

The Testimony of the Suns

By George Sterling

*To Whom the unceasing suns belong,
And cause is one with consequence,—
To Whose divine inclusive sense
The moan is blended with the song.*
—Ambrose Bierce.

I.

The winter sunset fronts the North.
The light deserts the quiet sky.
From their far gates how silently
The stars of evening tremble forth!

Time, to thy sight what peace they share
On Night's inviolable breast!
Remote in solitudes of rest,
Afar from human change or care.

Eternity, unto thine eyes
In war's unrest their legions surge,
Foam of the cosmic tides that urge
The battle of contending skies,

The war whose waves of onslaught, met
Where night's abysses storm afar,
Break on the high, tremendous bar
Athwart that central ocean set—

From seas whose cyclic ebb and sweep,
Unseen to Life's oblivious hours,
Are ostent of the changeless Pow'rs
That hold dominion of the Deep.

O armies of eternal night,
How flame your guidons on the dark!
Silent we turn from Time to hark
What final Orders sway your might.

Cold from colossal ramparts gleam,
At their insuperable posts
The seven princes of the hosts
Who guard the holy North supreme;

Who watch the phalanxes remote
That, gathered in opposing skies,
Far on the southern wastes arise,
Marshalled by flaming Fomalhaut.

Altair, what captains compass thee?
What foes, Aldebaran, are thine?
Red with what blood of wars divine
Glow that immortal panoply?

What music from Capella runs?
How hold the Pleiades their bond?
How storms the hidden war beyond
Orion's dreadful sword of suns?

When, on what hostile firmament,
Shall stars unnamed contend our gyre,
'Mid councils of Boötes' fire,
Or night of Vega's fury spent?

What tidings of the heavenly fray?
These, as our sages nightward turn
To gaze within the gulfs where burn
The helms of that sublime array:

Splendors of elemental strife;
Smit suns that startle back the gloom;
New light whose tale of stellar doom
Fares to uncomprehending life;

Profounds of fire whose maelstroms froth
To gathered armies of offense;
Cohorts unwearable, immense,
And bulks wherewith the Dark is wroth;

Reserves and urgencies of light
That flame upon the battle's path,
And allied suns that brave the wrath
Of systems leagued athwart the night;

Menace of silent ranks that sweep
Unto irrevocable wars,
And onset of Titanic cars
In Armageddons of the Deep!

Deem we their enginery was not,
Far in the dim, eternal past?
Deem we eternity at last
Will find their thunders unbegot?

How haste the unresting feet of Change,
On life's stupendous orbit set!
She walks a way her blood hath wet,
Yet deems her path untrodden, strange.

By night's immeasurable dome
She deems her hopes in surety held—
Lo! from insurgent deeps impelled
The fleeting systems lapse like foam.

Unshared she deems the kindred skies;
But runic gulf and star proclaim
(Archival gloom, prophetic flame)
The immutable infinities:

Vague on the night the mist we mark
That tells where met the random suns:
In changeless moulds of law it runs
To orbs that roam anew the dark,

And unto which the worlds are born,
Where Life awakes to know again
The light of stars, caress of rain,
And winds of the forgotten morn.

Lift up, ye everlasting gates
Whence fare her feet to wars unknown,
To heights august of Reason's throne.
And heritage of ampler Fates!

When she, the mindless clay no more
In Lust's or Fear's potential hands,
Shall range her uncontested lands
Or sister world's befriending shore.

Till lapse her beatific years
In emperies of art untold,
The music of her age of gold
Requiting for unnumbered tears

Till she behold—the visual boon
Surviving elemental risk—
The nearing sun's enormous disc,
Blood-red at dusk of sullen noon

Till her appointed course be run;
Till on the darkness faint her breath,
Flown to the silent void, and Death
Sit crowned upon the ashen sun.

Till sun and sun be met at last
In warfare that annuls the night,
When sea and mountain start to light,
Pyres of the sacrificial past,

Dim veils of fire, O world! that were
The stubborn bastions of thy frame,
And reaches of abysmal flame
Wherein thy spectral oceans stir—

A mist upon the vassal skies
Gyran to Betelgeuse—a flare
Upon the midnights round Altair—
A portent to barbaric eyes.

O dread and strong Eternity!
Prickt in an instant of thy clime,
The bubble of Antares' time
Is one with thine unchanging sea.

