

The Nightmare Lake

There is a lake in distant Zan,
 Beyond the wonted haunts of man,
 Where broods alone in hideous state
 A spirit dead and desolate;
 A spirit ancient and unholy, 5
 Heavy with fearsome melancholy,
 Which from the waters dull and dense
 Draws vapours curst with pestilence.
 Around the banks, a mire of clay,
 Sprawl things offensive in decay, 10
 And curious birds that reach that shore
 Are seen by mortals nevermore.
 Here shines by day the searing sun
 On glassy wastes beheld by none,
 And here by night pale moonbeams flow 15
 Into the deeps that yawn below.
 In nightmares only is it told
 What scenes beneath those beams unfold;
 What scenes, too old for human sight,
 Lie sunken there in endless night; 20
 For in those depths there only pace
 The shadows of a voiceless race.
 One midnight, redolent of ill,
 I saw that lake, asleep and still;
 While in the lurid sky there rode 25
 A gibbous moon that glow'd and glow'd.
 I saw the stretching marshy shore,
 And the foul things those marshes bore:
 Lizards and snakes convuls'd and dying;
 Ravens and vampires putrefying; 30
 All these, and hov'ring o'er the dead,
 Necrophagi that on them fed.
 And as the dreadful moon climb'd high,
 Fright'ning the stars from out the sky,
 I saw the lake's dull water glow 35

Till sunken things appear'd below.
 There shone, unnumber'd fathoms down,
 The tow'rs of a forgotten town;
 The tarnish'd domes and mossy walls;
 Weed-tangled spires and empty halls; 40
 Deserted fanes and vaults of dread,
 And streets of gold uncovered.
 These I beheld, and saw beside
 A horde of shapeless shadows glide;
 A noxious horde which to my glance 45
 Seem'd moving in a hideous dance
 Round slimy sepulchres, that lay
 Beside a never-travell'd way.
 Straight from those tombs a heaving rose
 That vex'd the waters' dull repose, 50
 While lethal shades of upper space
 Howl'd at the moon's sardonic face.
 Then sank the lake within its bed,
 Suck'd down to caverns of the dead,
 Till from the reeking, new-stript earth 55
 Curl'd foetid fumes of noisome birth.
 About the city, nigh uncover'd,
 The monstrous dancing shadows hover'd,
 When lo! there oped with sudden stir
 The portal of each sepulchre! 60
 No ear may learn, no tongue may tell
 What nameless horror then befell.
 I see that lake—that moon agrin—
 That city and the *things* within—
 Waking, I pray that on that shore 65
 The nightmare lake may sink *no more!*