Bingen on the Rhine.

"There's another,—not a sister; in the happy days gone by  
 You'd have known her by the merriment that sparkled in her eye;  
 Too innocent for coquetry,—too fond for idle scorning,—  
 O friend! I fear the lightest heart makes sometimes heaviest mourning!

Tell her the last night of my life (for ere the moon be risen  
 My body will be out of pain, my soul be out of prison),—  
 I dreamed I stood with *her*, and saw the yellow sunlight shine  
 On the vine-clad hills of Bingen,—sweet Bingen on the Rhine.”

. . . . .

His trembling voice grew faint and hoarse,—his grasp was childish weak,—  
 His eyes put on a dying look,—he sighed and ceased to speak;  
 His comrade bent to lift him, but the spark of life had fled,—  
 The soldier of the Legion in a foreign land was dead!  
 And the soft moon rose up slowly, and calmly she looked down  
 On the red sand of the battle-field, with bloody corpses strown;  
 Yes, calmly on that dreadful scene her pale light seemed to shine,  
 As it shone on distant Bingen,—fair Bingen on the Rhine.

The reference to the red sand in the last stanza is local, for the fight took place in Algeria, and probably in the southern part, beyond the edge of the desert. There is nothing to explain in the text of the poem, I think, except perhaps the word “coquetry” in one of the stanzas. The word may be used in two senses,—one signifying only pretty and mischievous, the other meaning bad, and that is the meaning in the text. Some handsome girls, having the power to attract the attention and the admiration of men, like to amuse themselves by testing their power upon those who admire them,—trying to see how much influence they have over a man, without caring for him personally in the least. Girls who act this way toward lovers are said to be guilty of coquetry in the bad sense. Perhaps, in the same stanza, the phrase “idle scorning” may be a little obscure,—you had better understand it to mean foolish pride. There is nothing else to explain.

The qualities in this simple but strong poem really belong to a very high class of literature,—that literature which does not belong to any particular time or country, which does not depend upon local effect, and which can be translated into almost any language without losing its pathos or truth or beauty. The incident described, with scarcely a difference of the tale, might as well be of Japanese life as of German

life. If you translate those stanzas, even into Japanese prose, you will see that they do not lose their touching quality or their truth by such translation. But, as I mentioned before, the poem is related to the subject of this lecture only by the last stanza. It is in the closing lines about the moon,—looking down upon the bloody desert and the dead bodies of the soldiers, but looking down at the same time, with the same calm, upon the quiet German town so many hundreds of miles away,—it is in these closing lines, I think, that the great force and beauty of the composition lies. There is almost what we might call “the supreme touch” of emotional art. I think you can see why; but I must try to explain why as definitely as possible. In the previous part of the poem our natural emotions of pity, of love, and of sympathy have been gradually stirred more and more by each succeeding stanza, until the death scene is over. Then, while our feelings are still vibrating in sympathy with the pathos of the story, suddenly comes, like a cold shock, the revelation, the apparition, the surprise of the absolute indifference of nature. The moon sees all this, and much more, and is not in the least changed thereby; the very calmness and purity of her light seems almost cruel under such circumstances. A great modern French poet made a great success by a touch of the very same kind in a poem about Eyes, which I think I read to you long ago. He makes us think about all the millions of beautiful eyes, human eyes, that once looked upon the sun, and that are now dust. “But,” he tells us, “the same sun rises every morning just as usual!” It is this same suggestion of nature’s indifference that becomes so powerfully pathetic when artistically introduced at the close of the poem we have just read together.

In this case the emotional shock is immediate—it comes as an impulse to present feeling, to the feeling aroused by something mentally seen at the same time. In great drama, great tragical drama, effects of this kind are often given. But in the case of the French poet’s composition, the feeling is retrospective,—is aroused by reflection upon the past.

The usual impression which night and its sounds or sights make upon us is apt to be of this kind. More intimate and immediately touching effects, such as those produced in the last stanza of "Bingen on the Rhine," are really uncommon even in poetry, and for that reason ought to be the more prized.

Of the other kind, the retrospective kind, of melancholy feeling, a famous modern example is Matthew Arnold's poem entitled "Dover Beach." This is a meditation on the shore of the sea at night, and a very melancholy meditation, though full of depth and beauty. The part of it that I shall quote particularly refers to a certain effect of night sounds, which I am sure you have all noticed. Sounds appear to deepen as the night deepens; because as the noises of human and animal life gradually cease in sleep, those voices of nature that are never silent become more profoundly audible. You must have noticed how much louder the noise of the sea appears to be during the night than during the day. And the loudness of it gives us solemn and lonesome thoughts that we do not have at other times. Such were the thoughts that came to Matthew Arnold one night listening to the sea at Dover. He remembers how the Greek poets thousands of years ago had listened to the same sound with the same feeling and thought about human life.

The sea is calm to-night.  
The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
Upon the straits;—on the French coast the light  
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,  
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.  
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!  
Only, from the long line of spray  
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,  
Listen! you hear the grating roar  
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,  
At their return, up the high strand,  
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,  
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring  
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago  
Heard it on the Ægæan, and it brought  
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow  
Of human misery; we  
Find also in the sound a thought,  
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

There is a certain quality of cosmic emotion in these lines: the memory of the Greek poet, and of his thought about the same sound, gives a sense of relationship to all the humanity of past ages. In many of the poems which we have read about the moon, you have noticed that the same kind of emotion is given by the sight of the stars, the moon, or the deeps of the sky. But we cannot always have our emotions upon so large a scale; and the larger an emotion, the more apt it is to be a little vague, indefinite. Naturally philosophic thinkers prefer the vast; the majority of ordinary readers, on the other hand, prefer the direct appeal to common emotion and thought. There is nothing very grand about the following well-known poem by Bourdillon, which has become a classic. But although it is pretty and touching rather than grand, one cannot ever quite forget it after having read it; and it must have the true quality of world-poetry in it, because it has been translated into many languages. It will serve as a kind of ornamental ending or "tail-piece" to the present lecture.

The night has a thousand eyes,  
And the day but one;  
Yet the light of the bright world dies  
With the dying sun!

The mind has a thousand eyes,  
And the heart but one;  
Yet the light of a whole life dies  
When love is done!