



NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY  
"RELIGIOUS EDUCATION."

A LETTER TO

CARDINAL MANNING.

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PART III.

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WITH ADDENDA.

BY



*Saladin.*

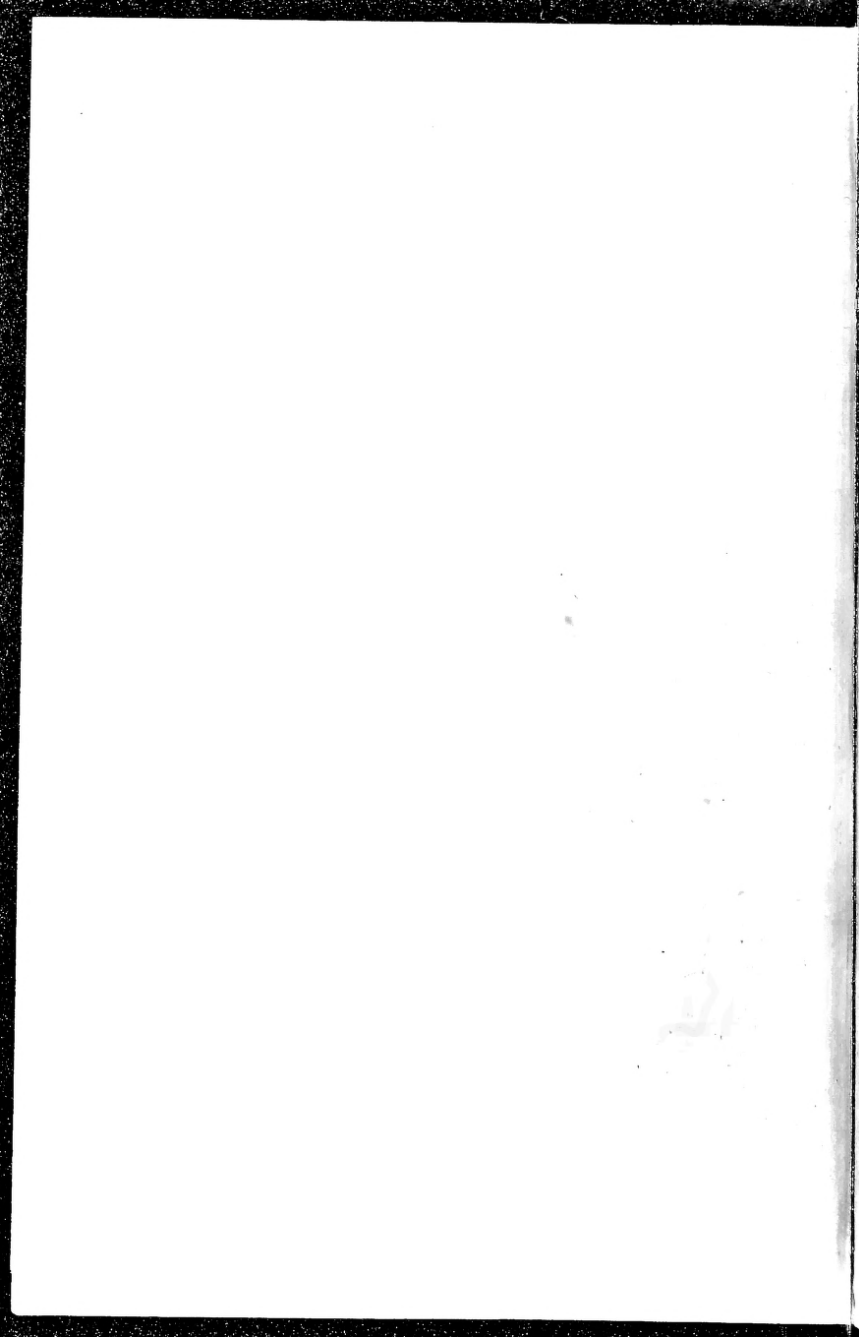
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## “RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.”

