

KEY-NOTES

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"Why hear I the same sense from countless differing voices,
"and read one never quite expressed fact in endless picture-
"language? . . . The secret of heaven is kept from age to age.
". . . It must be fresher than rainbows, stabler than mountains,
"agreeing with flowers, with tides, and the rising and setting of
"autumnal stars. Melodious poets shall be hoarse as street
"ballads when once the penetrating Key-Note of nature and
"spirit is sounded—the earth-beat, sea-beat, heart-beat which
"makes the tune to which the sun rolls, and the globule of
"blood, and the sap of trees."—EMERSON.



And yet the sum of them together cast
Makes just one questioning dissonance, such chord
As symbolises best unfinished life,
Unanswered askings, and unyielded hope ;
But tends, prophetic, toward a tarrying close
In chastened minor.

Aimée, you have heard

These songs spring singly from me through the years
Since the fresh mornings when my spirit went
In girlhood's blindness to its own unsight,
Thoughtful, and little learnèd, up and down
Among its guesses, groping for a truth
Half in heart hunger, half in earnest act
Of young thought-energy, that needs must win
Its own conviction from what page of life
It opens at ; and deems that page the whole.

From then, when truth alone seemed worth my will,

Till now, when every truth seems valueless
Save as it fosters in the mood of man
The growth and fruiting of persistent good :—
Fair happiness that ever lifeward tends,
Holding affection social ; nor reacts
In any lessened aptitude for joy :—
From then till now, from dawn till more than noon,
So far, still singing, I have found my way.

And there were seasons. First, the frosty chill
That kept the buds asleep, when theories
Bristled, clear out-lined, in such lucid air
As breathed no breath to melt them into life.
Then wakening spring, when heart first questioned
head,
And raindrops split the sunlight into hues.
After, those fiercer noons and lurid nights,
Tense with the testing of all theory ;

When many a pallid, passionless, plain truth
Philosophy could swear to showed obverse
As bloodless irony 'mong human things.
Later, the autumn mellowness, and fruit
That taught the year the meaning of her life.
And now, at last, a folding of the hands
And waiting of the will while, quietly,
Old loves, old certainties, old sorrows die,
And leave deposit softly in my soul
To enrich the sources of a future spring.
Such parable, my Aimée, gives to you
My clustered key-notes, and their story too ;
And if not quite their meaning, only so
Because no heart may, quite, another know.
Yet take them, dear, and let them tribute be
For the sweet, patient faithfulness you've shown to
me.

CONTENTS.



	PAGE
UPWARD	I
JANUARY	4
UNTO THIS PRESENT.	5
MORNING	22
AFTERNOON	24
TWILIGHT	26
MIDNIGHT	28
FEBRUARY	31
TWO SONGS—I. WITH THE TIDE	33
„ II. UP STREAM	36

	PAGE
SONNET	38
MARCH	39
A SONG OF SILENCE	41
EASTER	43
APRIL	45
TEMPTATION	49
DRIFTING	56
A FRAGMENT	61
THE MOTTO	63
MAY	65
A TEST	66
"WHO WILL SHOW US ANY GOOD"	68
THE SONG-BIRD, AND THE FAIRY	70
SONNET	73
JUNE	74

Contents.

xi

	PAGE
THE STAMMERER	78
SONNET	80
A MODERN MORAL	81
SUMMER SONG	85
JULY	87
THE FATALIST	90
SONNET	92
ROSES	93
AUGUST	95
FAR AND NEAR	97
THE STORY OF A SCARLET FLOWER	99
FOR WOMAN'S SAKE	102
ECLIPSE	103
SEPTEMBER	105
LOVE AND PRIDE	108

	PAGE
MY FLOWER	110
OCTOBER	112
AN OLD THOUGHT, THOUGHT ANEW	117
UNFULFILLED	122
NOVEMBER	124
DEPRECATION	125
DECEMBER	127
LISTENING	131

KEY-NOTES.



UPWARD.

WHAT is the tireless key

Of the unheard chorus of things?

Of the ceaseless autumns and springs?

Of the ebbing and flowing sea?

Answer: that we may join in thy chorus, Eternity!

What shall we do to-day

To lessen the total strife?

To forward the total life?

To help the worlds on their way?

To live by the last-learnt law is more than to praise
or to pray.

Why is the fit thing best ?

Why is the best thing fit ?

We work, and we cease from it :—

Do we work for work, or for rest ?

Daily the light comes up in the east to hide in the
west.

Never, never in sight

The Perfect we long to see,

The Perfect we long to be,

The final, immutable Right.

Nay, for the Perfect *grows*, with growth that is in-
finite ;

Over the verges fair

Of the best we can feel and think ;

Ever just over the brink

Of the best we can do and dare ;
Till we ask—"Are there ends at all to purposes
everywhere?"

From stars in the solemn sky,
From the tender flower at my feet,
Certain, and grave, and sweet,
Comes the same eternal reply—
"Upward ! O child of man ! for Progress doth never
die.

"Then lend thy will and thy song
"To the thing that must surely be ;
"For so shall thy life be free,
"And so shall thy speech be strong,
"And thy Will be one with the law that beckons the
worlds along."

JANUARY.

(A SONNET.)

AWAY into the past the minutes slide,
Dies the old year and dies my old distress,
Comes the new year and comes new blessedness,
And every sheathèd bud a hope doth hide.
And every little life may well abide
What yet remains of winter, and caress
Its prison-walls confidingly, and bless
Kind sternnesses that sway the seasons' tide.
For tender is the clasp wherewith the snow,
Clasps the sad earth of winter ; very fair
The faint blue chillness of the moonlit air
In frost-bound midnight. I will rise, and go
Out in the herald hush where stars move slow,
And wait the new year's calm birth-moment there.

UNTO THIS PRESENT.

I

FREE, and yet fast ; fast, and for ever free :
Led in the line of law to liberty,
Sweeping the spirals of invariant space,
On flees the little earth around her sun.
For ever tending to his fiery breast,
For ever tending to the outer cold ;
So held, unfettered, 'twixt her two desires
From either doom ; and of her impotence
Driven, where hindrances are least, along
The curves of gentler possibility.

O little planet ! fated to be free,
And have thy leisure for an æon's space
To bud, and bloom, and grow a teeming thing ;
Cooling, yet lifewards ; darkening into sight

That wakes in many eyes of many lives,
And lights the living into wider light ;—
O little planet ! Chariot of mankind,
Force-drifted from impalpability
Into thy rounded being, and the form
Thy children know thee by,—how sternly kind
Is force, new-differenced as Life, as Love,
As fitness for a freedom yet to be.
Free, and yet fast ; fast, and for ever free !
Thy history is writ in parable :
Man's tale is one with thine, O little world of man !

II.

I looked into the green sea yesterday
And dreamt in outline of that sum of Cause
Which brought it there, and me to watch it curl
Its never sleeping mystery to my feet.

Although so far agone as now appears
Like never, yet I think there was an hour
Down the dim reaches of a cosmic Past,
'Ere the beginnings of the growth of things,
When Fact stayed, poised and centred everywhere ;
And for one pregnant moment of suspense
The awful Infinite had nought to do :—
When universal forces nowhere clashed,
And all through space hung equal formlessness :
When, wrecked, some all-dissolvèd, older Past
Yielded its untired atoms for new work—
Or play—at system-churning ; till there went
Slow, doubtful whirlings through immensity,
And sameness grew new focussed, here or there,
With glimmering, gassy nuclei. So, anon,
These, settling into fluid balls of fire,
Flung forth, all wildly spinning into space,

Planets, and these, all spinning, flung their moons ;
Until, among an unguessed myriad more
This little thing we live to call our world
Grew individual, and puny shone
Among the millions : thence, self-centred, rolled,
An isle of gleaming chaos through the cycled years.

III.

The young world's radiance ebbed away to night,
And a slow-settling darkness veiled her curves,
As she a vaporous mantle for awhile
Drew round her broodingly. And in that gloom
The mystery, Motion, learned a strange new art
In subtle particles. Change after change
Smaller and stiller grew, and more complex
As Life began in darkness. For 'twas then
Under a heaven all murky with the breath

Of young creation rising hot and thick,
Sprung that, which, lighted, had been loveliness.
Fern-forests, haply, at the steaming poles
Spread to the darkness beauty unbeheld,
And forms most gracious in the eye of day
Were born unheralded, and died in night.
Nor so were wasted. What though living eyes
That turn ethereal quiverings into light,
And use the light to find out loveliness—
Not yet were focussed from a vaguer force ;—
Men, retrospective, in this later age,
Learn, by the trace of what they never saw,
A lesson worth the learning. Let it pass.

