

[THE CONQUEROR WORM]

Lo! 'tis a gala night

 Within the lonesome latter years!
 A mystic throng, bewinged, bedight
 In veils, and drowned in tears,
 Sit in a theatre, to see
 A play of hopes and fears,
 While the orchestra breathes fitfully
 The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,
 Mutter and mumble low,
 And hither and thither fly—
 Mere puppets they, who come and go
 At bidding of vast shadowy things
 That shift the scenery to and fro,
 Flapping from out their Condor wings
 Invisible Woe!

That motley drama—oh, be sure
 It shall not be forgot!
 With its Phantom chased for evermore,
 By a crowd that seize it not,

Through a circle that ever returneth in
To the self-same spot,
And much of Madness, and more of Sin,
And Horror the soul of the plot.

But see, amid the mimic rout
A crawling shape intrude!
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
The scenic solitude!
It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs
The mimes become its food,
And the angels sob at vermin fangs
In human gore imbued.

Out—out are the lights—out all!
And, over each dying form,
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm,
And the seraphs, all haggard and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy, "Man,"
And its hero the Conqueror Worm.