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HAVE I recommended purgatives to work deity and mechanic out of the enterics of saints? May I point out, your Church, in its “religious education,” proceeds on somewhat similar lines? I find, from a rubric in the “Roman Missal,”\* what is to be done with Christ, providing that the saint vomit him! The blasphemy implied in a “poor worm of the dust” retching away and VOMITING GOD is a hyperbole of sacrilege to which I cannot aspire to reach, and I leave all the honour and glory of it to the Roman Catholic Church. I find that, according to the rubric (how unspeakable the advantages of a “religious education”!), the vomit is to be kept in “some sacred place” till it is “corrupted”—in other words, till God is rotten. It is so considerate of your Church to thus write down to the level of a sow—perhaps the only creature besides a priest who could contemplate without nausea first swallowing the Lord and then vomiting him, and then looking for him in the vomit. And your Eminence would like this emeticating of God, prodding about for him in the vomit, finding him and swallowing him over again, or not finding and, therefore burning him and the vomit, and casting the ashes into the sacristan to be taught at the expense of the ratepayers! The ratepayers are mostly fools, and pay rates and taxes with too little investigation into the why and wherefore; and many of them are addicted to finding Jesus. But they draw the line somewhere. They have begun to draw the line at the priest who, in order to “find Jesus,” prods about in a vomit with a breakfast fork! Ugh! But no. This is nastiness to be sure; but it is divine nastiness, and part and parcel of

\* Published in Mechlin, 1840.

a "religious education." Would it be etiquette, your Eminence, for the person prodding about with the fork, when he has discovered the half-digested wafer in the vomit, to exclaim, "I HAVE FOUND JESUS!"

Then, your Eminence, the fine, cheerful doctrine of Purgatory enters into the curriculum of a "religious education." In purgatory there is a nice, clear fire (*ignis*\*) for cooking souls. This nice, clear fire is exceedingly useful; it enables you to rifle the pockets of a man's relations after he himself has been laid in his grave. The fires in purgatory are just the sufficient heat for the dead to enable you to extract half-crowns from the pockets of the living. Old Brown dies, his body is buried, and you get certain fees over that; and his soul canters off to purgatory. Young Brown would not mind a cent about his dad being in purgatory, if you would make the place at all comfortable for him; but you manage to make old Brown hot enough to make young Brown pay to get him out. All this is very clever, and very religious. St. Christina, who had been in purgatory, and managed to come back to the earth again (possibly for her umbrella), told your great and learned Cardinal Bellarmine that "the torments that I there witnessed are so dreadful that to attempt to describe them would be utterly in vain." The place was found to be filled with "those who had repented indeed of their sins, *but had not PAID the punishment* due for them."† After this, from St. Christina to Bellarmine, who would be so unfilial as to leave his father, or even his mother-in-law, in purgatory? Out they must come. The devout one must "raise the wind" to put out the fire. What man who has the soul of a man would not pawn his braces; what woman who has the heart of a woman would not sell her garters, to get her dear dead out of such a hot and damnable hole as the purgatory of Bellarmine? It is set apart, it seems, for those who have *repented* of their sins, but have not *paid* for them. Those who have neither repented of their sins nor paid for them go straight to hell; but that matters little: the temperature

\* See *Catechism* on the fifth article of the Creed of Pope Pius IV,

† "De Genitu Columbæ," bk. ii., ch. ix.

is only a trifle higher, and a good, round, sound specimen of a sinner can soon get accustomed to that. The great thing is the *pay*. *Pay*, and it hardly matters a cinder whether you *repent* or not. Yours is a grand and noble Church, Cardinal Manning. It has the knack of getting all possible moneys out of a man when he is alive, and, through its purgatory, it can pursue the dead through the very bottom of the grave, as it were, and shake him, red-hot, flaming, and shrieking, in the eyes of the friends he has left, that they may sell their very shirts to relieve him of his agony. The one paid for leaps out from the flames into the midst of heaven's wings and harps, and the gold and silver ring and rattle into the coffers of the priest.

The Agnostic, alas, has no such facilities for turning an honest penny. He does not know God sufficiently to be able to induce him to enter into the swim with him to help him to swindle and juggle. It is no use any one trying to swindle on any exalted and profitable scale, unless he has got God on his side, and does his juggling in God's name. All history and all experience teach us that lesson with pious emphasis. I have not God on my side, so all that I get is a little pittance for my honest toil. I have no way of extracting cash for the love of harps that have never been strung, and for the fear of fires that have never been kindled. I am at this disadvantage for not having acted up to the precepts of a "religious education."