Dawn conquered e'en the long primeval night,
The blackness thinned, and wept itself away,
And let the light through from the parent sun ;
And life began to know itself as life

In sentient things that joyed in some degree.
New inter-adaptation everywhere
Among material bent on issuing
At last in that supremest, noblest thing
Achieved by all that has been—Consciousness—
The being who not only lived a life,
Loved, joyed, and suffered, slept, and woke again,
But noted it, and recognised himself,
And found some words, and said "I am a man."

IV.

In yon far distance, where the sea and sky
Make of two meeting edges one thin line,
A boundary seems where yet no boundary is
Being persists, and, grandly gradual,
All aspects melt in oneness as we move,
And spite of all our severing, ill-fit names

Cause, as effect, retains its force unspent :
One fact grows smoothly on through changing lights,
Stable alone in instability,
Unchangeable in constant changefulness.

in thine own piteous, piteous ignorance

Break not the calm, continuous tale of growth
Told by the tacit truthfulness of things
With theory of breach. O petty man !
Pause with thy rounded story, in mistrust
Of its full-bloom completeness ! In the face—
The awful face—of deep, unfinished Life
Cast thy neat sketch of things aside awhile ;
Forget thy need of headings to thy page,
Or final flourish hinting all is said.
Learn of thy planet home, man-dazzled man !
The life of man is *not* the end of things.

For, not till earth hid all her fires away,

And gave but borrowed splendour to the night,
Knew she of greater glory than her own,
And, in her children's vision, learnt to see the stars.

v.

Strong, sanely conscious, sweet Philosophy !
I see her dealing with the fevered screams
Of angry, over-certain ignorance ;
She measures men by what they tend to be,
Endures all honest lies right patiently,
Knows them for lies, but knows she knows them so
By knowledge that would make the liar true
Could he lay hold of it : unseeing one !

Grand, unrebelling, sane Philosophy !
Crownèd and calm I see her sit aloft,
Upon the apex of things knowable ;
Her heart the stiller that it is so vast ;

Her deed emergent from her gravest thought
As it illumes, and tempers to the fact
The deepest of her feeling. And around,
Above her spreads the measureless abyss
Time, both ways endless :—all ways endless, space.

O strongly patient, fair Philosophy!
She reads the midmost truth betwixt extremes,
Dreams of the far point whither truths converge,
And, with a question in her thoughtful smile,
Ponders the poetry of paradox.

How highest knowledge waxes negative,
How he who soars the farthest in his thought
Basks in a beatific ignorance,
Knows by his knowledge he can never know,
Sees by the light of sight that he is blind,
And loves the largeness of the total sum
That lured him to be ignorant and wise.

O just, harmonious Philosophy !
She links and interlinks the sciences,
Finds the coherence of a universe,
And oneness in the varied, wide-lived All ;
Reads in a lump of dirt the very law
That rules the being of society,
Kinship between the atoms and the suns,
And reason for a virtue foreshadowed in a clod.

VI.

There is a sense in which the universe
Is pivoted upon a molecule ;
There is a sense in which eternity
Hangs on each moment. Read that sense reversed.
The softest dimple in a baby's smile
Springs from the whole of past eternity ;
Tasked all the sum of things to bring it there,

And so was only barely possible ;
Yet 'twas so one and equal with its cause
'Twould need that whole of past eternity
Cancelled and changed, and every motor force
And every atom through infinitude
Set otherwise agoing, to hinder it.

The future lies potential in the Now ;
The Necessary is the Possible ;
'The two but differing names for one stiff fact,
That fact, the being of whatever is.

Is this dogmatic? 'Tis the normal voice
Of souging breezes, and of singing birds ;
It comes to me 'thwart distant silences
Of interstellar vacancy at night ;
It comes to me from human influence
Drifted through centuries, half-unperceived ;
And in it is an all-embracing Code—

And in it is an all-inspiring Creed—
In what has been man learns the law of life,
Finds Revelation writ as Genesis.

VII.

But now—what says Philosophy of Self?
What thinks her follower of the man he is?
Can he, in presence of the symphony
That rolls around him, played by viewless cause
On suns for instruments, with Life for key,
And the For Ever we can only name
As metronome, to beat out rhythmic bars
Great æons long, in number, numberless—
Can he revert to his small destiny,
As worth a moment's stopping of his ears
While that sweet thundering of the huge "Not Self"
Challenges him to listen while he may?

Aye ; for his egotism is not killed
But only stunned by vastness : now forgot
In the strong consciousness of larger things,
But yet, anon, assertive ; full of rights ;
Measuring worth by " What is that to *me* ? "
And so we look about us for a god
Whom we may bind in trust to work our welfare out.

VIII.

The tacit flux of unexplaining fact
That deals one recompense to one offence
Whether we call the doer " fool," or " knave ;"—
The steady tendency that draws the child
Playing too near a precipice to death,
And holds in safety every wretched life
That fails of chancing on the way to die ;—
This tacit fact, this steady tendency

Breeds our experience, and makes us wise ;
Breathes on our wisdom then, and makes us good.

O man ! thou mad ! thou blind ! thou self-engrossed !
Let thy poor blindness be chastised to sight ;
Grow acquiescent in the least award
Of Nature's fine impartiality ;
Learn that what *is* must measure what thou dost,
That on thy knowledge hangs thy highest fate,
And all thy virtue grows of cosmic growth.

IX.

Daily we die, eternally to live,
Each in the measure of his deathlessness,—
In the undying life of that strong Thing
That once was Chaos, and that shall be God,
But now is Man, and needs the lives of men
To learn its being,—weave its future by.

Freedom is born of fetters ; joy, of pain.
For he who *feels* the gain of greater things
In his own loss, makes of his loss a gain,
And masters so the stern necessity
That so apportioned. When thy will is one
With what must be, with or without thy will,
Thy will grows helpful, and thine act is free.

For mastery is service perfected,
And, being won, yields back obedience
To laws of larger life. 'Tis thus we grow
And feel a world-pulse thrill our hopeful soul,
And feel our bark of life lift on the wave,
With progress, joyous, sure and palpable.

Free, and yet fast ; fast, and for ever free !
Lured by a love-like law in lines of liberty.

x.

Now shall we worship? Aye, but name no name.
A thousand gods, outgrown of growing man,
Strew, with their martyred prophets all the past.
Man's spirit is the father of his god,
When, seeking in his misty ignorance
For sign of meaning in the drift of things,
For trace of purpose in his little life,
His hope—his trust sends forth blind, yearning cries
Which echo back from the mysterious face
Of outer things, transfigured as reply.

Is this so piteous? Nay; but it is well!
Such dreams have brought man up the slippery steep
Of half-learnt rectitude, and made him man.
But now we worship with our faces hid,
And name no name, since All we cannot name.
Our homage to the awfulness of law

Lies in the meekness of the earnest act,
Which, with sweet constancy in its reward,
Deals with us well, and turns our awe to love.

The end lies hid in future victory
Won by the faithfulness of man to Man.
We know not of that end, yet waiting, work,
And, acquiescent, worship while we wait.

Amen.

MORNING.

WHAT'S the text to-day for reading

Nature and its being by ?

There is effort all the morning

Thro' the windy sea and sky.

All, intent in earnest grapple

That the All may let it be :

Force, in unity, at variance

With its own diversity.

Force, prevailing unto action,

Force, persistent to restrain,

In a twofold, one-souled wrestle

Forging Being's freedom-chain.

Frolic ! say you—when the billow

Tosses back a mane of spray ?

No ; but haste of earnest effort ;

Nature works in guise of play.

Till the balance shall be even

Swings the to and fro of strife ;

Till an awful equilibrium

Stills it, beats the Heart of Life.

What's the text to-day for reading

Nature and its being by ?

Effort, effort all the morning,

Thro' the sea and windy sky.

AFTERNOON.

PURPLE headland over yonder,
Fleecy, sun-extinguished moon,
I am here alone, and ponder
On the theme of Afternoon.