Ever the star, unstable, frames
Her transitory throne of fire,
But in thy sight how soon expire,
How soon recur, the inviolate flames!—

Throbs of the fitful sun that are
Unto thine amplitude of sight,
Even as the quick unrest of light
That Stirs, to mortal sense, the star.

What silence rules the ghostly hours
That guard the close of human sleep!
Aldebaran crowns the western deep;
Belted with suns Orion tow'rs,

And greaved with light of worlds destroyed,
And girt with firmamental gloom,
Abides his far, portended doom
And menace of the warring void.

Shall night allay his high unrest?
Shall Time his destinies aver,
Or darkened vastitude deter
His feet from their immortal quest?

Shall augury his goal impart,
Or mind his hidden steps retrace
To mausolean pits of space
Where throbs the Hydra's crimson heart?

Ephemeral, may Life declare
What quarry from the Lion runs,
And sway the inexorable suns
Where gape the abysses of his lair?

O Night, what legions serve thy wars!
Lo! thy terrific battle-line—
The rayless bulk, the blazing Sign,
The leagued infinity of stars!

Remote they burn whose dread array
Glow from the dark a dust of fire;
Unheard the storm of Rigel's ire,
A grain of light Arcturus' day.

Unheard their antiphon of death
Who gleam Capella's cosmic foes;
Unseen the war whose causal throes
Perturb gigantic Algol's breath—

Whom from afar we mete and name
Ere Light and Life their doom fulfill,
Spawn of the Power whose æons still
The suns of Taurus armed with flame.

What sound shall pass the gulfs where groan
Their sullen axles on the night?
What thunder from the strands of light
Whence Vega glares on worlds unknown?

O Deep whose very silence stuns!
Where Light is powerless to illumine
Lost in immensities of gloom
That dwarf to motes the flaring suns.

O Night where Time and Sorrow cease!
Eternal magnitude of dark
Wherein Aldebaran drifts a spark,
And Sirius is hushed to peace!

O Tides that foam on strands untrod,
From seas in everlasting prime,
To light where Life looks forth on Time,
And Pain, unanswered, questions God!

What Power, with inclusive sweep
And rigor of compelling bars,
Shall curb the furies of the stars,
And still the troubling of that Deep?

What will shall calm that wrathful sky?
Crave ye tranquillities of light
Who stand the sons of war and night?
Behold! the Abyss hath given reply.

Wards of Whose realm shall ye avail
To loose the tentacles of force
That drag Arcturus from his course,
And rend the weight of Procyon's mail?

Shall yet your feet essay, unharmed,
The glare of cosmic leaguers met
Round stellar strongholds gulfward set,
With night and fire supremely armed?

Shall sun or cycle yet confirm
Your lordship to the unceded Vast,
Or human period outlast
The vigil of Capella's term?

Deem ye the Eternal Mind will change
The throned infinity of law
That never æon altered saw
In all the Past's eternal range?

Child of unrest, but fain for peace,
Life dreams, in her expectant dark,
Of final things, and waits to hark
Conclusive trumpets crying cease.

She lifts an alien voice to call
To near Denebola: "O sun!
A little, and thy day is done,
A little, and the Night is all."

A little, and his rays, far-flown,
Gleam in the dews upon her grave,
The storied pomps her epochs gave
A dust within her deserts lone.

Yea! so shall Life on worlds afar
Muse idly of a cosmic tomb,
Where now past Alioth the gloom
Stirs not with her awaited star.

Her fate, how stranger than we deem!
Tho' Faith behold with trusting eyes
A vision on transmuted skies—
The splendors of the human dream;

To live, tho' Pain and Sorrow cease;
To reach the high Eternal Heart;
To know Infinity, nor part;
To find the far Ideal, Peace—

The life of each perfected world
August archangels chanting praise,
Deep-ranked in everlasting ways,
With wings of grief and exile furred.

O dream not all the worlds fulfill!
Unblest, unbidden, save of hope.
Not for finality the scope
And strength of that unaltered Will.

The eternal Night hath writ in stars
Denial of the ends ye name;
Ye stand rebuked by suns who claim
The consummation of her wars.

Constrained to what abysmal pole
Shall severed armies close their flanks
To stand with deviated ranks,
Subserving to a final goal?

Shall Godhead dream a transient thing?
Strives He for that which now he lacks?
Shall Law's dominion melt as wax
At touch of Hope's irradiant wing?

Are these the towers His hands have wrought?
Dreams He the dream of end and plan
Dear to the finity of man,
And shall mutation rule His thought?

