

HYMN TO NIAGARA.

PROCLAIM, my soul, where thou,—though not
unused

To high communion with the powers that hold
The secrets of the ocean, and the earth,
And the blue fields of air,—hast nearest been
To the Invisible, and thyself *most* felt,
Thine earthly garment, *least*. Niagara!
At thy base, uplooking through the cloud
That in its depths of vapor shrouds thy feet,—
There, where the mighty river in mid-stream
Plunges beneath, as if to seek the heart
That sent it forth,—the heart of earth and sea!

Proclaim, my soul, proclaim it to the sky!
And tell the stars, and tell the hills, whose feet
Are in the depths of earth, their peaks in heaven,

And tell the Ocean's old familiar face,
Beheld by day and night, in calm and storm, —
That they, nor aught beside in earth or heaven,
Like thee, tremendous torrent, have so filled
Its thought of beauty, and so awed with might.

Niagara! from thy heights above, when first,
Half fearful, my expectant eyes beheld
Thy inland sea, with its embosomed isles,
Far-stretching and commingling with the sky, —
And nearer, its swift lapse and whitening speed,
And the green slide of waters, that around
The abyss, and 'round the rising clouds,
Which heaven with rainbows painted as they rose,
Stretched, sky-like, in a broad and whelming curve; —
Not then did I behold thee, — and I felt
Even in that moment that I saw thee not!
But still without the veil, before the shrine —
The home of an eternal splendor — stood,
And of thy glory but beheld the skirts.

But when I heard thy thunder from above,
And knew myself within thy misty shroud,
And felt thee in the earth beneath, I looked
Then to behold thee, and that moment broke
Upon my soul a sight unspeakable!
As if I had beheld God face to face.

And then I only felt a rush, a weight
Of waters, a blind sense of power that crushed,
Confounded, and o'erwhelmed me. Like a soul
All bodiless and naked suddenly
Launched forth into another world, before
It had adapted to itself the forms
Strange to its faculties — so did I grasp,
So struggle for my half-lost consciousness.
Chaos was come again.

But soon, as rose
The first creation, built upon the form
Of that divine idea whose beauty took
The soul of chaos prisoner, and to law
Subdued his tumult, — so from that dread swoon

When first again my soul drew conscious breath,
Oh! thou didst rise before me, and above,
Majestical, harmonious as heaven,
Unutterably beautiful! Thy voice
I heard like my heart's whisper to itself, —
And not distinguished from my soul, thy form, —
A feeling and a vision, and at once
With inward and external sight beheld:
And thee and God alone I saw and felt; —
Earth, heaven, and all things vanished, but alone
One central stay, and all-pervading soul
Of love, and beauty, and eternal calm,
In which I rested, as upon the heart
Of universal life, and in its depths
Breathed immortality.

From that deep trance
At length my soul awaked, — waked not again
To be oppressed, o'er-mastered, and engulfed,
And in the tempest's blind delirium lost, —
Confounded beyond knowledge of itself, —
But of itself possessed, o'er all without

Felt conscious mastery! nor feared adown
The steady column whose perpetual shock
Makes there the thunder of the heavens mute,
To send its thought into thy yawning gulf,
By mists forever mantled from the sight, —
Nor with thy storm to tumult, nor to rise
In thy ascending cloud to heaven.

And then
Retired within, and self-withdrawn, I stood
The two-fold centre and informing soul
Of one vast harmony of sights and sounds :
And from that deep abyss, that rock-built shrine,
Though mute my own frail voice, I poured a hymn
“ Of praise and gratulation,” like the noise
Of banded angels when they shout to wake
Empyrean echoes.

In myself so strong
And calm, and yet beyond myself so rapt,
I stood, and made that glorious that me
More highly glorified, and to that height
To which its power had uplifted me,

Itself, in praise, exalted. And my cheek
Was wet with tears unwept by that white cloud,
And joy was in my heart, as of a god
At birth of a new world. And earth and sky
Came back and blended with my thought.

So high,
So glorious never seemed the sky: — till then
I never felt the earth itself to be
An awful presence. The stern rocks around,
From whose high-piled and adamantine fronts
Ages have fallen like shadows, without power
To crumble or deface them, — they to me
Seemed as if conscious that they were the shrine
Of God's peculiar presence, in the cloud
And bow beheld, as in the cloud that dwelt
Between the cherubim within those walls
Built for His glory by the hands of men,
As this unpillared temple by His own.

Eternal symbol of a higher power
And greater beauty than makes earth its home!

Bride of my soul ! Oh, thou art not to me
A thing seen only in the fitful light,
And by the weak and oft relaxing grasp
Of memory held, — but like the earth and sea
And all-involving heaven, with the thought
Itself of Being present as its forms ; —
So thou art with me ; and when these shall fail,
And earth, and sea, and sky have passed away,
And here thy voice is silent, and these rocks,
Unyielding but to thee, have worn through time
Into eternity, and at its touch
Have crumbled and fallen, — Oh, give me then,
Although of heaven's bright habiliments,
Haply than thine more gorgeous, disarrayed,
Give me thy sea-green robe, and these white mists,
These veiling glories painted by the sun,
Give me thy thunder ! — and amongst the throng
Of loftiest Archangels let me move
Nearer the cloudy throne, and in His ear
Who gave to thee thy terror, and thy joy,
Thy dreadful beauty and resistless might,
Forever and forever utter praise.