Past has made a groove for Present,
And what fits it *is*: no more.
Waves before the wind are weighty;
Strongest sea-beats shape the shore.

Just what is is just what can be,
And the Possible is free;
'Tis by being, not by effort,
That the firm cliff juts to sea.

With an uncontentious calmness
 Drifts the Fact before the "Law ;"
So we name the ordered sequence
 We, remembering, foresaw.
And a law is mere procession
 Of the forcible and fit ;
Calm of uncontested Being,
 And our thought that comes of it.
In the mellow shining daylight
 Lies the Afternoon at ease,
Little willing ripples answer
 To a drift of casual breeze.
Purple headland to the westward !
 Ebbing tide, and fleecy moon !
In the "line of least resistance,"
 Flows the life of Afternoon.

TWILIGHT.

GREY the sky, and growing dimmer,
And the twilight lulls the sea ;
Half in vagueness, half in glimmer,
Nature shrouds her mystery.

What have all the hours been spent for ?

Why the on and on of things ?

Why eternity's procession

Of the days and evenings ?

Hours of sunshine, hours of gloaming,

Wing their unexplaining flight,

With a measured punctuation

Of unconsciousness, at night.

Just at sunset was translucence,
When the west was all aflame ;
So I asked the sea a question,
And an answer nearly came.

Is there nothing but Occurrence ?
Though each detail seem an Act,
Is that whole we deem so pregnant
But unemphasizèd Fact ?

Or, when dusk is in the hollows
Of the hill-side and the wave,
Are things just so much in earnest
That they cannot but be grave ?

Nay, the lesson of the Twilight
Is as simple as 'tis deep ;
Acquiescence, acquiescence,
And the coming on of sleep.

MIDNIGHT.

THERE are sea and sky about me,
And yet nothing sense can mark ;
For a mist fills all the midnight
Adding blindness to its dark.

There is not the faintest echo
From the life of yesterday :
Not the vaguest stir foretelling
Of a morrow on the way.

'Tis negation's hour of triumph
In the absence of the sun ;
'Tis the hour of endings, ended,
Of beginnings, unbegun.

Yet the voice of awful silence
 Bids my waiting spirit hark ;
There is action in the stillness,
 There is progress in the dark.

In the drift of things and forces
 Comes the better from the worse ;
Swings the whole of Nature upward,
 Wakes, and thinks—a universe.

There will be *more* life to-morrow,
 And of life, more life that *knows* ;
Though the sum of force be constant
 Yet the Living ever grows.

So we sing of evolution,
 And step strongly on our ways ;
And we live through nights in patience.
 And we learn the worth of days.

In the silence of murk midnight

Is revealed to me this thing :

Nothing hinders, all enables

Nature's vast awakening.

FEBRUARY.

Now are the days of greyness and of gloom ;

Now are the heavens expressionless and sad :

Crisp winter has departed, yet the glad

Spring-smile has not yet freshened from the tomb.

There is a gleamy sunrise every day,

It mostly into weeping melts away,

Yet upon every dripping, leafless bough

See how the birds sit, singing in the rain ;

Most innocently sure that yet again

Life shall grow lovely : no mysterious " How ? "

Troubles with wistfulness and spoils the strain.

We, self-bound, human weaklings !—need a store

Of hardly-garnered, inward hopefulness.
So to translate a present dim distress
To mean "the future shall but shine the more."
'Tis what we know, and what we partly know
Hinders our sight, at times when, dim and grey,
Soulless as death, shrivels the bloom away
From lovely things; and if our hope would go
Further than sight can lead us, 'tis with pain
And strivings of the will that we attain
Such trustfulness as makes the small bird sing
Of sunshine, shaking sky-tears from its wing,
Knowing the gloom must gladden into spring.

TWO SONGS.

I.

WITH THE TIDE : A CRY OF WEAKNESS.

DEEP, and silent, and wide,

The evening shelters are spread ;

And the tears may flow unread

That' the taunt of day would' have dried.

And oh ! most dear love of mine we may float one
hour with the tide.

I see the great river go,

Fast, where the lamplight gleams

In streaks :—I see how it streams

Through a moment's revealing glow ;

Like a life, from the dark to the dark, that flows
because it must flow.

And the old church-bells divide
The moments of evening-time ;
As a passion-charged soul they chime,
As a sob of near bliss subside ;
And the wild vague flow goes on of the tacit, un-
hinderer tide.

My love ! my love ! are you there
In this hour of stealing drift ?
When through every quivering rift
Of silence there strays an air
Like a whisper of blessed sanction, answering a
hopeless prayer.

I see with a dreamy sight,—
I hear with a half-lent ear,—
How the bells keep showering near,

How the wild flood hurries to-night ;
And lamps on the farther shore keep lending long
gleams of light.

O, reckless of source or end,
Let the great river go !
Adrift on its bosom's flow
One infinite hour to spend ;
Hark ! how the sobbing bells from silence to silence
tend.

There is all day long for the fight
With the deep perverseness of life ;
We may rest one hour from the strife,
As the heavens may rest from light.
O love ! with your lips on mine, drift, drift with the
tide, to-night.

II.

UP STREAM: A SONG OF STRENGTH.

UP stream ; up stream ; deep breaths and long ;
Up stream ; up stream ; slow strokes and strong ;
Pass the wild hurry of ripples along.

Be it a river-flood streaming to sea,
Be it a heart's tide of passion in thee,
Breast it, and brave it ; strike strongly ; be free !

Waves curl to meet it and make it their own ;
Drowned then the stream-song in great ocean-groan ;
Lost then the bright flood where all floods are one.

In eye of the sun-ray, in teeth of the wind,
Leave further and further the wild waste behind,
Where currents are clashing, and forces are blind.

Up, thou ! from sad seas where strong craft are lost ;
Up ! from the vague main where purpose is tossed ;
Up ! wring thy freedom back ! count not the cost !

Up ! toward the hill-land where sources are pure,
Frail blossoms trust the wind, star-skies endure ;
Back to thy child-heart where sanctions are sure.

The flood force is weakness, it drifts by the strand
Of will-less inertia, and slope of the land ;
Dwells mightier might in thy small human hand.

Then up stream ! up stream ! slack not, nor cease
Till strong strokes and many strokes win thy release ;
Till noon bends to evening, and conflict to peace.

SONNET.

1870.

A LITTLE brook doth babble and doth dance,
And in its eddies trap a sunny ray,
And toy with it, and split it every way
Till thousand seeming gems dazzle and glance.
The summer earth lies in a lovely trance,
While a blithe song-bird on the o'erhanging spray
Trills forth his mirth all through the livelong day ;
And some have said this world is ruled by Chance.
O broad, blue lift? wherein the sun is set,
Whence the stars peep and sparkle all the night,
I'll hymn the reign of Love and Purpose yet,
Fit names for chance that issues in your light—
Most happy Chance ! such beauties chance to be ;
I, too ; with ears that hear, and eyes that see.

MARCH.

WILD winds of March ! ruthless, and stern, and cold :

Wild flowers of March ! that tenderly unfold :

Wind, as a voice of sovereign fury, wild,

Flower, only so, as is a peasant's child ;

Why come ye thus together, wind and flower,

Linked hand in hand, a weakness and a power ?

One speaks in both, and doth the storm-wind hold

That it hurt not his primrose ; and his smile,

Mid blustering bleakness, helps the flower meanwhile

With courage to be lovely in the cold.

The god is everywhere, if anywhere,

Ruling the strong and weak with equal care ;

In the wild days when nature's voice is harsh,

Weaving the rudest breath of bitter March,

Yet guarding, that its fragrance may not fail,
The weakest bud that opens in the gale.

One law demands the twain. We are so blind!

Spite of the legend, God is in the wind,

As in the still, small voice with which meanwhile

The meek, pale primrose wakes into a smile.

O little flower! teach me to be bold,

And, like thyself, keep courage in life's bitter cold!

A SONG OF SILENCE.

OVER the edge of silence

My hearing went tripping one day,

And I heard all the tiny laughter

Of tiniest lives at play.

I heard the rhythm of growing

Wherever the herbage stood ;

Wherever the flowers blossomed .

The boom of the bursting bud.

