AENEAS AT SEA: Charybdis and Aetna

Aeneid III, vv. 554-587

(In the Metre of the Original).

Then, o'er the wave afar,
Trinacrian Aetna is sighted,
And, with a mighty moan
of the deep, we hear in the distance
Beaten rocks and strand—
wrecked voices fitfully calling:
Shoals are leaping aloft,
and sands with surge are commingled.

Father Anchises then:—
"In good sooth, here's that Charybdis,
"These are the terrible rocks—
these crags that Helenus warned of:
"Rescue now, O fellow mates,
and as one man rise to your oar-hafts."

Just as 'twas bid, they do,—
Palinurus, leading the vessels,
Turned his roaring prow
right round to the waves on the lefthand,—
Leftward all of the fleet
with oars and winds came a-bending;

Up to the sky we're borne,
on arching billow, and likewise
Sunk to deepest shades,
when passed the wave from beneath us.

Thrice did the hollow rocks
resound in their craggy recesses,
Thrice, with high-flung foam,
beheld we the stars all a-dripping.

Meanwhile, the wind and sun
have sunk and left us aweary,
And, not knowing our way,
we drift to shores of the Cyclops.
Spacious a harbour lies—
    itself unmoved by the wind-blast's
Entrance; but Aetna is near
    by, thund'ring with fearsome destruction.

Sometimes, lo, it flings
    out, up to the heavens, a black cloud,
Smoking in pitch-dark whirl,
    and with ashes glowing in whiteness:
Balls of flames it uplifts
    and licks the clusters of star-land.

Other times, and the rocks,
    the innermost torn from the mountain,
Belching, it vomits up;
    and the stones that are massed into liquid
Heaves, with a groan, to the light,
    and boils from depth the profoundest.

'Tis said, Encela-dus,—
    his frame half burned by the lightning—
Lies beneath this mass,
    and giant Aetna, above him
Superimposed, breathes fire
    from bursted furnaces blazing:

And when, wearied he shifts
    his side, the Sicilian island
Quakes with his murmured groan
    and veils the sky with a smoke-cloud.

That night we endure
    throughout these measureless portents,
Sheltered in woods, nor see
    what cause is creating the din, for
Neither were blazing stars
    nor heaven bright with their clustered
Radiance, visible, a
    dark veil obscuring the sky, while
Deepest night the moon
    detained, imprisoned in rainclouds.

H. MELLISH.