

# ADAH ISAACS MENKEN



HORACE VERNET, *MAZEPPA AND THE WOLVES*, 1826.

## INFELICIA





ADAH ISAACS MENKEN, *A LUCKY HAND*.



# INFELICIA

## Dreams of Beauty

VISIONS of Beauty, of Light, and of Love,  
Born in the soul of a Dream,  
Lost, like the phantom-bird under the dove,  
When she flies over a stream—

Come ye through portals where angel wings droop,  
Moved by the heaven of sleep?  
Or, are ye mockeries, crazing a soul,  
Doomed with its waking to weep?

I could believe ye were shadows of earth,  
Echoes of hopes that are vain,  
But for the music ye bring to my heart,  
Waking its sunshine again.

And ye are fleeting. All vainly I strive  
Beauties like thine to portray;  
Forth from my pencil the bright picture starts,  
And—ye have faded away.

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Like to a bird that soars up from the spray,  
When we would fetter its wing;  
Like to the song that spurns Memory's grasp  
When the voice yearneth to sing;

Like the cloud-glory that sunset lights up,  
When the storm bursts from its height;  
Like the sheet-silver that rolls on the sea,  
When it is touched by the night—

Bright, evanescent, ye come and are gone,  
Visions of mystical birth;  
Art that could paint you was never vouchsafed  
Unto the children of earth.

Yet in my soul there's a longing to tell  
All you have seemed unto me,  
That unto others a glimpse of the skies  
You in their sorrow might be.

Vain is the wish. Better hope to describe  
All that the spirit desires,  
When through a cloud of vague fancies and schemes  
Flash the Promethean fires.

Let me then think of ye, Visions of Light,  
Not as the tissue of dreams.  
But as realities destined to be  
Bright in Futurity's beams.

## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

Ideas formed by a standard of earth  
Sink at Reality's shrine  
Into the human and weak like ourselves,  
Losing the essence divine;

But the fair pictures that fall from above  
On the heart's mirror sublime  
Carry a signature written in tints,  
Bright with the future of time,

And the heart, catching them, yieldeth a spark  
Under each stroke of the rod—  
Sparks that fly upward and light the New Life,  
Burning an incense to God!



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## Pro Patria

America, 1861

God's armies of Heaven, with pinions extended  
Spread wide their white arms to the standard of Light;  
And bending far down to the great Heart of Nature,  
With kisses of Love drew us up from the Night.

Proud soul of the Bondless! whose stars fleck with crimson,  
And warm dreams of gold ev'ry pillar and dome,  
That strengthens and crowns the fair temples upswelling  
To glitter, far-seen, in our Liberty's home—

The spirits of Heroes and Sires of the People,  
Leaned down from the battlements guarding the world;  
To breathe for your Destiny omens of glory  
And freedom eternal, in Honor impearled.

The storm-goaded mountains, and trees that had battled  
With winds sweeping angrily down through the years,  
Turned red in the blood of the roses of Heaven,  
'Neath fires lit by sunset on vanishing spears.

The soft Beam of Peace bronzed the rocks of stern ages,  
And crept from the valley to burn on the spire;  
And stooped from the glimmer of gems in the palace,  
To glow in the hovel a soul-heating fire.

## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

Each turret, and terrace, and archway of grandeur,  
Its beauty up-rounded through laughs of the light;  
And world-crown'd America chose for her standard  
The blush of the Day and the eyes of the Night.

Then Liberty's sceptre, its last jewel finding,  
Was waved by a God o'er the years to be born,  
And far in the future there rusted and crumbled  
The chains of the centuries, ne'er to be worn.

The wave-hosts patrolling the sullen Atlantic,  
With helmets of snow, and broad silvery shields,  
Ran clamoring up to the seed-sown embrasures,  
And fashioned new dews for the buds of the fields:

They spread their scroll shields for the breast of Columbia,  
And turned their storm-swords to the enemy's fleet;  
Their glory to humble the tyrant that braved them,  
Their honor to lave fair America's feet!

