HERSE

When grace is given us ever to behold
A child some sweet months old,
Love, laying across our lips his finger, saith,
Smiling, with bated breath,
Hush! for the holiest thing that lives is here,
And heaven's own heart how near!
How dare we, that may gaze not on the sun,
Gaze on this verier one?
Heart, hold thy peace; eyes, be cast down for shame;
Lips, breathe not yet its name.
In heaven they know what name to call it; we,
How should we know? For, see!
The adorable sweet living marvellous
Strange light that lightens us
Who gaze, desertless of such glorious grace,
Full in a babe's warm face!
All roses that the morning rears are nought,
All stars not worth a thought,
Set this one star against them, or suppose
As rival this one rose.
What price could pay with earth’s whole weight of gold
One least flushed roseleaf’s fold
Of all this dimpling store of smiles that shine
From each warm curve and line,
Each charm of flower-sweet flesh, to reillumé
The dappled rose-red bloom
Of all its dainty body, honey-sweet
Clenched hands and curled-up feet,
That on the roses of the dawn have trod
As they came down from God,
And keep the flush and colour that the sky
Takes when the sun comes nigh,
And keep the likeness of the smile their grace
Evoked on God’s own face
When, seeing this work of his most heavenly mood,
He saw that it was good?
For all its warm sweet body seems one smile,
And mere men’s love too vile
To meet it, or with eyes that worship dims
Read o’er the little limbs,
Read all the book of all their beauties o’er,
Rejoice, revere, adore,
Bow down and worship each delight in turn,
Laugh, wonder, yield, and yearn.
But when our trembling kisses dare, yet dread,
Even to draw nigh its head,
And touch, and scarce with touch or breath surprise
Its mild miraculous eyes
Out of their viewless vision—O, what then,
    What may be said of men?
What speech may name a new-born child? what word
    Earth ever spake or heard?
The best men's tongue that ever glory knew
    Called that a drop of dew
Which from the breathing creature's kindly womb
    Came forth in blameless bloom.
We have no word, as had those men most high,
    To call a baby by.
Rose, ruby, lily, pearl of stormless seas—
    A better word than these,
A better sign it was than flower or gem
    That love revealed to them:
They knew that whence comes light or quickening flame
    Thence only this thing came,
And only might be likened of our love
    To somewhat born above,
Not even to sweetest things dropped else on earth,
    Only to dew's own birth.
Nor doubt we but their sense was heavenly true,
    Babe, when we gaze on you,
A dew-drop out of heaven whose colours are
    More bright than sun or star,
As now, ere watching love dare fear or hope,
    Lips, hands, and eyelids ope,
And all your life is mixed with earthly leaven.
    O child, what news from heaven?