

Dover Beach

The sea is calm tonight.
 The tide is full, the moon lies fair
 Upon the straits—on the French coast the light
 Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
 5 Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
 Come to the window, sweet is the night air!
 Only, from the long line of spray
 Where the sea meets the moon-blanchèd land,
 Listen! you hear the grating roar
 10 Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
 At their return, up the high strand,
 Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
 With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
 The eternal note of sadness in.
 15 Sophocles long ago
 Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
 Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
 Of human misery;¹ we
 Find also in the sound a thought,
 20 Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

 The Sea of Faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.²
 But now I only hear
 25 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
 Retreating, to the breath
 Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear
 And naked shingles³ of the world.

 Ah, love, let us be true
 30 To one another! for the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

of selling goods established by merchants from Carthage who used to sail through the Strait of Gibraltar to trade with the inhabitants of the coast of West Africa. The Carthaginians would leave bales of their merchandise on display along the beaches and, without having seen their prospective customers, would return to their ships. The shy natives would then come down from their inland hiding places and set gold beside the bales they wished to buy. When the natives withdrew in their turn, the Carthaginians would return to the beach and decide whether payments were adequate, a process repeated until agreement was reached. On the Atlantic coasts this method of bargaining persisted into the 19th century. As William Beloe, a translator of the ancient Greek historian, noted in 1844: "In this manner they transact their exchange without seeing one another, or without the least

instance of dishonesty. . . on either side." For the solitary Tyrian trader such a procedure, with its avoidance of "contact" (line 221), would have been especially appropriate.

1. A reference to a chorus in *Antigone* that compares human sorrow to the sound of the waves moving the sand beneath them (lines 585–91).

2. This difficult line means, in general, that at high tide the sea envelops the land closely. Its forces are "gathered" up (to use William Wordsworth's term) like the "folds" of bright clothing ("girdle") that have been compressed ("furled"). At ebb tide, as the sea retreats, it is unfurled and spread out. It still surrounds the shoreline but not as an "enclasp[ing] flow" (as in "To Marguerite—Continued").

3. Beaches covered with pebbles.

35 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies⁴ clash by night.

ca. 1851

1867

Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse¹

Through Alpine meadows soft-suffused
 With rain, where thick the crocus blows,
 Past the dark forges long disused,
 The mule track from Saint Laurent goes.
 5 The bridge is crossed, and slow we ride,
 Through forest, up the mountainside.

The autumnal evening darkens round,
 The wind is up, and drives the rain;
 While, hark! far down, with strangled sound
 10 Doth the Dead Guier's² stream complain,
 Where that wet smoke, among the woods,
 Over his boiling cauldron broods.

Swift rush the spectral vapors white
 Past limestone scars^o with ragged pines,
 15 Showing—then blotting from our sight!—
 Halt—through the cloud-drift something shines!
 High in the valley, wet and drear,
 The huts of Courrierie appear.

cliffs

Strike leftward! cries our guide; and higher
 20 Mounts up the stony forest way.
 At last the encircling trees retire;
 Look! through the showery twilight grey
 What pointed roofs are these advance?—
 A palace of the Kings of France?

25 Approach, for what we seek is here!
 Alight, and sparely sup, and wait

4. Perhaps alluding to conflicts in Arnold's own time such as occurred during the revolutions of 1848 in Europe, or at the Siege of Rome by the French in 1849 (the poem's date of composition is unknown, although generally assumed to be 1851). But the passage also refers back to another battle, one that occurred more than two thousand years earlier when an Athenian army was attempting an invasion of Sicily at nighttime. As this "night battle" was described by the ancient Greek historian Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* (7.44), the invaders became confused by darkness and slaughtered many of their own men. Hence "ignorant armies."

1. A monastery situated high in the French Alps.

It was established in 1084 by Saint Bruno, founder of the Carthusians (line 30), whose austere regimen of solitary contemplation, fasting, and religious exercises (lines 37–44) had remained virtually unchanged for centuries. Arnold visited the site on September 7, 1851, accompanied by his bride. His account may be compared with that by William Wordsworth (*Prelude* [1850] 6.414–88), who had made a similar visit in 1790.

2. The Guiers Mort River flows down from the monastery and joins the Guiers Vif in the valley below; in French, Mort and Vif mean "dead" and "alive," respectively. Wordsworth speaks of the two rivers as "the sister streams of Life and Death."