No hot hand of Mars scattered red bolts of thunder  
From out the blest land on their message-wind's breath;  
But softly the murmur of Peace wantoned o'er them,  
And soothed War to sleep in the Cradle of Death,

Then hiding their snow plumes, they slept in their armor,  
And as the sun shone on their crystalline mail;  
Lo! Freedom beheld, from her mountains, a mirror,  
And caught her own image spread under a sail!



## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

So, blest was Columbia; the focus of Nature's  
Best gifts, and the dimple where rested God's smile;  
The Queen of the World in her young strength and beauty,  
The pride of the skies in her freedom from guile.

Aloft on the mount of God's liberty endless,  
Half-veiled by the clouds of His temple she stood,  
Arrayed in the glory of Heaven, the mortal,  
With vigor Immortal unchained in her blood.

A bright helm of stars on her white brow was seated,  
And gold were the plumes from its clusters that fell  
To light the gaunt faces of slaves in old kingdoms,  
And show them the way to the hand they loved well.

No gorget of steel rested on her bare bosom,  
Where glittered a necklace of gems from the skies;  
And girding her waist was the red band of sunset,  
With light intertwined 'neath the glance of her eyes.

The sword that had bridged in the dark time of trouble,  
Her heart's grand Niagara rolling in blood;  
Still sheathless she held; but it turned to a sunbeam.  
And blessed what it touched, like a finger of God!

The robes of her guardian Angels swept round her,  
And flashed through the leaves of the grand Tree of Life,  
Till all the sweet birds in its depths woke to music,  
And e'en the bruised limbs with new being were rife.

## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

The Eagle's gray eyes, from the crag by the ocean  
Undazed by the sun, saw the vision of love,  
And swift on the rim of the shield of Columbia,  
The bold Eagle fell from the white throne of Jove.

Columbia! My Country! My Mother! thy glory  
Was born in a spirit Immortal, divine;  
And when from God's lips passed the nectar of heaven,  
Thy current baptismal was deified wine!

Thou born of Eternal! the hand that would harm thee  
Must wither to dust, and in dust be abhorred,  
For thine is the throne whose blue canopy muffles  
The footfalls of angels, the steps of the Lord!

But hush! 'Twas the flap of the raven's dark pinions  
That sounded in woe on the breeze as it passed;  
There cometh a hum, as of distance-veiled battle,  
From out the deep throat of the quivering blast;

There cometh a sound like the moan of a lost one  
From out the red jaws of Hell's cavern of Death;  
The Eagle's strong wing feels the talon of Discord,  
And all the fair sunlight goes out with a breath!

And see how the purple-hued hills and the valleys  
Are dark with bent necks and with arms all unnerved;  
And black, yelling hounds bay the soul into madness—  
The Huntsman of Hell drives the pack that has swerved!,



## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

The pale steeds of Death shake the palls of their saddles,  
And spread their black manes, wrought of shrouds, to the wind,  
The curst sons of Discord each courser bestriding,  
To guide the Arch-Demon, who lingers behind

They thunder in rage, o'er the red path of Battle,  
Far up the steep mount where fair Liberty keeps  
The soul of a Tyrant in parchment imprisoned;  
God pity us all, if her Sentinel sleeps!

Our Father in Heaven! the shadow of fetters  
Is held in the shade of the Dove's little wing;  
And must it again on our smothered hearts settle?  
Peace slain—and the knell of our Honor they ring!

Behold! from the night-checked edge of the woodland  
A wall of red shields crowdeth into the land,  
Their rims shooting horror and bloody confusion,  
Their fields spreading darkness on every hand.

A forest of morions utter grim murder—  
Threats kissed by the sun from their long tongues of steel;  
Lo, forests of spears hedge the heart of Columbia,  
And soon their keen points her fair bosom may feel!