'Then high on a cloud-capt upland

I found the beauty of snow,

I heard how the crystals sparkle,

I heard how the crystals grow,

All night, while the far stars twinkle
A crisp, clear tune of their own ;
Till clouds grow crimson at dawning
To a major, mellower tone.

The world is all set to music ;
O listen, listen with me !
Each separate life is a thread of song,
And the whole is a symphony.

EASTER.

WHERE there are daisies, daisies will be white ;
No human fear can turn them ashen-grey,
Nor human sobbings send one note astray
Of singing larks, aloft in heaven's light.

And we, through tears down-looking on the flowers
That spring, dew-filled and lovely, at our feet,
Pause in our weeping, seeing them so sweet ;
We hinder not their life : they gladden ours.

Men grimly question at their daily task
Why they are born to toil, and toil to die ;
While, clearly larks go trilling up the sky,
Trusting with trust that never thinks to ask.

Yet birds mean little by their minstrelsy,
Flowers wait, accept, but never feel the sun ;
Thy peace, ere yet it comes, must be hard won
That thou mayst know a finer ecstasy.

O weary soul !—world-driven, passion torn,—
That falters, fails, repents, and strives anew,
Envy not thou the fair field-flowers their dew,
Nor little larks their song, thou human born !

Daisies of very helplessness are white ;
Birds chaunt a will-less chorus in the skies ;
Higher than innocence must virtue rise,
Clear-eyed, grave-hearted, for a loftier flight.

Brace then thine inmost spirit to its strife,
Clear thine own wilderness to ordered fields,
And, from the fruit the tree of knowledge yields,
See that thou raise a sapling tree of life.

APRIL.

() SIGHTS, and scents, and sounds of this fair
earth,

When Nature has her way unmarred by man !

From the arched beauty of the rainbow span

That sheds its lustre through an April hour, 6.

To yonder lark's intensity of mirth,

Or the mysterious fragrance of a flower,

There is no imperfection. It is strange

That man alone has power to disarrange,

And, when he will, can mar. Who dare suspect

This creature, called a "crowning work," with

hands

Working the meddling will of intellect,

The more can do the more he understands,

To dim the face of Nature's loveliness,
Or make the sum of all her beauties less !

Sweet April morning ! by what wide mischance
Is it that things more lovely are, in fact,
Where men are few, or steeped in ignorance,
Than where a crowd of thinkers plan and act ?

For such mischance is beauty's self a lie ?
Because she shrinks away and seems to die
When rude man, in the hurry of his need,
Tortures her into usefulness ? when greed
By twisting fair and good things into gold
Makes "progress" one with wealth, and young men
old ?

'Tis well there are some feats beyond our reach ;
'Tis well we cannot climb the rainbow's arc
With earthy tread, to make its glory dark ;
'Tis well no art of man can ever teach

The wind and song-bird trammelled, thought-bound
speech,

Or build sick cities on the mighty sea,

Or make one billow's curve less wildly free.

And though on earth we crowd achievement so

That little flowers have hardly room to grow,

Price-labelled prose may reach not very high ;

We cannot "civilise" and spoil the sky.

Yet stay ! we weep this beauty that we soil,

And shrink from turning all our play to toil ;

But this fair thought may shine athwart our tears,

And hope gleam April-wise on gloomy fears ;

The reign of fitness is not over yet,

We never wholly lose what we regret.

If he be man who blots the sunny sky

With-breath of avarice, and smoke of gain,

Yet man he is who feels relenting pain

For beauty's sickness ; hates to see her die.
The poet in the bosom of the best
Shall *never* starve ; because the law is just
By which it lives, in which we put this trust
That all fair things from final loss Love's Strength
may wrest.

TEMPTATION.

I LOVE thee ! I love thee ! I love thee

Maiden, my Sweet !

I long to take thee, and crown thee,

And kiss thy feet.

Yet the spirit of worship ~~within~~ me

Would ~~fain~~ be sure

That thy fair white ~~form~~ ~~about~~ shadow

Of soul as pure.

I would ~~fain~~ be sure thou art worthy

Of uttermost praise ;

That thou shinest of day ~~within~~ thee,

Not borrowing rays.

I would fain be sure that thy goodness
Is strong and deep,
More than the mild deception
Of self asleep.

I'm longing to try thy spirit
And prove thee best ;
What will most safely serve
For the sacred test ?

I would see thee waver a moment
With shy, soft eyes,
At the wonder of waking sweetness—
Passion's surprise.

I would meet the questioning firmly
Of thy child-gaze,
And—oh ! so loyally—warn thee
Of danger's ways.

I would see thee haughtily flushing
At wrong full seen ;
Spurned from the earliest moment
By my true queen.

Then I would fall before thee,

Knowing thee white ;

And love thee, and woo thee, and worship
With my best might.

Shall I praise then that fair negation,—

Thine Innocence ?

Shall I kindle it into a virtue—

A force intense ?

Shall I show thee the joys of knowledge ?

And risk the woe ?

Shall I rob of flavour all sweetness

That thou dost know ?

Shall I pale into neutral colours

Thy virgin joys,

Till thou turnest away for ever

From broken toys ?

Shall I lay the meaning of life

In thy delicate breast ?

Shall I sound the key-note of strife,

And break thy rest ?

Shall I make of my girl, a woman,

· Holy and wise ?

Or, leave in the mists of morning

Her blind, bright eyes ?

Shall I give to my darling's keeping

Her heart's control ?

Shall I rouse from its slumber a human,

Responsible soul ?

Shall I trust the terror of choice

To her untried will ?

Or, leave her possible strength

Undiscovered still ?

Dare I wake her ear to the pulsing

Of passionate blood ?

Dare I offer the sweetest evil

To prove her good ?

How if I miss my angel

In pluming her wing !

At my touch if she flutter earthward,

A maimèd thing !

Oh ! cannot I throne thee, dear,

But by casting thee down ?

Must I give thee a cross to bear

E'er I find thy crown ?

Or lay on thy tender shoulder
The terrible strain
That might bring thee to saintly honour
Thro' martyrs' pain?

Dare I rob thee of silvery virtues
Because they are pale,
Since thy strength for the winning of golden,
Might utterly fail?

Or, barter the strength of thy blindness
For weakness of will?
Risk thy unmeritorious goodness
For possible ill?

Away with the question! 'Tis bred
Of insatiate pride!
Why, *why* should I claim that an angel
Should come to my side?

What though her best virtue be latent,

Yet is she pure ;—

A flower that knows not its whiteness,—

And so shall endure.

I will leave thee—my snowdrop! my snowdrop!—

Safe in the shade ;

Just as thou art I will love thee,

Dear little maid.

DRIFTING.

A HUMAN soul has slipped its moorings, and the help-
less bark

Goes drifting, drifting, all adrift, without one guiding
spark,

On the boundless main of Being, in the utter dark.

Drifting,—drifting,—drifting in infinite despair ;
Sending spirit-tortured questions shrieking thro' the
air,

“Is there God, or Love, or Purpose, ruling any-
where?”

“Answer! answer! answer!”—So the wretched soul
has cried—

“Any throb from any quarter I would take for guide!”
Broods an unregarding silence on th' eternal tide.

Not a shimmer of a rending in the hideous night ;
Not the faintest token to reward the o'erstrung sight ;
Not a breath of heaven's wind to fill the sail aright.

In the heart a hopelessness, a chaos in the head,
Only helpless driftings, *undriven*, and *unled* :
Aye ! 'tis an awful thing to be, and be abandonèd.

The longer grows the silence, the sicker grows the brain ;
The madder are the red-hot whirlings of the thoughts
in pain ;

—“ Drifting into Nothingness ? and drifting there *in*
vain ? ”

Drifting, oh ! so sadly, through a silent, unruled realm ;
Tired, tired, tired, with clinging to the helm :
Abject longings that the waves might rage—and over-
whelm.

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Comes a faintly sighing Something, nearer, nearer,
nearer ;

Shines a little flickering ray, clearer, clearer,
clearer ;

Grows a little clinging hope, dearer, dearer, dearer.

Drifting—a whole fleet of them!—drifting every
one !

Why? oh! why?—whose are they, Sky?—and why is
each alone?

The question deepens ; yet, methinks, its great despair
is gone:

A fleet of souls, all ignorant, all rudderless at sea,
Each drifted into being, driven adrift thro' mystery
Until they fall asleep of it and driftings cease
to be !

