

I would that I could show to you
The grace of motion all his own—
Tell how each guttural sentence grew,
And, swelling into monotone,
Was chanted as one should rehearse
Low fragments of iambic verse.

He spoke ascent, and wave of hand
Showed where a trail forsook the shore;
He then, as if it were command
For us to follow, went before
Through narrow pass, that seemed as if
A saber stroke had cleft the cliff.

It reached a shelf—a sunny spot,
Where firs in primal verdance grew,
Wall graced to be a village plot,
And shimmer with the morning dew;
There, 'neath the wall of mountain shade,
The tribal lodges were arrayed.

We clambered on, in Indian file,
Still higher, where a rocky shelf
Surfaced the jutting crags, the while
The mountain leaned to see itself
Reflected on the sullen flow
In shadow pictured far below.

The fisher's rock hung far beneath;
The fisher's lodge was fair in view;
The mist flung like a bridal wreath
Of white that shone the azure through;
And where cliffs rose precipitous
Poured water-falls that bowed to us.

Down far below the rush of flood
Sent up its ever-living plaint,
And as thus pinnacled we stood,
It with our accents mingled faint—
A weird-like choral chant that swept,
And measure with our measure kept.

My people once were many as the bended heads of clover;
The red men and their children were like leaves the forest over;
They filled the hills and valleys, as the red cones dot the pine;
And theirs were all the sunny plains where mountain streams entwine.
Their lodges rose in clusters on each river bank and shore,
For everywhere the Great Tyee had given a bounteous store;
The antlered elk they hunted where the highest ranges stood;
They chased the mighty bison through the valley and the wood;
For them the shaggy buffalo was pastured on the plain,
And marched in thundering columns as they never will again.
They feared nor man nor mortal, and worshiped that Tyee,
Sahullah, and Great Spirit, who made the land and sea.
He sent warm breath from far Chinook, to melt the winter's snow,
He drove the salmon up the stream as far as they could go;
He gave them elk and bison, gave them springs so cold and clear,
And lent them cunning; so swift to chase the fallow deer.

The salmon still are many, and they climb the streams each year;
But the Siwash and the mowitch,* how fast they disappear!
It seems as if my people were all fated soon to go
To the silent, distant hunting grounds where went the buffalo,
The rivers still flow seaward, and the mountains stand the same;
The Indian follows on the trail where went the vanished game.

Back in the early days of all the Siwash men were few;
Before they dwelt in all the land as far as falls the dew
The snowy peaks that north and south now rise to summits grand
Stood here the river's flow beside, and watched it near at hand.
The Spirit of the Storms kept one, and when his robe he shook,
The roar that swept the clouds along was heard to far Chinook;
His was the snowy peak, far south, whose name with you is Hood;
Mount Adams, whiter than the snow, across the river stood;
'Twas there the Spirit dwelt whose fires flash from the mountain's shroud
In lightning strokes that signal when shall peal the stormy cloud—
Dread spirits, born of gloomy power, whose anger sometimes woke
In jealous wrath, and then would flash the lightning's fiery stroke;
Then thunder, with its muffled roll, would answer, peal on peal,
And fires would light the mountain side, like blows of flint on steel.
Far-reaching then, from mount to mount, in one broad native span,
A rock-hewn arch, or bridge, was thrown, 'neath which the river ran;
And with its flow the light canoe went down the tranquil stream,
While underneath the darkling arch the river gave no gleam.

A pilgrim to this mountain arch oft times the hunter came,
And on the stone of sacrifice made offering of his game;
The choicest salmon of the streams the fisher brought and gave,
To yield the Spirit Father back a tribute from the wave,
And often joining in the throng two strangers would appear,
Tufted in eagle feathers long, and dressed in skins of deer,
All braided with such rare device as Indian never wore
This side the happy hunting grounds upon the farther shore.

And here was held high carnival when many tribes were met,
For festival and worship joined. The legend lingers yet
That, circled on the river's arch, the tribes looked on—each one—
While fairest maids laid sacrifice upon the altar stone.
Rude flames leaped up from mossy logs high piled the arch along,
And by their glare the aged priest doled out his chanted song.
His child, the priestess of the arch, of Indian maids most fair,
On altar steps with hands out-stretched, and with wide-flowing hair,
As one entranced by vision, stood, all statue-like and still—
A bronze ideal votarress who knew no self nor will.