Still, O Cardinal, if God be God—if he be noble and generous and humane—you may stride up to him with all the wealth and grandeur your Church has acquired, and I will walk up into his presence with only this year's volume of the *Secular Review* under my arm. And, if he say, "Depart from me, ye cursed!" it will be to *you*, O Cardinal, and not to me. He will say, "Give me a shake of your hand, Saladin. You searched earnestly and honestly for me, and could not find me; but you see I am here. You often studied and read all day, and then burned the oil till long after midnight. Without fee or reward, amid contumely and in obscurity, you worked out your very life to teach others what you conceived to be right and true. To be *mistaken*, Saladin, is

a small thing in the eyes of a God ; but to be *honest* is a great thing. Read me some passages from 'At Random;' they are flashes from the immortal soul of a man struggling in the dark ; and passages written in the red blood of an earnest human life are worthy the attention of a God."

I am, My Lord Cardinal,

Your Eminence's

Obedient Servant,

SALADIN.

## ADDENDA.

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### THE CHRISTIAN HEAVEN.

BISHOP CROKE of Cashell recently mounted the highest stilts of sacred oratory, and dashed along thus, with his head in New Jerusalem and his feet in Kildare :—

When we read in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke that “there is more joy in heaven upon one sinner that doeth penance than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance,” we may very naturally be expected to say each one within himself—Sin, then, must sadden God exceedingly, and cast a gloom, so to speak, over the face of His angels ; because penance that wipes sin away gives great gladness to God, fills with joy the whole court of heaven, makes the loveliest seraph there smile yet more sweetly, and Heaven itself become more heavenly still. Only just think of it, brethren. There is the great God of the universe sitting serenely, as we are used to picture him, on his throne of state on high. Millions and hundreds of millions of angels brighter far than the sun and infinitely more beautiful than the moon stand ever-joyous sentinels around him. The ample domain of heaven itself, extending far and wide—yea, full many a mile further than created eye can carry—encompasses him on every side. It is lit up with lamps that know no dimness, and peopled with happy spirits that are not destined to die. This earth is but an atom in their sight. Wars, conflagrations, earthquakes, plague and famine, and pestilence sweep over and decimate its inhabitants, and Heaven heeds not the ruin that is *thus* made. Yet, strange to say, one man, a poor weak worm of the earth, living on it, born of it, and destined to return to it again in death, transgresses a law that had been given to him by God for his guidance—thereby committing sin—and behold the heart of the Most High is saddened, a cloud comes across the countenance of his angels, and heaven itself seems to be heaven no more. But, see, that same man repents; that sinner is converted ; that rebel hand raised in pride against the Almighty is uplifted no more, and, as the herald of God’s mercies to man proclaims the glad tidings aloud, the music of heaven’s choir becomes sweeter still ; the light of heaven’s lamps becomes brighter still ; the face of heaven’s angels becomes more smiling still, for there is more joy in heaven upon one sinner that does penance than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance.



You see into that passage in Luke the Archbishop has got his papist "penance" inserted where the Protestant version has "repentance." With the Protestant, "penance" is an heretical abomination. But you observe the "word of God" is so explicit and simple that it means either, or both, or neither. This vague ambiguity is a distinguishing feature of divine writing. If a man were to lose his reason, he could write tolerably like God; and a man who has lost his reason, or who, as is usually the case, had never any to lose, understands best what God has been graciously pleased to write.

"Sin," according to Croke, and of course he knows all about it, must "sadden God exceedingly." A "sad" deity, God-in-the-dumps, sitting on the white throne, with all the beasts roaring "Holy, holy, holy!" and glaring at him with the eyes they have in their tails and their elbows, convinces me that Augustus Harris will never produce a really effective pantomime at Drury Lane till he has had the advantage of spending a week in heaven. Would the great Croke, who seems to know heaven and its denizens so intimately, inform me whether the hebdomadal issue of this journal can "sadden God exceedingly"? I know of no god, and I prefer to know of none till I find one magnanimous and mighty enough not to get "sad" at the writings of a weak mortal like Saladin, or be pleased with the ranting but pious blarney of a little sermon-spinner like Croke.