Not one of all the souls can point the others where to
steer ;

Not any voice proclaims with sureness "There is
meaning here ;"

Not one may hold a light to make his neighbour's
vision clear.

Still deaf silence broods athwart a sea of mystery,
Still no beacon focusses the blank obscurity,
Only, in the ghastly void, there wakes a Sympathy.

Whispers go from like to like, and love from soul to
soul ;

A crowd of human loneliness at least is round and
whole ;

Each in the mutual amaze may half forget the
goal.

The hidden goal ! far poised in dense invisibility,
Ruling the sum of being ere itself begins to be,
That strong unborn that wrests effect from cause—
Futurity.

Go, fleet of drifters ! looking hither, thither, thro' the
grey ;

Rejoice in this, at least, that all the drifting sets one
way ;

There is a current, then : maybe it tends towards the
day.

At last—who knows ? a light may break most
beautifully broad

To show ye how the drifting all along the billowy road
Was drifting into life and rest.—Aye ! say it—home
to God.

A FRAGMENT.

O WEARY unfed waiter on sick hope !
Thou petty, peevish, palpitating Self
Whose code and creed turn on the accident
Of what account the seasons make of *the* —
Cease hoping : breathe the morrows as they rise,
And gauge thy life Time-fashion ; as an hour
Named with thy name, and coloured with thy deed,
But given the many-hearted human Kind
To step a forward step in : nothing more.

Self-halo'd personality that clings
To self, as self, all through futurity
Sees not the worth of minutes as they go.
Be spent ; aye ! serve and suffer *merit-less* ;
The force that made thee, made thy virtue too ;

Thou shalt but glean so much of happiness,
As meets the perfecting of Man in thee.
What though no joy may be thy special own,
And skies of life be everygrey for thee,
Happy if thou mayst be a darkened lens
To aid some seer's vision of a broader day.

THE MOTTO.

St. Benedict gave to St. Scholastica as her motto, "Pax."
One night she saw an angel clad in white enter her cell, and
write after the motto two additional words. The words were
"In Deo."

SHE lay 'twixt sleeping and waking,

The fair, pale saint,

Weary with watching and praying,

With fasting, faint.

The cold moon shone from a heaven

Where passions cease,

On the tracèd lines of her motto—

St. Benedict's "Peace."

Peace on the wall's rough coldness

And moonlight fair !

Strife in the saint's young bosom

And moaning prayer !

The moon-ray dwelt on the motto,
 Silvery bright ;
It spread, till an angel stood in it,
 Solemn and white.

He wrote with a pure, slow finger,
 And pointing, stood ;—
Lo! the motto traced to its ending :
 'Twas " Peace—in God."

With wan hands crossed on her bosom
 The meek saint dwelt,
Till the angel passed up the heaven
 She gazing knelt.

Then lay her down in the darkness,
 And softly wept ;
" There is peace—in God," she whispered,
 And so she slept.

MAY.

(A SONNET.)

DIE not, my hope ! it is the month of May,
A fair, fair moon of consummated loves,
Of boughs bloom-laden and of cooing doves,
And garland-weaving children at their play ;—
Fail not, my courage, while the world is gay
With wealth of sunlit green, and liquid song ;
The tender air that lifts the clouds along
Claims echo from thy mood at least to-day.
So shall it fare. Flow May-time into me
And set my soul from its own vision free ;
I will not own a frown upon the air
That all the sweet young flowers find so fair.
The gravest reading of my song shall be
A wistful gladness steadied by a cast-off care.

A TEST.


WHEN health is pulsing in thy veins,
And every sense-gate lets in life;
And all the universe is rife
With ministering to thy gains ;

When, light in heart, and cool in brain,
Life's minor tones are all unheard,
And sorrow is the merest word,
Unmated with the fact of pain ;

Then it is easy, human soul,
To raise glad eyes to skies above,
To hymn a god of light and love,
And muse sweet musings on the Whole.

But when the nerves are all on fire,
When the brain whirls and cannot think,
And the numb spirit seems to shrink
From effort of its best desire ;

Then, if thy hope can lord it still
Above, and through, and in thy woe,
And something in thee dares to know
Good *is*, despite thy being's ill ;

Then hast thou gained a victory,
And found the deepest secret out ;
Thy courage draws the sting from doubt,
Thou hast thine immortality. 

"WHO WILL SHOW US ANY GOOD."

O HUMAN sadness ! mystery of life !

O hearts, most finely tuned for joy or woe

That seldom joy, and often suffer so !

Whose is the Will that issues in your strife ?

The corn-seed sown yields bread, or when it fails

'Tis mere exception. Some success prevails

In all mean forms of life. Their feeble powers

For happiness are satisfied in brutes,

The whole earth speaks a promise through her flowers,

And keeps it, nearly always, in her fruits.

But man ! For every little hour of rest

He must be many, many times distressed ;

For one right granted, crowds must suffer wrong ;

A thousand sorrows go to make one song ;

And every nerve-gate that lets in our bliss
Lets in tenfold the pain. Whose fiat this?
Is there a promised good in present grief?
Maybe! maybe!—the doubt is half belief!
Not from thy narrow self shalt thou grow broad;
Look deeper than thy life to find thy God.

THE SONG-BIRD, AND THE FAIRY.

THERE'S been a lone bird all the day,
The long May-day ;
Singing a song on a beechen-spray
For love of a fay :
A tender, plaintive song, and so sweet,
For the heart that under its plumage beat
Has measured the beat and swell of the lay :—
O fay ! O Sweet !

How shall it be, my fairy fay,
When to-morrow we greet ?
Will you wave white flowers and smile to meet,
And vanish away ?—
Will you sing me a song all golden-gay
And dance with your feet ?

With never a thought of love, my Sweet,
With never a glance at my beechen-spray?

O sweet, fair fay!

I will woo you not in this month of May,

My beautiful fay,

I will only sing, and sing you my song,

I will only love you, and long, and *long*

For a mellower day,

When the autumn's here, and the corn is strong,

And the fair white flowers have perished away

That you love far better than love's own lay

O Sweet! my fay.

Will you hear me then, my fay, my fay?

Will you love my song?

When the flowers are faded upon your way,

And your golden head is all silver grey,

And memories throng?

Will you reach your hand to the beechen-spray,
Will you cherish your bird in that autumn-day,
That sang so long?

Sang all for love of you, fair fay,
Sang, till it sang its youth away!

I can stay my heart, I can stay my lay,
And live, and live, and live for the day
When the dancing and weaving of flowers is done
And your gold is grey:—

Till clouds move thicklier over the sun

I can stay my song:

Till you turn with a sigh to the beechen-spray,
And see it all lit with an evening ray

I can live:—for the love at my heart is strong,
But oh! my darling, my Sweet, my fay,

'Tis long: 'tis long.

SONNET.

1874.

You ask, what have you given?—how solaced me?—

You, whom 'tis duty that I see no more

Lest I should claim—you, give—from your heart's store

Too largely of a perfect sympathy.

This have you wrought: you gave it me to be

A strong-winged spirit that can give you o'er,

You showed me a brave sake to battle for,

You dowered me with a new self-mastery.

This: and, ah! love,—'tis very much to know

The sweet, sad truth and reason of our pain,

The deathless, passionate faith that links us twain

How far soever sundered we may go.

'Tis much to think that should our love—our woe

Grow mortal, it must bring us heart to heart again.

JUNE.

O SUN, that makes haste to be early to look on thy
self-kindled morn,

And to see the most beautiful brightness of dewdrop-
filled daisies at dawn ;

O tears of the gladness of greeting when earth
shakes her short sleep away,

And turns her to meet the long future of one more
intense summer day ;

O fulness of life in the flowers, of joy in the
fledgling's new flight,

There is left no work for the heart at home, when earth
is so full of delight.

I will hark to the innocent secret in whisperings of
tall, flowered grass,

I will read the white lesson of daylight in breeze-
wreathed clouds as they pass,

And, with fullest surrender of spirit to the free
efflorescence of things,

I will think not a thought that is duller than glint of
a dragon-fly's wings ;

My heart shall be tender and trustful, and hold not
a heavier care

Than a butterfly, fluttering 'mong roses at noon, might
carry, nor know it was there.