What powers throng the pregnant gloom!
Unseen, the ministers of Law
Reach from eternity to draw
The suns to predetermined doom.

On Law ye serve with kindred might,
Atom and world that hold her ways;
The firefly's mote, the comet's blaze,
Are equal in her perfect sight.

Her bonds compel the Vast where boils
Intensest Spica's sea of fire;
Her lips decree the hidden gyre
Of bulks that strain in Algol's toils.

Subject to Law's resistless word,
Thy hands, O Force! resolve the star,
And toil, at Alphard's battle-car,
His flaming panoply to gird.

Charged, the immeasured gulfs transmit
Her mandate to the founts of life,
Inciting to the governed strife
Whereby the lethal voids are lit,

With augment of imperious tides
On vague, illimitable coasts,
And battle-haze of merging hosts
To which the flare of Vega rides.

“But nay!” ye cry, “we trust her hands
Induce an un conjectured morn,
To whose divine fulfillment born
Her strength irrevocable stands.”

O lights by which, far-taught, we trace
The path of Life from death to death!
O lanes of her recurrent breath,
And strength of Night’s annulling mace

Profounds whose silences proclaim
What realms of mystery and awe!
Colossal Wraths extolling Law
From unsubverted thrones of flame!—

Suns of the Lyre whose thunders rise
From chords the eternal Hands have smit!
Stars of the Sword a moment lit
Ere Life re-name her altered skies!—

Without beginning, aim or end;
Supreme, incessant, unbegot;
The systems change, but goal is not,
Where the Infinities attend.

Deem ye their armaments confess
A source of mutable desire?
Think ye He mailed His thought in fire
And called from night and nothingness

And armed for Time their high array?
Dream ye Infinity was bent
Upon a whim, a drama spent
Within an instant of His day?

Think ye He broke His dream indeed,
And rent His deep with fearful Pow’rs,
That Man inherit fadeless bow’rs?
Since He desires, He knows a need.

Nay! stable His Infinity,
Beyond mutation or desire.
The visions pass. The worlds expire,
Unfathomed still their mystery.

So hath He dreamt. So stands His night,
Wherein the suns abiding range,
Dust of the dynasties of change,
And altars of eternal light.

II.

My sleep was like a summer sky
That held the music of a lark:
I waken to the voiceless dark
And life's more silent mystery.

Night with her fleeting hours, how brief
To watch beyond her vault sublime
The gyant systems meting Time,
That holds the timelessness of grief!

How pure the light their legions shed!
How calm above the crumbling tomb
Of race and epoch passed to gloom
No ray can pierce nor mortal tread!

What gulfs define the cosmic storm!
The torrent of Capella's light
A needle on the nerves of sight
Till Force annul the bonds of form;

Till Alcor vanish from the void
Wherein the Dragon dares the waste,
Wherein the spawn of Alioth haste
To ghostly bastions long destroyed.

O nearer dark whence Man descries
Abyssal lamps that flare and sink!
Profounds where stellar glories shrink,
Or Betelgeuse relumined flies!

In gloom as dense can Spica grope
As this that bars the human will?
Desires as vast her children fill,
Or kindred mystery and hope?

Lo! peaceless, ere the veiling day
Expand where now Arcturus shines,
I cry to night's ascendant Signs
The timeless questions of the clay:

Will Life, the bourne eternal crossed,
Attain the secret of her hours?
Will Sorrow find atoning Pow'rs,
And Love fare heavenward to her lost?

I lift entreating eyes to see
Gulf beyond gulf till sight relent,
Sun beyond sun till Time repent
Its question of Infinity.

Shall voice or vision cross the night
From glooms where grope the hands of Force
On law's inexorable course,
To Being's transitory light?

Shall Sirius resolve our fears?
Shall Vega's Lord command the Lyre
To scatter from her chords of fire
A music on the mortal years?

Shall Procyon with flaming tongue
Declare the doom his strength awaits,
Or Rigel's light reveal the Fates
Whereto his shadowed worlds have sung?

O silence of the changeless dark
Whence Hope uplifts unwearied eyes!
O patience of devouring skies
That close on Algol's dying spark!

Enhooved with gloom, the Age stamps down
The palace-flare of Babylon;
To night the lords of Ur are gone;
The Tyres of Time put by the crown.

To Death the sons of Life are thrust;
From night to night the nations pace;
Empire by empire, race by race,
The generations pass to dust.

