

# Oceanus

By William Sharp

## I

While still the dusk impends above the glimmering waste  
A tremor comes: wave after wave turns silvery bright:  
A sudden yellow gleam athwart the east is traced:  
The waning stars fade forth, swift perishing pyres.  
The moon lies pearly-wan upon the front of Night.  
Then all at once upheals a flood of golden light  
And a myriad waves flash forth a myriad fires:  
Now is the hour the amplest glory of life to taste,  
Outswimming towards the sun upon the billowy waste.

## II

The pure green waves! with crests of dazzling foam ashine,  
Onward they roll: innumerable grand, they beat  
A wild and jubilant triumph-music all divine!  
The sea-fowl, their white kindred of the spray-swept air,  
Scream joyous echoes as with wave-dipped pinions fleet  
They whirl before the blast or vanish 'mid blown sleet.  
In loud-resounding, strenuous, conquering play they fare,  
Like clouds, high over head, forgotten lands i' the brine—  
Great combing deep-sea waves with sunlit foam ashine.

## III

On the wide wastes she lives her lawless, passionate life  
Enslaved of none, the imperious mighty Sea!  
How glorious the music of her waves at strife  
With all the winds of heaven that, fiercely wooing, blow!  
On high she ever chants her psalm of Victory;  
Afar her turbulent pæan tells that she is free:  
The tireless albatross with wings like foam or snow  
Flies leagues on leagues for days, and yet the world seems rife  
With nought save windy waves and the Sea's wild free life!

#### IV

How oft the strange, wild, haunting glamour of the Sea,  
The strange, compelling magic of her thrilling Voice,  
Have won me, when, 'mid lonely places, wild and free  
As any wand'ring wind, I have heard along the shore  
The wondrous ever-varying Sea-song loud rejoice.  
I have seen a snowy petrel, arising, poise  
Above the green-sloped wave, then pass for evermore  
From keenest sight, and I have thought that I might be  
Thus also deathward lured by glamour of the Sea.

#### V

Hark to the long resilient surge o' the ebbing tide:  
With shingly rush and roar it foams adown the strand:  
The great Sea heaves her restless bosom far and wide—  
Heedless she seems of winds and all the forceful laws  
That bar her empire over the usurping Land:  
Enough, she dreams, is her imperial command  
To make the very torrents, waveward falling, pause:  
She scorns the Bridegroom-Land, yet is a subject Bride  
For she must come and go with each recurrent tide.

#### VI

On moonless nights, when winds are still, her stealthy waves  
Creep towards the listening land; with voices soft and low  
They whisper strange sea-secrets 'mid the hollow caves:  
A wondrous song it is that rises then and falls!  
Deep-buried memories of the ancient long-ago,  
Confused strange echoes of some vanished old-world woe,  
Weird prophecies reverberant round those wave-worn walls:  
When loud the wrathful billows roar and the Sea runes  
Her deepest mourning broods beneath the foaming waves.

## VII

As some aerial spirit weaves a rainbow-veil  
Of mist, his high immortal loveliness to hide;  
So too thy palpitant waters, duskily pale,  
Ofttimes take on a sudden splendour wild.  
Then thy sea-horses rise, fierce prancing side by side,  
And—like the host of the dead-arisen—ride  
Ghastly afar to bournes where all the dead lie piled! .  
Superb, fantastic, crown'd with flying splendours frail,  
Thou, when in dreams, thou weav'st thy phosphorescent veil!

## VIII

Vast, vast, immeasurably vast, thy dreadful peace  
When heaving with slow, mighty breath thou liest  
In utter rest, and dost thy ministering winds release  
So that with folded wings they too subside,  
Floating through hollow spaces, though the highest  
Stirs his long tremulous pinions when thou sighest!  
Then in thy soul, that doth in fathomless depths abide,  
All wild desires and turbulent longings cease—  
Profound, immeasurable then, thy dreadful peace!

## IX

But in thy noon of night, serene as death, when under  
The terrible silence of that archèd dome  
Not a lost whisper ev'n of thy wandering thunder  
Ascends like the spiral smoke of perishing flame,  
Nor dying wave on thy swart bosom sinks in foam—  
Then, then the world is thine, thy heritage, thy home!  
What then for thee, O Sea, thou Terror! or what name  
To call thee by, thou Sphinx, thou Mystery, thou Wonder—  
Above thou art Living Death, Oblivion under!