Her Cain-branded foes! How they crawl in the valley,  
And creep o'er the hills, in their dastardly fear!  
Afraid, lest their victim should suddenly waken  
And blast them for e'er with a womanly tear!

## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

Like hunters who compass the African jungle,  
Where slumbers Numidia's lion by day,  
They falter and pale, looking back at each other,  
And some, in their falsehood, to Providence pray!

Assassins of Liberty! comes there not o'er you  
A thought of the time, when the land you would blight,  
Though slumbering 'mid tombs of a hundred dead nations,  
Though Britain's steel bulwarks broke into the light?

And can ye forget the hot blood-rain that deluged  
The Hearts of the Fathers, who left to your care  
The beautiful Trust now in slumber before you,  
They starved, fought, and fell to preserve from a snare?

Would ye splash, in your madness, the blood of the children,  
With merciless blows, in the poor mother's face?  
Turn back, ye Assassins! or wear on your foreheads  
For ever the brand of a God-hated race!

Down, down to the dust with ye, cowards inhuman!  
And learn, as ye grovel, for mercy to live,  
That Love is the Sceptre and Throne of the Nation,  
And Freedom the Crown that the centuries give!

Unrighteous Ambition has slept in our limits  
Since fearless Columbia sheathed her bright blade:  
And at her dread Vengeance on those who awake it,  
The soul of the stoutest might well be dismayed.



## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

Beware! for the spirit of God's Retribution  
Will make a red sunrise when Liberty dies;  
The Traitors shall writhe in the glow of a morning,  
And drown in the blood that is filling their eyes!

The bright blade of old, when it leaps from the scabbard  
Like Lightning shall fall on the traitorous head,  
And hurl with each stroke, in its world-shock of thunder,  
A thrice cursed soul to the deeps of the Dead!

Beware! for when once ye have made your Red Ocean,  
Its waves shall rise up with tempestuous swell,  
And hurl your stained souls, like impurities, from them  
Up death's dark slope, to the skull beach of Hell!



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## Myself

“La patience est amère; mais le fruit en est doux!”

### I

AWAY down into the shadowy depths of the Real I once lived.  
I thought that to seem was to be.

But the waters of Marah were beautiful, yet they were bitter.  
I waited, and hoped, and prayed;

Counting the heart-throbs and the tears that answered them.

Through my earnest pleadings for the True, I learned that  
the mildest mercy of life was a smiling sneer;

And that the business of the world was to lash with vengeance  
all who dared to be what their God had made them.

Smother back tears to the red blood of the heart!

Crush out things called souls!

No room for them here!

### II

Now I gloss my pale face with laughter, and sail my voice on  
with the tide.

Decked in jewels and lace, I laugh beneath the gaslight's glare,  
and quaff the purple wine.

But the minor-keyed soul is standing naked and hungry upon  
one of Heaven's high hills of light.

## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

Standing and waiting for the blood of the feast!

Starving for one poor word!

Waiting for God to launch out some beacon on the boundless shores of this Night.

Shivering for the uprising of some soft wing under which it may creep, lizard-like, to warmth and rest.

Waiting! Starving and shivering!

### III

Still I trim my white bosom with crimson roses; for none shall see the thorns.

I bind my aching brow with a jeweled crown, that none shall see the iron one beneath.

My silver-sandaled feet keep impatient time to the music, because I cannot be calm.

I laugh at earth's passion-fever of Love; yet I know that God is near to the soul on the hill, and hears the ceaseless ebb and flow of a hopeless love, through all my laughter.

But if I can cheat my heart with the old comfort, that love can be forgotten, is it not better?

After all, living is but to play a part!

The poorest worm would be a jewel-headed snake if she could!

### IV

All this grandeur of glare and glitter has its nighttime.

The pallid eyelids must shut out smiles and daylight.

Then I fold my cold hands, and look down at the restless rivers of a love that rushes through my life.

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Unseen and unknown they tide on over black rocks and  
chasms of Death.