Enter, O Life! their place of dread,
And seek their silence to attain:
Shall Mystery renounce her reign,
Or darkness render thee thy dead?

Where stirs the energy they knew?
Joins it the forces undestroyed
That urge the suns within the void,
And shake the star in evening's dew?

Or sit they girt by laws unknown
Whereto the senses serve as bars—
With fire of unrecorded stars
That light a heaven not our own?

The Night inevitable waits
Till fails the insufficient sun,
And darkness ends the toil begun
By Chaos and the morning Fates,

And starward drifts the stricken world,
Lone in unalterable gloom,
Dead, with a universe for tomb,
Dark, and to vaster darkness whirled.

How dread thy reign, O Silence, there!
A little, and the deeps are dumb—
Lo! thine eternal feet are come
Where trod the thunders of Altair.

O ashen bulks that haunt the Vast,
Beyond the ministry of Light!
O strong intrenchment of the Night
On charred Antares cold at last!

Eternity! thine awful hands
Shall blot the Lion from our skies,
And build thy dark for future eyes
Where now illumed Orion stands.

Forever, infinite of range,
Unceasing whirls the cosmic storm,
In changeless gulfs where Force and Form
Renew the mystery of change.

A fleeting moment, to thy sight,
Lamp of thine altar Alphard burns;
Aldebaran to dusk returns,
And Betelgeuse is stone and night. . . .

What solitudes of gloom unknown
Abide, O Sun! thy future ways,
Ere Light at last a sceptre raise,
Resuming her forsaken throne—

When Law's compulsive angels sweep
The armored sun athwart thy path;
When hands resistless wake the wrath
That smites to flame the boiling Deep!

And sprung from that recurrent storm,
The youthful world exultant wheels,
Where slow Eternity anneals
The manacles of Time and Form;

Where dim alchemic powers rebuild,
To Law's immutable designs,
The primal, unapparent shrines
With Being's basic mystery filled—

Fanes of the slowly fostered spark
Whose fire shall light the groping clay
To Reason's sympathetic day
And refuge from the bestial dark.

Reborn to that selective strife
And fury of ascendant wars,
What tidings of the immortal shores?
What covenant from Death, O Life?

When, in what maze of spacial bound,
Or cryptic glooms that wall the grave,
Hast heard the secret which we crave
From that inscrutable Profound?

What surety that thy sons attain
The litten council of thy Lords,
And thunder of seraphic chords
To music not of Time and Pain?

What whisper from the world new-born
Recalled thy footsteps to essay
The far, inevitable way
Lit sunward from thy mists of morn?

Nay! were Oblivion's nightward springs
So fair to thine enchanted eyes
That now forgot the message lies
From Mystery's reluctant kings?

Nay! are thy lips forever sealed,
O thou that stoodst aloof with Death—
Thou that with unrevealing breath
Hast passed the swords his angels wield?

She standeth mute. She cannot say
(Ah! dumb to Love's appealing Deep!)
If Death be suzerain of Sleep,
Or Lethe cross the road to Day.

She cannot say if she in sooth
Abide Infinity's concern,
Tho' Time's unanswered altars burn
In question to the final Truth.

And yet from unaccording Fates
We crave the Secret of our tears,
With trust in the betraying years,
And clamor at relentless gates.

And lost within the glooms that fill
The Night's primordial realm unknown,
See Mystery on a vaster throne
And Truth's far face receding still.

Shall yet the fearful answer fare
To ancient life supremely wise,
By seas that flash on alien eyes
The riven sunlight of Altair?

Athwart the gulfs of mote and mind
How vast, to Sense, the shadow falls!
She gazes from her proven walls
What deeps unfathomable to find!

Lo! wearied with the fruitless quest
Their shores invisible to mark,
We turn us to the outer Dark,
And gleaming suns far-manifest.

Night! of the dooms to which they sweep
What rumor from the battle's verge,
Where sun and sun their chariots urge
To leaguers of the hostile Deep?

O Space and Time and stars at strife,
How dreadful your infinity!
Shrined by your termless trinity,
How strange, how terrible, is life!

How dark to Being's baffled glance
The pits of night and nothingness,
Where manacled in Law's duress
The allegiant Pleiades advance!

Behold! her little sight is drawn
By Hope's untold, immortal ray;
Debarred, she seeks atoning day;
Beyond her gloom she dreams a dawn.

Thy secret, O profound of stars!
We, born of darkness, dare to seek,
Adjuring Rigel that he speak
His tidings of the eternal wars.