God used to be unchangeable. But that was in the good old days, before Ireland and Croke were invented. Now he gets "sad" whenever anybody sins; but grins from ear to ear, and kicks up his holy heels with delight, whenever anybody does penance. Pretty sudden and frequent transitions these for an unchangeable God. But the authority is very high—the authority of his friend, Croke of Cashel.

I am really sorry for the poor dear angels with the "gloom" on their faces. I once had a notion of becoming an angel myself by imitating, say, David, the man "according to God's own heart." But now I give up the project. There would always be somebody sinning, and so my face would always be clouded with "gloom," except when somebody did penance—the only thing, by



the-bye, that seems to throw a gleam of light into heaven. This "gloom" would never do for me; I like a good laugh now and again; and I *can* laugh, too, a loud hurricane of a laugh that shakes the rafters. So I will relinquish my design of becoming an angel by imitating David, and thereby some Uriah and some Joab will escape murder and some Bathsheba dishonour.

Lord, how Croke does hit off heaven with only a few spasms of his voice—the best voice going at wild rant and mad tapsalteeerie. Perhaps "the loveliest seraphs there would smile yet more sweetly" if I could get beside them to tell them tales of heroic Wallace instead of stories about timid Jesus. By my halidome, I should like to strut up the golden street—although I should much rather stand up to the hurdies in Scottish heather—and fling the strains of my mountain harp into the ears of the belles of heaven. If they have blood in their veins, I should send it tingling to the tips of their toes and their wings. I should make the lyre of Caledonia weep and moan and thunder and dirl till the harps that hung on the willows by the streams of Babel would be broken up and cast away.

Dr. Croke's heaven, which is intended to be so attractive to good Catholics and Land-Leaguers, does not tempt me. I do not feel at all attracted to a great ogre of a God, sitting on "his throne of state on high," while "millions and hundreds of millions of angels, brighter far than the sun, and infinitely more beautiful than the moon," stand around him as "sentinels." "Sentinels," indeed! Surely these millions of angels might be better employed. Millions of these celestial monsters with wings, but whose tails are never mentioned, stand "sentinel," like the big horsemen at Whitehall. Before I can be got to be really enamoured of heaven, I should like to know how its flying monsters get along without tails. A tail is to a bird what a rudder is to a ship. I should like to be assured, before I consent to go to heaven, that an angel can steer its course accurately without a tail. I do not wish to go there and incur the risk of some great, flying idiot coming dashing up against me and knocking the teeth out of my head, with a "Beg your pardon, Sir—pure accident; had

intended to fly to that there rafter!" Besides, if these angels are "brighter far than the sun," I could not look upon their splendour; so I should shortly be blind as well as toothless.

In spite of the tremendous effulgence of Dr. Croke's angels, I observe that heaven is "lit up with lamps." Seeing that, in brilliance, every angel must be equal to at least fifty sperm candles, I fail to see the use of the "lamps;" and I fear, as a canny Scot, I should demur at the holy extravagance and the divine waste of paraffin. At all events, fitting heaven up with lamps does not, as far as I am concerned, add to its charms. There you sit, pen in hand, all silent as death; and you in obstetric throes with one of your biggest thoughts, when crack goes the glass chimney of the said lamp, and, in your state of concentrated intensity, nearly startles your life out. Besides, lamps are constantly getting upset, and, if I were to upset one upon Sarah's skirts or Rahab's polonaise, the effects might disconcert all heaven. Besides, in trimming the wick, I usually burn my fingers, and when I burn my fingers I usually swear; and a good, rattling malediction might tempt some outraged seraph to throw me over heaven's battlements into the other place, hurling the lamp after me.