Oh, for one sweet word to bridge their terrible depths!

O jealous soul! why wilt thou crave and yearn for what thou  
canst not have?

And life is so long—so long.

### V

With the daylight comes the business of living.

The prayers that I sent trembling up the golden thread of  
hope all come back to me.

I lock them close in my bosom, far under the velvet and roses  
of the world.

For I know that stronger than these torrents of passion is the  
soul that hath lifted itself up to the hill.

What care I for his careless laugh?

I do not sigh; but I know that God hears the life-blood drip-  
ping as I, too, laugh.

I would not be thought a foolish rose, that flaunts her red  
heart out to the sun.

Loving is not living!

### VI

Yet through all this I know that night will roll back from the  
still, gray plain of heaven, and that my triumph shall rise sweet  
with the dawn!



## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

When these mortal mists shall unclothe the world, then shall I be known as I am!

When I dare be dead and buried behind a wall of wings, then shall he know me!

When this world shall fall, like some old ghost, wrapped in the black skirts of the wind, down into the fathomless eternity of fire, then shall souls uprise!

When God shall lift the frozen seal from struggling voices, then shall we speak!

When the purple-and-gold of our inner natures shall be light-ed up in the Eternity of Truth, then will love be mine!

*I can wait.*



## The Autograph on the Soul

IN the Beginning, God, the great Schoolmaster, wrote upon the white leaves of our souls the text of life, in His own autograph.

Upon all souls it has been written alike.

We set forth with the broad, fair characters penned in smoothness and beauty, and promise to bear them back so, to the Master, who will endorse them with eternal life.

But, alas! how few of us can return with these copybooks unstained and unblotted?

Man—the school-boy Man—takes a jagged pen and dips it in blood, and scrawls line after line of his hopeless, shaky, weak-backed, spattering imitation of the unattainable flourish and vigor of the autograph at the top of our souls.

And thus they go on, in unweary reiteration, until the fair leaves are covered with unseemly blots, and the Schoolmaster's copy is no longer visible.

No wonder, then, that we shrink and hide, and play truant as long as we possibly can, before handing in to the Master our copy-books for examination.

How soiled with the dust of men, and stained with the blood of the innocent, some of these books are!

Surely, some will look fairer than others.

Those of the lowly and despised of men;

The wronged and the persecuted;

The loving and the deserted;

## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

The suffering and the despairing;  
The weak and the struggling;  
The desolate and the oppressed;  
The authors of good books;  
The defenders of women;  
The mothers of new-born children;  
The loving wives of cruel husbands;  
The strong throats that are choked with their own blood, and  
cannot cry out the oppressor's wrong.

On the souls of these of God's children of inspiration, His autograph will be handed up to the judgment-seat, on the Day of Examination, pure and unsoiled.

The leaf may be torn, and traces of tears, that fell as prayers went up, may dim the holy copy, but its fair, sharp, and delicate outlines will only gleam the stronger, and prove the lesson of life, that poor, down-trodden humanity has been studying for ages and ages—the eternal triumph of mind over matter!

What grand poems these starving souls will be, after they are signed and sealed by the Master-hand!

But what of the oppressor?

What of the betrayer?

What of him that holds a deadly cup, that the pure of heart may drink?

What of fallen women, who are covered with paint and sin, and flaunt in gaudy satins, never heeding the black stains within their own breasts?—lost to honor, lost to themselves; glittering in jewels and gold; mingling with sinful men, who, with sneering looks and scoffing laughs, drink wine beneath the gas-light's glare.



## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

Wrecks of womanly honor!

Wrecks of womanly souls!

Wrecks of life and love!

Blots that deface the fair earth with crime and sin!

Fallen—fallen so low that the cries and groans of the damned must sometimes startle their death-signed hearts, as they flaunt through the world, with God's curse upon them!

What of the money-makers, with their scorching days and icy nights?

Their hollow words and ghastly smiles?