Capella! past thy lonely light
What Guardians rule the changeless void?
What final Eden undestroyed
Where seethe the caldrons of the night?—

Where, on the path of suns far-fled,
Aldebaran goes forth to doom;
Where unto Night's tremendous tomb
The worlds of Procyon are led.

Ere yet below our sky-line dip
Thy sun-crowned spars to deeps unknown,
Ere yet our pharos-light be flown,
Declare thy cosmic port, O Ship!

Arcturus! from the abysses vast
That hush the Voices of thy strife,
Hast heard a whisper unto Life,
Assuring that she rest at last?

Crave ye a truce, O suns supreme?
What order shall ye deign to hark,
Enormous shuttles of the dark!
That weave the Everlasting Dream?

Shall Sirius light the gulfs untrod
That bar, O Life! thy claimant gaze?
Shall Betelgeuse attend thy ways,
Or Alphard guide thy feet to God?

Shall lone Antares whisper thee
His attestation to thy hope,
Or Alioth aid the souls that grope
Within the Night's infinity?

Dost dream to hold the ghostly heights
That soar beyond Mutation's reign,
Or sway the tides of Time and Pain,
Lord of the war Arcturus lights?

Wouldst set the Crown upon thy brow?
Wouldst still the Scorpion's heart of fire?
Wouldst tread the arc of Rigel's gyre,
Or greet the God his worlds avow?

Lo! claspt to His atoning breast
In Whom are woe and wrong made just,
Why this regression to the dust—
This loss of certitude and rest?

What farce were that in which the soul
Were summoned to celestial peace,
And, ere her jubilation cease,
Dismissed to her ancestral goal?

To what emergency concealed,
Abides the realm we seek to share
Which to all antecedent pray'r
Eternity hath not revealed?

Hath Vega's night diviner shores?
Shall Spica with surpassing ray
Illume her worlds with vaster day
Than that Denebola outpours?

Dim are the laws the sages give,
For Science sees in all her lands
Illusive twilight, in her hands
The judgments of the Relative.

Obscure the glooms that harbor Truth,
And mute the lips from which we crave
The guarded secret of the grave—
So soon grown dumb to word and ruth!

But ye, O suns! concede the boon
To those whose baffled eyes aspire
To search your syllables of fire,
And read Orion's telic rune—

The boon to know that Life abides
One with your immortality,
One with your changing mystery,
And foam of your eternal tides.

Exalt, Infinity, thy might,
Nor deem their decrement to mark.
Spread thou their ashes on the dark:
Behold! they leap again to light—

To light that summons Life to wake,
And stirred from consummated sleep
In matter's unconjectured deep,
From mire to mind the pathway take,

The pathway traced with blood and tears,
And dust of all our fathers dead,
Whose backward footsteps, wandering, red,
Fade to the mist of nameless years.

How oft, O Life, on worlds forgot,
Hast thou, in thine unnumbered forms,
Gone forth to Time's transmuting storms,
And fought till storm and stress were not!

How oft hast striven, hoped, and died,
And dying, fared to gracious rest,
The Night's inevitable guest,
In alien realms unverified!

How oft to Mystery and Time
Returned, their ancient ways to hold,
With lips that never yet have told
The tidings of that distant clime—

With little hands that could not keep
The mighty message of the Night,
Nor bare to Day's appealing sight
The hidden annals of thy sleep.

Dost deem the eternity to come
The secret will disclose at last
Whereunto an eternal past
Held lips to revelation dumb?

How vast the gulfs of man's desire!
Children of Change, we dream to share
The battle-vigil of Altair,
And watch great Fomalhaut expire;

To live, where darkened suns relume
Their kingdoms in the abysmal haze—
Where nearing Night attends the blaze
Of high Antares red with doom;

To hear within the deep of Law
The Word that moves her causal tides;
To know what Permanence abides
Beyond the veil the senses draw.

And such the hope that fills thy heart,
O Life! on some allegiant world
Round Procyon's throne of thunder whirled
Or poised in Spica's gulf apart.

So dreamt thy sons on worlds destroyed
Whose dust allures our careless eyes,
As, lit at last on alien skies,
The meteor melts athwart the void.

So shall thy seed on worlds to be,
At altars built to suns afar,
Crave from the silence of the star
Solution of thy mystery;

And crave unanswered, till, denied
By cosmic gloom and stellar glare,
The brains are dust that bore the pray'r,
And dust the yearning lips that cried.