From where the crescent shape slow climbed the ranges far away,
The moonlight, cleaving through the sky, proclaimed the waning day;
Defly its gleams came struggling through the flame-lit gorge below;
Slowly the evening stars came down to glint the river's flow;
The sombre shades of night had crept into the twilight's hush,
The songing wind and restless leaf toned the dark river's rush—
A weird cadence that suited well the lonely chanted rite,
As deep-voiced woods or lone sea swells blend in the far-off night.

The bravest of the bravest loved Mentone, who fed the sacred flame,
And hoping to deserve her love, they sought for fields of fame;
And when they launched the light canoe, or swept the lowland plain,
Or scaled to heights of summer snow, they hoped her love to gain.
And one there was of noblest deeds, and of a chieftain's line,
Who loved fair Mentone from far, and worshipped at her shrine,
He uttered never word of love; he wooed no other maid;
But, voiceless, at her vestal feet, gifts from the chase he laid.
No voice to thought gave utterance his soul's one deep desire;
He watched and worshipped as afar she fed her altar's fire,
Vigils by night would guard her lodge if danger hovered nigh,
And his the truest arm that e'er let feathered arrow fly.

And she was priestess of the arch. She fed her sacred fire
Unpassioned by a mortal thro'p, unfelt love's swift desire.
Slowly the waiting months came round—surely the fates came true—
Swift come or slow, they ever found her love to Heaven still due.
And pleading at the sacred shrine, her chanted prayer arose
To ask no boon of human love, but balm for human woes.
No vestal ever fed the lamp with soul more chaste and fair;
No altar of earth's worshippers was tended with such care.

As, standing by the altar's glow, we list the priest's low song,
The gem of the snowy mounts go gliding through the throng,
Her voice keeps time-beat with the flames that claim her sacrifice,
With mystic presence by her side the spirits seek device
To win from her a word, a look. Now summer lightnings flash;
Now through the gloom of nether hills we hear the thunder crash;
Then rising into forms of shade, those jealous spirits grow
To giant height on either hand, and fiercer flashes glow,
Her rite has ended; yet she stands there statue-like and still,
Unheeding all the demon strife—no thought of coming ill.
On one bank darts the living fire, on other hand a cloud,
And answering back the bolts of flame, the thunder peals aloud.
Amid the gleamings of the fire a flame-wrapped form is seen,
And robed in shadows of the cloud is shape of angry men.

They strove, and 'neath their earthquake tread tall pines and cliff shores
The lofty forests prostrate fell. The awe-struck tribes forsook (shook)
The quivering arch, whose mighty span rock'd o'er the wondering tide,
Till every beating heart thereon with fear seemed petrified—
Here two, and one had ceased to beat; her form was left of life,
Even as she worshipped she had died—slain in the demon strife.
Nor died she there alone; nor hellish strife nor earthquake shock
Spoke fear to Tamalis' great love to drive him from that rock.

Fire answered fire from mountain high, cloud answered peal to cloud,
The great arch hung in space awhile, and then it tottering bowed;
And as it fell the gleamings high of sacrificial flame
Lit up the maid's imploring form, that stood in death the same—
Her head uplift, her arm upraised, and her beseeching eye—
Went down to meet the wheeling wave fixed on the night's deep eye.
And he, so mute of love in life, whose heart such silence kept,
Stood by and clasped the lifeless form as downwardly they swept.

We watch the grand Cascade to-day where once that arch uprose,
And yonder, where were forests once, now deep the river flows;
Still giant trunks, beneath the wave, mark where the forest stood,
And, monuments of ages flown, are stone instead of wood.
No more the snowy mountains stand and guard Columbia's wave;
No more the spirits of the heights above the powers Heaven gave.
The Great Sahullah's angry hand, 'gainst which none dare rebel,
Has set the snowy peaks apart, and bids them far to dwell,
Prisoned in each, far apart and deep in the realms of fire,
The angry spirits utter still the ventings of their ire—
When Hood its sulphury vapor heaves upon the wintry air,
When Adams from its deepest depths sends gronings of despair.

When falls the twilight of that day—once more in every year—
That fell the arch, it comes again; again the tribes appear;
Then snowy mounts and wondrous span look on Columbia's flow,
While gleaming fires of sacrifice on waiting worship glow,
And charm-ed hush and mystic spell dwell on the haunted air
The while the priestess tends her fire or lowly chants her prayer.

† Chief. § The Highest. | Horse. ¶ Deer.