

A PHIAL.

This precious bubble of the antique world,
As light as lifted foam, as frail as breath,
Endured when empires died a desperate death,
When heaven on earth, when tower on tower was hurled.

Hues of a beetle's temporary wing
Have grown on this in centuries of slime ;
Dials have told a rosary of time
For every nuance of this feeble thing.

Were it devised at first for costly balm,
The distillation of a summer's fee,
To sweeten some " Ah sweet, I dote on thee,"
And over all there lies a common calm. . . .

No more, no more the heavy branches drip
Another fragrance to the tangled moss,
Translucent insects flamed and hummed across ;
The sleep they soothed is grown eternal sleep.

It mocks indeed, it is not wholly dumb,
The insect's fiery wing ; and, listening well
Against the margin of this tell-tale shell,
There wakes the memory of a distant hum.

Drowse on, drowse on until I come again ;
Or sleep, or sleep for ever, evermore ;
We are like men who halt upon a shore,
Whose thoughts go forward and whose feet remain.

JOHN GRAY.