

THE MIRROR OF MADMEN

I dreamed a dream of heaven, white as frost, The splendid stillness of a living host; Vast choirs of upturned faces, line o'er line. Then my blood froze; for every face was mine.

Spirits with sunset plumage throng and pass, Glassed darkly in the sea of gold and glass. But still on every side, in every spot, I saw a million selves, who saw me not.

I fled to quiet wastes, where on a stone, Perchance, I found a saint, who sat alone; I came behind: he turned with slow, sweet grace, And faced me with my happy, hateful face.

I cowered like one that in a tower doth bide, Shut in by mirrors upon every side; Then I saw, islanded in skies alone And silent, one that sat upon a throne.

His robe was bordered with rich rose and gold, Green, purple, silver out of sunsets old; But o'er his face a great cloud edged with fire, Because it covereth the world's desire.

But as I gazed, a silent worshipper, Methought the cloud began to faintly stir; Then I fell flat, and screamed with grovelling head, 'If thou hast any lightning, strike me dead!

'But spare a brow where the clean sunlight fell, The crown of a new sin that sickens hell. Let me not look aloft and see mine own Feature and form upon the Judgment-throne.'

Then my dream snapped: and with a heart that leapt I saw across the tavern where I slept, The sight of all my life most full of grace, A gin-damned drunkard's wan half-witted face.