There are harebells that nodding and swaying defy
the full sunshine to fade ;

There are oaks, in their gnarled firmness, dividing
the noon from the shade ;

There are beetles that shimmer and vanish among
little stones by the bank ;

There are hummings of flight that is seeking, and
perfume of blossoms that thank.

Things seem all youthful and faithful, and life all
earnest and glad ;

Who can believe 'tis the same old earth men say is so
sinful and sad !

So busy the flowers are blowing, so busy, and so
untired ;

So certain the bee is of finding the sweetness her
life has desired ;

So steady the sky stands over to bless all the
kindling and birth

Of a thousand new things in a minute on the teem-
ing, summer-day earth.

O breezes, aglow with the sunbeams ! ye'd utter it
all if ye could—

The tending of things to be conscious of life: the
tending of life to be *good*.

THE STAMMERER.

(A VILANELLE.)

COULD I but sing that song
I heard in my heart to-day,
Perish would sorrow and wrong.

Sorrows a million strong

As mist would vanish away,
Could I but sing that song,

Beauty would triumph along

Free as the mood of May ;
Perish would sorrow and wrong.

Words to my strain belong

That I labour in vain to say !—
Could I but sing that song,

'Twould sever each servile thong,

'Twould cleave the night with a ray,
Perish would sorrow and wrong.

It fails on the stammerer's tongue,

The beautiful, heavenly lay :—
Could I but sing that song,

There'd be a transfigured throng

Up-looking, and all one way ;
Perish would sorrow and wrong.

Years of the future are long,

Perhaps in a distant day
Some one may sing that song,
The death-knell of sorrow and wrong.

SONNET.

1872.

THERE is a scepticism born of love,
 Rooted in longing for the doubted thing,
 In which the weary heart goes questioning,
Nor dare believe what most it yearns to prove.
There is a dread lest further light bring woe ;
 As in our human love's intensity,
 That dares not trust for lack of certainty,
So, faintly pines perhaps where joy should glow.
There is a duty for love-grounded doubt,
Not in forgetting, but in finding out ;
Take thou thy wish, assume its truth, and act ;
 For finding out still lies in trial made,
 Truth aye is wholesome, be it light or shade ;
Doubt is a bootless pain ; thy hope may grow to fact

A MODERN MORAL.

"Work while it is called To-day. The night cometh."

DID not the Seer see indeed ?

Did not the Christ-voice tell
That having each one little life
We needs must live it well ?

With simple measurement of good
That reckons not by time,
But deems life-worthy each firm step
Of man's progressive climb ?

You tell me life is pitiful
Since I must die one day :
You ask me why I need to work,
Since wisely I might play.

But does my death that is to be
 Make pain less bitter now?
Or joy, less joy, that I may bring
 To clear yon mourner's brow?
Or sin less poisonous that saps
 To-morrow's human strength?
Or virtue less a blessed thing
 That wins it back at length?
And must I be content to rest
 And leave my brother sad,
Because to-morrow I may fail,
 Through death, to make him glad?
Oh! help the prophet to be bold
 The poet to be true!
It yet remains for man to learn
 What love to man may do.

With faith not pent within a book,
Or buried in a creed,
But growing with the expanding thought,
And deepening with the need.

A faith that laughs in little joys
Of children at their play,
That weeps in every woman-grief,
And prays when heroes pray.

A faith whose parable is plain
And needs no priest to tell ;
Its law " Be kind, be pure, be just ;"
Its promise—" Thence, be well."

It says not surely " Self shall live
" And sleep shall never come ;"
But rather, " Life shall all be joy,
" And all un-pain the tomb."

" And joy just one with sentience,
" And sentience, planet-wide,
" Where many men have done their best,
" And doing it, have died."

" What is, is good, yet not the best ;
" A better is to seek ;
" And so for ever each must strive,
" With purpose strongly meek."

Well ; is this comfortless and cold ?

What wails that child about ?

Let us just soothe him into smiles,

Then we will talk it out.

A

SUMMER SONG.

SING! sing me a song that is fit for to-day,
Sing me a song of the sunshine, a warm sweet lay,
Blue larkspur, and bold white daisies, and odour of
hay.

Breathe : breathe into music a summer-day tune,
Learnt of the bloom-heavy breezes and honey of
noon,
Full of the scent, and the glow, and the passion of
June.

You shall sit in the shadow to learn it, just under the
trees ;

You shall let the wind fan you and kiss you, and hark
to the bees ;

You shall live in the love-laden present, and dream at
your ease.

And skylarks shall trill all in concert up, up in the
blue,

And the bee and the lazy-winged butterfly dance to it
too,

While you sing me a song of the summer that's ancient
and new.

JULY.

OVER the earth there hangs a cloud-knit frown,
Now and again a savage, sudden gust
Breaks the hot hush, and flings aloft a dust
Choking the thirsty leaves, so sombre grown
In their staid middle age. July is here ;
The bloom is gone, the fruit doth not appear.
These sultry noons warp the round lines of truth ;
In thought-worn years men mourn for thoughtless
youth,
And hardly note the coming of the fruit
For 'plaining that the birds have all grown mute.
A heaped-up blackness gathers in the west
As the sun dips, and July's dewless night
Grows thundrous as it ages. Hours for rest

Are loud with clamour, lanced with lurid light,
And fitful, frenzied gusts, all armed with hail,
Deafen the darkness.

Then, when efforts fail
To find forgetfulness in blessed sleep,
When the sheer weariness of heart and brain
Hinders the rest both need, 'tis hard to keep
The patience that abides through present pain.
Where are the smooth, sweet lessons that were learnt
In smiling May, or bright, contented June?
Did we not sing of Purpose over-soon,
Judging too hopefully the light o'erhead?
The light is gone. Why trust the fairer days
Just for their fairness, and neglect to see
An equal truth in gloom? Spring's purest rays
Were not more real than this loveless glare,
Shattering the blackness of the thunder air.

O soul! that trembles lest it lose its trust
Must thou doubt Goodness if thou wouldst be just?
One question answer. Which most firmly stands?
The murk earth-clouds, muttering this sultry night?
Or the calm canopy they hide from sight?
The cool, far clearness where the planets spin,—
Long, restful reaches vexed not by our din?
Or these near tempests, swept o'er summer lands?
Wait till the morning; see the blue dilate
Just where the savage flash was flung of late,
And own, if thou art just, the quiet smile
Of heaven was there, though hidden, all the while.

THE FATALIST.

O SORRY soul of mine !

O faltering will !

Slow progress, swift decline,

O good, and ill !

What means the fight in thee ?

What seekest thou to be ?

We have our little powers

And live awhile

With harmless habitude,—

Hearts free from guile ;

Till fortune's shocks grow rude ;

Then, where the nobler good ?

Intelligence that grows,

And yet is sure ?

The purity that knows,

And yet is pure ?

The sacrifice unpaid

Still gladly, freely made ?

Is all the good in man

Fate's poor pretence ?

Blind custom, blindly led—

All innocence ?

Never a sure-toned voice ?

Never a clear-eyed choice ?

O sorry soul of mine !

O faltering will !

Through progress, through decline,

Life never still :

O fated, and not free !

What means the fight in thee !

SONNET.

1876.

I THOUGHT I was quite happy yesterday ;
I thought I was, and told mine own heart so,
But in the telling felt a tremor go
Down thro' the joy that clove a secret way
To where a little shivering sorrow lay
Deeper than joy, and yet I do not know
Whether, if I could kill that hidden woe,
The joy might not be driven too away,
So close the twain are. Nay, in our best life
So blent are pain and gladness, rest and strife,
To make our draughts of joy quite pure and clear
Fate drops into the cup a human tear ;
A sigh for one who may not share its bliss
Will sometimes rise and mingle in love's own dear kiss.

ROSES.

(A VILANELLE.)

THERE are roses white, there are roses red,
Shyly rosy, tenderly white ;—

Which shall I choose to wreath my head ?

Which shall I cull from the garden-bed

To greet my love on this very night ?

THERE are roses white, there are roses red.

The red should say what I would have said ;

Ah ! how they blush in the evening light !

Which shall I choose to wreath my head ?

The white are pale as the snow new-spread,

Pure as young eyes and half as bright :

THERE are roses white, there are roses red.

