

HELEN AT THE LOOM. +

HELEN, in her silent room,
Weaves upon the upright loom,
Weaves a mantle rich and dark,
Purpled over deep. But mark
How she scatters o'er the wool
Woven shapes, till it is full
Of men that struggle close, complex;
Horses clipped, with wrinkled necks
Arching high; spear, shield, and all
The panoply that doth recall
Mighty war, such war as e'en
For Helen's sake is waged, I ween.
Purple is the groundwork: good!
All the field is stained with blood,

Blood poured out for Helen's sake ;
 (Thread, run on ; and, shuttle, shake !)
 But the shapes of men that pass
 Are as ghosts within a glass,
 Woven with whiteness of the swan,
 Pale, sad memories, gleaming wan
 From the garment's purple fold
 Where Troy's tale is twined and told.
 Well may Helen, as with tender
 Touch of rosy fingers slender
 She doth knit the story in
 Of Troy's sorrow and her sin,
 Feel sharp filaments of pain
 Reeled off with the well-spun skein,
 And faint blood-stains on her hands
 From the shifting sanguine strands.
 Gently, sweetly she doth sorrow :
 What has been must be to-morrow ;
 Meekly to her fate she bows.
 Heavenly beauties still will rouse
 Strife and savagery in men :
 Shall the lucid heavens, then,
 Lose their high serenity,
 Sorrowing over what must be ?
 If she taketh to her shame,
 Lo, they give her not the blame, —
 Priam's wisest counsellors,
 Aged men, not loving wars :
 When she goes forth, clad in white, —
 Day-cloud touched with first moonlight, —
 With her fair hair, amber-hued
 As vapor by the moon imbued
 With burning brown, that round her clings,
 See, she sudden silence brings
 On the gloomy whisperers
 Who would make the wrong all hers.

So, Helen, in thy silent room,
 Labor at the storied loom ;
 (Thread, run on ; and, shuttle, shake !)
 Let thy tender sorrow make
 Something strangely beautiful
 Of this fabric, since the wool
 Comes so tinted from the Fates,
 Dyed with loves, hopes, fears, and hates.
 Thou shalt work with subtle force
 All thy deep shade of remorse
 In the texture of the weft,
 That no stain on thee be left ; —
 Ay, sweet queen, shalt fashion grief,
 Grief and wrong, to sweet relief.
 Speed the garment ! It may chance,
 Long hereafter, meet the glance

Of Oenone ; when her lord,
 Now thy Paris, shall go t'ward
 Ida, at his last sad end,
 Seeking her, his early friend,
 Who alone can cure his ill
 Of all who love him, if she will.
 It were fitting she should see
 In that hour thine artistry,
 And her husband's speechless corse
 In the garment of remorse !
 But take heed that in thy work
 Naught unbeautiful do lurk.
 Ah, how little signifies
 Unto thee what fortunes rise,
 What others fall ! Thou still shalt reign,
 Still shalt work the colored skein.
 Though thy yearning woman's eyes
 Burn with glorious agonies,
 Pitying the waste and woe,
 And the heroes falling low
 In the war around thee, here,
 Still that exquisitest tear
 'Twixt thy lids shall dearer be
 Than life, to friend or enemy.

There are people on the earth
 Doomed with doom of their great worth.
 Look on Helen not with hate,
 Therefore, but compassionate.
 If she suffer not too much,
 Seldom does she feel the touch
 Of that fresh, auroral joy
 Lesser spirits may decoy
 To their slight and sunny lives.
 Heavy honey 't is, she hives.
 To her sweet though saddening soul
 All that here she doth control —
 What of bitter memories,
 What of coming fate's surmise,
 Paris' passion, distant din
 Of the war now drifting in
 To her quiet — idle seems ;
 Natural as lazy gleams
 Of some stilly water's reach,
 Seen from where broad vine-leaves pleach
 A heavy arch, and, looking through,
 Far away the doubtful blue
 Glimmers, on a drowsy day,
 Crowded with the sun's rich gray,
 As she stands within her room,
 Weaving, weaving at the loom.

G. P. Lathrop. †