Their trifling deceits?

Their shameless lives?

Their starving menials?

Their iron hands, that grasp the throats of weary, white-baited men?

Will their coffins be black?

They should be red—stained with the blood of their victims!

Their shrouds should be [ make ] with pockets; and all their gold should be placed therein, to drag them deeper down than the sexton dug the grave!

How will it be with him who deceives and betrays women?

Answer me this, ye men who have brought woe and desolation to the heart of woman; and, by your fond lips, breathing sighs, and vows of truth and constancy—your deceit and desertion, destroyed her, body and soul!

There are more roads to the heart than by cold steel.

You drew her life and soul after you by your pretended love. Perhaps she sacrificed her home, her father and her mother—her God and her religion for you!

## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

Perhaps for you she has endured pain and penury!

Perhaps she is the mother of your child, living and praying for you!

And how do you repay this devotion?

By entering the Eden of her soul, and leaving the trail of the serpent, that can never be erased from its flowers; for the best you trample beneath your feet, while the fairest you pluck as a toy to while away an idle hour, then dash aside for another of a fairer cast.

Then, if she plead with her tears, and her pure hands, to Heaven, that you come back to your lost honor, and to her heart, you do not hesitate to tear that suffering heart with a shameless word, that cuts like a jagged knife, and add your curse to crush her light of life!

Have ye seen the blood-stained steel, dimmed with the heart's warm blood of the suicide?

Have ye seen the pallid lips, the staring eyes, the unclosed, red-roofed mouth—the bubbling gore, welling up from a woman's breast?

Have ye seen her dying in shivering dread, with the blood dabbled o'er her bosom?

Have ye heard her choked voice rise in prayer—her pale lips breathing his name—the name of him who deceived her? Yes! a prayer coming up with the bubbling blood—a blessing on him for whom she died!

Why did she not pray for her despairing self?

O God! have mercy on the souls of men who are false to their earthly love and trust!

But the interest will come round—all will come round!

## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

Nothing will escape the Schoolmaster's sleepless eye!

The indirect is always as great and real as the direct.

Not one word or deed—

Not one look or thought—

Not a motive but will be stamped on the programme of our lives, and duly realized by us, and returned and held up to light heaven or flood hell with.

All the best actions of war or peace—

All the help given to strangers—

Cheering words to the despairing—

Open hands to the shunned—

Lifting of lowly hearts—

Teaching children of God—

Helping the widow and the fatherless—

Giving light to some desolate home—

Reading the Bible to the blind—

Protecting the defenceless—

Praying with the dying.

These are acts that need no Poet to make poems of them; for they will live through ages and ages, on to Eternity. And when God opens the sealed book on the Day of Judgment, these poems of the history of lives will be traced in letters of purple and gold, beneath the Master's Autograph.



ADAH ISAACS MENKEN



# ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

## Infelix

WHERE is the promise of my years;  
Once written on my brow?  
Ere errors, agonies and fears  
Brought with them all that speaks in tears,  
Ere I had sunk beneath my peers;  
Where sleeps that promise now?

Naught lingers to redeem those hours,  
Still, still to memory sweet!  
The flowers that bloomed in sunny bowers  
Are withered all; and Evil towers  
Supreme above her sister powers  
Of Sorrow and Deceit.

I look along the columned years,  
And see Life's riven fane,  
Just where it fell, amid the jeers  
Of scornful lips, whose mocking sneers,  
For ever hiss within mine ears  
To break the sleep of pain.

I can but own my life is vain  
A desert void of peace;  
I missed the goal I sought to gain,

## ADAH ISAACS MENKEN

I missed the measure of the strain  
That lulls Fame's fever in the brain,  
And bids Earth's tumult cease.

Myself! alas for theme so poor  
A theme but rich in Fear;  
I stand a wreck on Error's shore,  
A spectre not within the door,  
A houseless shadow evermore,  
An exile lingering here.