

Three Sonnets on Oblivion

By George Sterling

Dedicated to Mr. Raphael Weill

OBLIVION

Her eyes have seen the monoliths of kings
Upcast like foam of the effacing tide;
She hath beheld the desert stars deride
The monuments of Power's imaginings—
About their base the wind Assyrian flings
The dust that throned the satrap in his pride;
Cambyses and the Memphian pomps abide
As in the flame the moth's presumptuous wings.

There gleams no glory that her hand shall spare,
Nor any sun whose rays shall cross her night,
Whose realm enfolds man's empire and its end.
No armor of renown her sword shall dare,
No council of the gods withstand her might:
Stricken at last Time's lonely Titans bend.

THE DUST DETHRONED

Sargon is dust, Semiramis a clod!
In crypts profaned the moon at midnight peers;
The owl upon the Sphinx hoots in her ears,
And scant and sear the desert grasses nod
Where once the armies of Assyria trod,
With younger sunlight splendid on the spears;
The lichens cling the closer with the years,
And seal the eyelids of the weary god.

Where high the tombs of royal Egypt heave,
The vulture shadows with arrested wings
The indecipherable boasts of kings,
As Arab children hear their mother's cry
And leave in mockery their toy—they leave
The skull of Pharaoh staring at the sky.

THE NIGHT OF GODS

Their mouths have drunken the eternal wine—
The draught that Baal in oblivion sips.
Unseen about their courts the adder slips,
Unheard the sucklings of the leopard whine;
The toad has found a resting-place divine
And bloats in stupor between Ammon's lips.
O Carthage and the unreturning ships,
The fallen pinnacle, the shifting Sign!

Lo! when I hear from voiceless court and fane
Time's adoration of Eternity—
The cry of kingdoms past and gods undone—
I stand as one whose feet at noontide gain
A lonely shore; who feels his soul set free,
And hears the blind sea chanting to the sun.