Roses white, from the heaven dew-fed,
Roses red for a passion's plight,
Which shall I choose to wreathe my head?

Summer twilight is almost fled,
Say, dear love! have I chosen right?
There are roses white, there are roses red,
All twined together to wreathe my head.

AUGUST.

(AN IMPROMPTU.)

'Tis harvest-time, and ruddy cornfields are
A poem, or a homily on war,
As pleases the observer. I have been
Where no corn is, and many things are green,
Into the holiest depth of beechen wood
To learn the secret of the August mood.

I felt the very heart-throb of the hush
Answer the "chuck, chuck" of the startled thrush;
I saw the shy, red squirrel start aside,
And eye me round a tree-stem's further side
In timorous doubt to flee, or only hide.
I saw the bracken-pinions wave and sway
Bent 'neath an airy burden of blue sky;

Then, tangled shade—where chance made harmony
Of thousand random branches' interplay.
Stray glints of outer noon lay on the leaves,
And flecked the shade with lacy quiverings
That danced to music of the wild bee's wings
In sylvan holiday.

You sing of sheaves—
Of bread-fields ripe for garnering ; yet, see !
'Tis good to go from busy harvest glare
Into the August solitudes, and there
To learn how lovely idleness may be,—
How idle, loveliness,—where woods grow free,
And bracken-fronds and berried brambles are.

FAR AND NEAR.

FAR away in the gleamy day
Stand the fir-clad serious hills,
Letting lights and shadows over them play
As the mood of the morning wills.

They are woods to me which afar I see
Dark massed in the mountain breeze,
Yet to sheltered birds in the midst of them
They are trees, and trees, and trees.

Ever so high in the far, fair sky
Goes a drifting cloud of white ;
And the ether round seems a firmer thing
Than its form of expressed light.

Yet I know up there in the silent air
I should find its light a shade ;
Only the skyey mile between
The beautiful brilliance made.

So woods that gleam in the shifting beam
Are fir-trees, single and grim ;
There's indifferent mist where the cloudlet is,
And a sigh in the heart's best hymn.

"Where—*what* is Truth?" To our asking youth
Comes a strange two-voiced reply :
O soberly hear the Far, the Near,
Till the twain melt in harmony.

THE STORY OF A SCARLET FLOWER.

A WHITE flower blew on a summer day,
A rude hand plucked it to cast away,
And it sprang up, a weed, on the king's highway.

So, deeply wounded, and yet not slain,
There came on its petals a scarlet stain,
(Will it ever—oh! *ever*—be white again?)

For the soul of the flower was perishing,
And the form of the flower did boldly spring
A noisome, a winsome wayside thing.

Some trampled it down in the race for wealth,—
Poor dusty weed!—and returned by stealth
To breathe the breath of its poisoned health.

Some, mocking, praised its flaming red,
And some went by with offended head,
And still the flower-soul bled, and bled.

All day it said to the careless eye,
“Praise me, or mock me, for what care I?
“Let me eat and drink, for to-morrow I die!”

All day it so mutely, mutely pled—
The white soul prisoned beneath the red—
“Help me! I'm weary, and nearly dead.”

And many gave ear to the scarlet lie;
Yet to that dumb prayer beneath the sky,
Not one! *not one* of the passers-by!

Till there came a man in a heaven-sent hour
Who stayed to gaze on the scarlet flower,
And there fell some drops of a morning shower.

“ I will save thee, Flower, from a dusty end,

“ I will ask the heavens kind dews to send,

“ I will bear thee home for my lady to tend.

“ I will give thee tenderest, sternest care,

“ I will give thee the purest of garden air,

“ Till thy petals grow white and exceeding fair.

“ Meet for the children at Whitsuntide,

“ Or to wreathe the brow of a virgin bride,

“ Or to lay on the pillow where baby died.”

So instead of the dust it breathed the dew,

And the scarlet cooled to a purer hue ;

Till the white flower soul looked sweetly through,

And the children loved it, as children do.

FOR WOMAN'S SAKE.

FOR woman's sake, my brother, be thou man,
And neither worm nor worldling. Raise thyself
To that ideal that the purest soul
Thou lovest sees in thee, and deems thou art.
Mount on the stepping-stones of her fair trust
To be the substance of her loveliest thought,
For ever she will learn to mirror thee
And show thee thine own image in her soul
Transfigured or distorted. Teach her well.
A large religion claims thee in such heart
As trusts thee utterly : thy Bible read
In the true eyes that look to thee for guide,
Seeking no dearer heaven than thy love.
Thy Code is writ in her belief in thee ;
Thou art her creed. Oh ! be that creed thy law.

ECLIPSE.

(A SONG.)

O MOON, in harvest heaven

Silver bright !

She is coming—my beloved—

All in white ;

Thro' the dewy, dewy grass

I shall hear the maiden pass

Tripping light.

O changing moon in heaven !

Clouding fate !

I have waited, I have waited,

And I wait ;

There's a rustle in the grass,
Yet my maiden doth not pass ;
She is late.

O lurid moon in heaven,
Dim and red !
In the darkness I have hearkened
For her tread ;

O alas ! and alas !
Where my love was fain to pass
Lay a viper in the grass ;
She is dead.

SEPTEMBER.

O SUNSHINE in September ! golden-green
Through beechen woods, lap in thy mellow sheen
The vista of my days ; show hope afar,
And teach me to accept the things that are
With such a patient grace as is thine own,
Though one more summer be for ever flown.

My heart's uneasy, glowing autumn sun,
In the Septembers of its circumstance,
Ever so ready in its ignorance
To feel as though a dismal goal were won.
Each hope laid by, or through fruition, passed
Into a memory, seems like my last ;
And so it is I sigh most wearily
As if were proved a life's futility.

O to be patient still, in gentle faith !
To smile with no defiance in the heart,
To deem that whole of which my life is part
Worthy my life's expense. Loss is not death,
But, maybe, just the clipping of bold wings
Where flight were harmful. Autumns lead to springs,
Although a rayless pause between gives room
To lay what profits not in fitting tomb.

Ah ! mellow splendours of the autumn day,
Do with me all the life-ward things ye may ;
Kindle me, lest a deadly, numbing pain
Born of inaction, and the taunt of things,
Sap all the little, vital, inner springs
That yet might float me into peace again.

O star-specked purple of the autumn night !
Hint all thou canst of purpose infinite,
Even in my small spirit's human strife,

Even in my so ragged little life.
Prop up the habit of unseeing trust,
That hopes in goodness just because it must ;
Shine on, September sun, submiss, and sure
That summer's passion may be given o'er
And life be yet worth living ; gleam and glow
Although the flowers are daily fading so ;
Hint, if thou truly mayst, that autumn light
Is not *all* memory, but long, long sight
That dares look on, and 'thwart the deadening grey
Of coming winter sees a gladness on the way.

1872.

LOVE AND PRIDE.

I COULD have striven for you, dear,
To save your spirit strife ;
I could have suffered, aye ! and died
If you had needed life :
But since you ask no boon of me
I'll love you very quietly.

I could have been a saint, for you,
Or stooped to meanest fame ;
The stair to heaven or path to hell,
With you, were all the same :
But since you do not beckon, dear,
My life shall wait, unprovèd, here.

'Tis very hard to give no gift,
To yearn, and yet to bide ;
The keenest pain that lovers know
Is love's own patient pride ;
But since no service, dear, you ask,
My heart accepts the sterner task.

MY FLOWER.

Oh ! it waited all through the year to bloom,
Waited, and weathered the wind, the gloom,
Pent, and folded, and shaded ;

Oh ! it blossomed at last for an hour, an hour,
The beautiful, beautiful sun-kissed flower !

And at blaze of the noontide, faded.

Faded, and fell in the fervid air
That had nursed its waking and made it fair ;

Dead with the passion of living :

Oh ! spent, and lost, for ever and aye !

A year of work for an hour of play !

A gift withdrawn at the giving !

How shall I measure the good, the ill,

The pain of waiting, the pain of fill,

Long hoping and short fruition ?

Shall I nip the buds lest they shed their flowers

In the swift, sweet warmth of meridian hours ?

Shall I call the shedding, perdition ?

No ; buds must open, and flowers must blow,

So kiss them passing and let them go,

With not too heavy a sorrow !