But, O Bishop of Cashel, can all these millions of angels find nothing better to do than to "stand sentinel"? It may be all glory and brilliance with *them*; but there are lanes and alleys with *us* where it is all misery and gloom. The sties of Seven Dials are filled with guilt and misery; over the fever slums of White-chapel falls the Shadow of Death. Where are the hundreds of millions of angels? From the dens of Want and Stench and Disease rises the cry of Humanity; but that cry reaches not the ears of the angels. Unmoved, they stand sentinel round their ogre God. Not one angel breaks away from the phalanx to help the gallant soul beaten down in life's struggle, to drive away want and shame from the home of the widow, to give shelter to the destitute and bread to the fatherless. The "father which art in heaven" cannot spare one angel out of his hundreds of millions to visit his children in mercy, and allay the gnawings of hunger and the pain

of the heart that aches in misery. The music of every harp, the sheen of every wing, is wanted "for his own glory." No angel can be spared to stand between the maiden and the deceiver. No angel can be sent for a moment to kiss the desperately-parted lips and smooth down the wildly-dishevelled hair of her, the lost and ruined, as she mounts the parapet of the bridge to leap from the street and Shame into the river and Death. No angel comes down with the lightning in his hand to strike the rich man dead as, by dint of his gold, from the pale arms of Famine he forces the embraces of Love.

A hundred thousand men, in uniform, are struggling in yonder valley. A chorus goes to hell of the yells of madness, the groans of anguish, and the screams of agony. The gulf of smoke is torn by torrents and bursts of fire, and shaken by louder than the thunders of God. Weary with slaughter, his feet entangled in his brother's entrails, the powder-blackened madman falls. He clutches at the red grass and the heaps of reeking butchery, and gurgles and gasps and drowns in his brother's blood. And the horror and the agony are not all here. Circling away into the busy towns, the quiet villages, the corn fields, and the apple orchards of other lands, extends the tide of misery and woe. Far away from the field of carnage, hunger overtakes the orphan child. The aged mother has lost her son, and the young girl her lover. Over hundreds of leagues of the world rises the voice of mourning and lamentation and woe. Damn the heartless god that required all his idle angels when his children down here went mad! Out of the vast multitude, could he spare not a single one to stand between these two hosts, and stay that hurricane of lead; not one to stop these levelled bayonets and that crunch of steel—that grinding of the bloody wheels of the mills of Death?

Is this God—this omnipotent fiend who could make us, his poor children on earth here, holy and happy, and will not? Then let me, his son, flee from such a father to the uttermost rim of the universe. Is this heaven, where immortals stand as a retinue of sentinels, unmoved by the tears of man's misery and the cries of human

pain? Is this heaven—the happiest sphere we are to enter when the gate of the grave closes behind us? Then proclaim it from the housetops that there is no heaven, that all that is is a universal hell, and that man is the plaything of an inscrutable fiend.

When will gushing gospel-mongers learn that, in spite of its “loveliest seraphs” smiling as sweetly as they can be made to do in Bishop Croke’s pious rhetoric, heaven is not good enough for nineteenth-century men and women. It did well enough as a more or less delirious day-dream for centuries that are no more, for those who have lain in the grave so long that it would require chemical analysis to distinguish the marrow of the femur-bone from the rust of the coffin-nail.

Shades of the dead, whose essence, in a sublime panontism, has gone to feed the tissues of the universe, we mean no disrespect to you when we reject your heaven. It is upon the mountain, formed by the bones of a departed world, we stand, in order to see further than that departed world ever saw. It is not the cerebation inside our individual skull, but the fact of our standing upon a more than Tamerlane pyramid of skulls, that throws our vision further down the vista of Mystery. The former coral zoophytes laid their deposits on the sea-bed and under the wave; on their deposits we place ours, thanks to them, not in the dark like theirs, but up in the light, where the sun shines, where the clouds roll and unroll, where the wind blows and the billows thunder and sing. We are no longer away down among heavens and hells, the rocks and algæ of the ocean’s floor, but up in the light, where the sea-birds scream, where the blue smoke from our hearth melts away calmly over the deep green of the trees, where the waters are wooed by olive boughs and kissed by riparian myrtles, and flowers fling the glory of their fragrance over the lake of the atoll.

Away with your heaven and other submarine nightmares of the world before sunrise. All hail a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness! Emerged at length from the deep, we are religious, but our religion has burst asunder the fetters of your theology; we are pious, but we visit your temples with fire and desolation; we are worshipful, but we urge on the car of Progress over the shattered fragments of your gods.



## CHIVALRY.

THEY knelt 'fore the altar's gilded rail,  
 The beautiful and the brave,  
 In the dim old abbey down in the vale,  
 O'er high-born dust in the grave.

And martyr holy and tortured saint  
 Were limned on the glorious pane,  
 And the sunbeams threw on the carvings quaint  
 A golden and crimson stain.

