

Like a tale of little meaning though the words are strong;
 Chanted from an ill-used race of men that cleave the soil,
 Sow the seed, and reap the harvest with enduring toil,
 Storing yearly little dues of wheat, and wine and oil;
 Till they perish and they suffer—some, 'tis whispered—down in hell
 Suffer endless anguish, others in Elysian valleys dwell,
 Resting weary limbs at last on beds of asphodel.⁵
 Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
 Than labor in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar;
 O, rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.

1832, 1842

Ulysses¹

It little profits that an idle king,
 By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
 Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole
 Unequal laws² unto a savage race,
 5 That hoard, and sleep, and feed,³ and know not me.

I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
 Life to the lees. All times I have enjoyed
 Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those
 That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
 10 Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades⁴
 Vexed the dim sea. I am become a name;
 For always roaming with a hungry heart
 Much have I seen and known—cities of men
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,
 15 Myself not least, but honored of them all—
 And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
 Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy,
 I am a part of all that I have met;
 Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
 20 Gleams that untraveled world whose margin fades
 Forever and forever when I move.
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!⁵

5. A yellow lilylike flower supposed to grow in Elysium—in classical mythology a paradise for heroes favored by the gods.

1. According to Dante, after the fall of Troy, Ulysses never returned to his island home of Ithaca. Instead he persuaded some of his followers to seek new experiences by a voyage of exploration westward out beyond the Strait of Gibraltar. In his inspiring speech to his aging crew he said: "Consider your origin: you were not made to live as brutes, but to pursue virtue and knowledge" (*Inferno* 26). Tennyson modified Dante's 14th-century version by combining it with Homer's account (*Odyssey* 19–24). Thus Tennyson has Ulysses make his speech in Ithaca some time after he has returned home; reunited with his wife, Penelope, and his son, Telemachus; and, presumably, resumed his administrative responsibilities

involved in governing his kingdom.

Tennyson stated that this poem expressed his own "need of going forward and braving the struggle of life" after the death of Arthur Hallam.

2. Measure out rewards and punishments.

3. Cf. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* 4.4.9.23–25: "What is a man / If his chief good . . . Be but to sleep and feed?—a beast, no more."

4. A group of stars (literally, "rainy ones") in the constellation Taurus; their heliacal rising and setting generally coincided with the season of heavy rains. "Scudding drifts": driving showers of spray and rain.

5. Cf. Ulysses' speech in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* 3.3.144–47: "Perseverance, dear my lord, / Keeps honour bright. To have done is to hang / Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail / In monumental mock'ry."

As though to breathe were life! Life piled on life
 25 Were all too little, and of one to me
 Little remains; but every hour is saved
 From that eternal silence, something more,
 A bringer of new things; and vile it were
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
 30 And this gray spirit yearning in desire
 To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
 Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
 To whom I leave the scepter and the isle—
 35 Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill
 This labor, by slow prudence to make mild
 A rugged people, and through soft degrees
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.
 Most blameless is he, centered in the sphere
 40 Of common duties, decent not to fail
 In offices of tenderness, and pay
 Meet^o adoration to my household gods,
 When I am gone. He works his work, I mine. *suitable, fitting*

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail;
 45 There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
 Souls that have toiled, and wrought, and thought with me—
 That ever with a frolic welcome took
 The thunder and the sunshine,⁶ and opposed
 Free hearts, free foreheads⁷—you and I are old;
 50 Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.
 Death closes all; but something ere the end,
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
 The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
 55 The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
 Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
 Push off, and sitting well in order smite
 The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
 60 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths⁸
 Of all the western stars, until I die.
 It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,⁹
 And see the great Achilles,¹ whom we knew.
 65 Though much is taken, much abides; and though
 We are not now that strength which in old days
 Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are—
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,

6. I.e., varying fortunes.

7. Confidence.

8. The outer ocean or river that the Greeks believed surrounded the flat circle of the earth; the stars descended into it.

9. In Greek myth the Islands of the Blessed, a par-

adise of perpetual summer, located in the far-western ocean, where the virtuous and heroes dwell forever after death (often identified with Elysium).

1. The greatest of the Greek warriors at Troy, where he was killed.

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

1842

Tithonus¹

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
 The vapors weep their burthen to the ground,
 Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
 And after many a summer dies the swan.²

Me only cruel immortality
 Consumes; I wither slowly in thine arms,³
 Here at the quiet limit of the world,
 A white-haired shadow roaming like a dream
 The ever-silent spaces of the East,

Far-folded mists, and gleaming halls of morn.

Alas! for this gray shadow, once a man—
 So glorious in his beauty and thy choice,
 Who madest him thy chosen, that he seemed
 To his great heart none other than a God!

I asked thee, "Give me immortality."

Then didst thou grant mine asking with a smile,
 Like wealthy men who care not how they give.

But thy strong Hours indignant worked their wills,
 And beat me down and marred and wasted me,

And though they could not end me, left me maimed
 To dwell in presence of immortal youth,

Immortal age beside immortal youth,
 And all I was in ashes. Can thy love,

Thy beauty, make amends, though even now,
 Close over us, the silver star,⁴ thy guide,
 Shines in those tremulous eyes that fill with tears
 To hear me? Let me go; take back thy gift.

Why should a man desire in any way
 To vary from the kindly race of men,

Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance⁵
 Where all should pause, as is most meet for all?

A soft air fans the cloud apart; there comes
 A glimpse of that dark world where I was born.

Once more the old mysterious glimmer steals
 From thy pure brows, and from thy shoulders pure,
 And bosom beating with a heart renewed.

Thy cheek begins to redden through the gloom,
 Thy sweet eyes brighten slowly close to mine,
 Ere yet they blind the stars, and the wild team⁶

1. A Trojan prince loved by the goddess of the dawn, Eos or Aurora, who obtained for him the gift of living forever but neglected to ask for the gift of everlasting youth.

2. Some species of swans live for at least fifty years.

3. Aurora's arms.

4. The morning star that precedes the dawn.

5. What is decreed or ordained as human destiny.

6. The horses that draw Aurora's chariot into the sky at daybreak.