And the organ peal shook the dead in their grave,  
 And the incense smoke died away  
 Down the dim-lit chancel and solemn nave  
 Where the dead in their marble lay.

The orange wreath in the morning's breath,  
 And the warrior's nodding plume,  
 In the hoary cloister smiled at Death  
 And the warp and the weft of Doom.

And the noblest blood in the land was there—  
 The chivalrous sword and mail ;  
 And the naked breasts of the Norman fair  
 Throbbled around that altar's rail.

And the father leant on his battle brand,  
 And the mother dropped a tear,  
 And De Wilton's Edith laid her hand  
 In the gauntlet of De Vere.

And the bridal ring and the muttered words,  
 And the gems and the plumes of pride,  
 And the whispers low, and the clank of swords,  
 And De Wilton's girl was a bride.

\* \* \* \*

Heir to wide lands, she bore him a son  
 On a sweet and a silent day :  
 Where the breach was won, and lost, and won,  
 De Wilton was far away.

And he wore her glove by his mangled plume,  
 And her kiss on his lip still lay,  
 And his blade flashed dread as the bolt of Doom  
 From the morn till the noon of day.

Wherever raved wildest the storm of blades,  
 And the red rain bloodiest fell,  
 Wherever thickest the troops of shades  
 Were hurled to the realms of Hell

De Vere's blue flag with his Edith's hair  
 Waved in the reeling van,  
 And rose and fell, 'mid groan and yell,  
 In the chaos of horse and man.

It sank at last in the hurricane  
 That raged round the knights of De Vere,  
 And the world span round his reeling brain,  
 Laid bare by a foeman's spear.

Hearts rained out blood, helms glinted fire,  
 'Mid the death groan and hurraa ;  
 And knighthood's pride toiled, and died  
 Where the spangled banner lay.

For Edith's hair on that broidered soy  
 Lay trampled in dust and gore ;  
 And Rudolph had sworn to bear it with joy  
 To her bower or return no more.

He sprang with a shout from the reeling sod,  
 A gash on his helmless brow,  
 Raised his red hand aloft to God,  
 And hissed his dauntless vow :

"Ye saints," quoth he, "this soy's my shroud,  
 Or I bear it to Edith again!"—  
 But, wild as the burst of the thunder-cloud,  
 Or the dash of the roaring main,

The foe swept on ten thousand strong  
 O'er Rudolph's wounded ten ;  
 The forest quakes, the mountain shakes,  
 'Neath the tramp of arméd men.

And vassal thralls with husky cheer  
 Rush o'er the banner fair,



His blazoned scutcheon of De Vere  
And Edith's golden hair.

Firm faced the host the glorious ten  
For Edith, God, and Home—  
Swung the angry sea of ten thousand men—  
Dashed the battle's bloody foam.

\* \* \* \*

His horse lay on the carnage ground,  
Upon that flag of woe ;  
His mangled vassals lay around,  
And Rudolph lay below,

'Mid battered helm and shivered lance,  
And corslet, helm, and glave ;  
And all the wrecks of War's wild dance  
When waltzing to the grave.

\* \* \* \*

Sighed o'er the field the young morn's breath :  
The foemen found him there,  
His pale lips pressed in ghastly death  
To Edith's crimsoned hair.

They laid him down by the side of her bed,  
The monks who his body bore ;  
His eyes had the glare of the eyes of the dead,  
His armour was dyed in gore.

A friar essayed the ladye to cheer  
In the mournful tidings of ill ;  
But the faithful heart of the bride of De Vere  
Ever, forever was still.

Though the babe still lay on the high, white breast  
That milk to its dear lips gave,—  
Years laid him again on that bosom to rest,  
When he fell in the ranks of the brave.

\* \* \* \*

She followed her lord to the halls of God  
Ere that sorrowful day was done ;  
For her lord had died on the trampled sod :  
To a corpse she had borne her son.

Now the sire and the dame and their gallant boy  
 All rest 'neath the marble there,  
 And over them waves the banner of soy,  
 With Edith's blood-stained hair.

And swords have clashed to the valiant tale,  
 And the voice of the minstrel sung,  
 How fair were the maids, how deadly the blades,  
 When the heart of the world was young !

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