Petals are frail of the fairest flower,

Yet the fruit at its broken heart hath power

To yield new beauty to-morrow.

OCTOBER.

O STILL, sweet mornings, silvery with frost ;
O holy, early sunsets, full of calm ;
When the spent year has seen her utmost fruit
And beautifully leans towards her doom.
I think, if I could choose my hour to go
Into the unknown infinite, 'twould be
While earth is lying patiently bereft
During this yearning month ;—while summer holds
A failing hand across the narrowing days
To meet the stern, cold grip of winter : smiles
The last sweet effort of her life away,
And bids October mourn in gold and grey.
'Tis not quite hopefulness I gather there,
And yet methinks it is not quite despair,

But a resigning, with a painless will,
Of what was lovely once,—is lovely still,
And yet must go.

O mystery of Death !

The formless blank that margins liveliest life :
We turn the weary face towards the wall,
We wish less vehemently hour by hour,
We let the thought-worn spirit ebb away
Into unconsciousness, and as we fail
No more have energy to question God,
Or men, or things, but dimly think it strange
That ever it had seemed to matter so !

Are there degrees of dying ? or, when breath
Has ceased for ever, are men all the same ?
Do varying intensities of death
Mark of past lives which most deserved the name ?
Where noble purpose, unfulfilled, subsides

With the out-ebbing of a human life,
With the slow-slacking beat of noble heart
That erewhile did conceive it, is no sign
Vouchsafed to mark the lapse from death of such
As all his life long kept his soul asleep?
Each did his nothing. One, from lack of days,
Or lack of God's help—opportunity;—
The other, from the lack of purpose, or
Of force to wield it: now it seems all one;
Each dies his death; the nothing that is done
Has less of satire for the selfish fool
Than for his loftier brother.

Earth's fair things

Perish so unresistingly; the while
They meet the autumn as they met the spring,
Lovely and acquiescent; for the year
Seems never surer,—less indifferent

Than when the woods are withering and *aglow*,
And oaks in calmness let their acorns go
To fare as they are able in the dark.

Let the true aspirant endure to leave
His precious noblest thought. Aye! bear to die
Not seeing it prevail. 'Thou feeble man!
Meet the inevitable with strong trust
That waste *is not*, but fitness everywhere;
And though thy thought had seemed so very good
Its worth might well have won thy fame for thee,
Mistrust that love of it as *thine own* thing;
In measure of its fitness, not *as thine*,
'Twill rule the life-blood of posterity,
And make of man meet master of his ways.
Good is too strong to need thy consciousness,
But, having blest thy vision, lets thee die.

O prophet! live the flowering future through

In present days, however chill and few ;
Catch the vast measure of the march of man
And read a cycle in an hour ; for he,
And only he, may live immortally
Who lives, the while he lives, in tune with life
That lives for ever. Prophet ! having lived
And quickened with thy word some further soul
And sent a-ringing through eternity
The chord thy hand was formed to strike, and leave,
Thou shalt, October-wise, resign thy breath
Glad with faint echoings from a future life
Grown beautiful and great beyond thine hour of
death.

AN OLD THOUGHT, THOUGHT ANEW.

I DREAM a good, good time is coming; 'tis not very near,
Yet near enough to fire a will, and make a duty dear ;
A time when every heart shall hope, and not one
heart shall fear.

I hear the whisper of its coming in such tone to-day
As wise men use when they prevail, and good men
when they pray,

I hear its herald utterance in what their children say.

A time when patient work shall win sweet hours that
never cloy,

When bliss can never be too sweet, nor further bliss
destroy ;

A time when joy is fruitful grown, and joying brings
more joy.

A time when poets hymn no beauty in corrupt delight,
When never learning kills a flower, nor quenches stars
 at night,

A time when gentleness shall reign, and love alone
 make "right."

A time when Science, loved and trusted, needs no
 priests' defence,

A time when virtue, grown almighty, outshines inno-
 cence,

When strength of hand and strength of thought have
 lost their insolence.

Oh! do not slay my hope in it! my name must
 quiver too

Down all the ages unto it, a fibre in the clue

That guides great_crowds to liberty through what is
 pure, and true.

But what the Power among us *now* to claim our holiest
trust,
To bless our best, and curse to death all lying, and all
lust,
To change an outer scourge of Duty to an inner
“must?”

Why, even in the black and lying present, full of hell,
When only those who know not ill succeed in doing
well,
And blindness stumbles in the snare that seers fear to
tell ;

One strength alone is strong to sweeten woman's
bitterest tear,
To force the sinner into sighs, and check the cynic sneer,
One strength, I say, which swells my heart and brings
the good time near.

Before it every riot-force at war with Man shall quail ;
For even here, and even now, it sometimes doth
prevail

Where sermon, science, sentiment, and even scorning
fail.

Hear me ! Of sinner, scoffer, fool, a hero ye shall make,
Aye ! train to honest service e'en the world-old awful
snake,—

When ye have found for each, for all, some well-
belovèd Sake.

One text, one parable, one law the living Life
approves ;

Joy shall be one with duty when each spirit largely
loves,

And all be wise as serpents then, and harmless as the
doves.

O Love ! come down and bless our toil and turn our
pain to peace ;

O Love ! come near to each of us and make our
weeping cease ;

O Love ! O blessed, perfect Love ! release thy world !
release !

1878.

UNFULFILLED.

ERE yet the sunlight caught it where it lay,

I saw a snow-flake vanish utterly ;

I saw a blossom perish on the spray,

Ere yet its petals opened to the bee :

I heard a yearning dissonance to-day

Fail, ere it found its final harmony.

These, symbols : yet—O saddest, and O best

Of Nature's unfulfilments !—one hath passed

Unscarred by any heart-strife to her rest

Who, scarcely fed, gave thanks for life's repast,

And ere love's first full throb had stirred her breast

Praised God for love, and smiling, smiled her last.

Well ! well ! such vanishings are breathings stilled
Ere yet they grew intense, and turned to sighs ;
We curse the stern world-providence that willed
The light away from waking baby-eyes ;
We sing the dirges of the Unfulfilled,
We suffer ; not the innocence that dies.

It dies at our, and not its own expense,
We loved it, for it was exceeding white ;
Who knows ? — strong draughts of utmost sentience
Had left it, fevered, in a lurid night !
Better a thousandfold that, lost to sense,
It lingers yet—the memory of a Light.

NOVEMBER.

(A SONNET.)

O SADNESS of November ! when, forlorn,
The grey year has outlived her latest leaf,
And lies, too dim and numb for any grief,
Between fruition past, and hope unborn ;—
When fog inertly shrouds unbeauteous morn
In pulseless and dishevelled apathy
That cares not if the day begin to be,
So futureless it is—so very worn !
Such moods are ours when life outlives its love
And has no tears, nor any warm regret ;
When sense hangs soulless as the clouds above
That lack the force to rain ; but linger yet
Veiling drear things that live not any more,
Yet are not dead enough to bury and deplore.

DEPRECATION.

O SAY! must goodness die with creeds,

And man lose all his love?

His patience, purity, and peace?

And backward, downward move

To where his bestial life shall be

A wreckèd thing, from conscience free?

If so, then spare the dear old tales

That told of right and wrong;

That helped him here, and cheered him there,

And made him sometime strong.

Draw not his gaze from fancied skies:

If truth be Death, then give him lies.

Or better still if ye may read

Through lies, a thing that's true,
And value truth a little less

Unless 'tis goodness too ;

There lives a good that is not vain,
'Tis love-lit hope ; 'tis self-hood slain.

DECEMBER.

WINTER ; and loveliness of frosty hours :
Winter, and frost ; and sorrow of the poor :
More than one half of all the men alive
Forced, by the struggle 'twixt the hurling power
Of orbit motion, and the stiff, strong pull
Of yon white sun,—to be immersed in cold.

Snow crystals ! tiny, perfect, everywhere :
Man's work and Nature's crisply fringed with hoar
That sends a gem-hued sparkle through the eye
Into the gladdened consciousness behind,
And helps the poet to sufficient theme
For kindling verse where prose was yesterday.

What? will he glibly, gaily, dare extol

The levelling force of whiteness, and the robe
Of beauty thrown alike o'er hut and hall,
And miss the lesson of it? Let him pause!
A ledge exists where snow-flakes can be lodged;
There they *are* lodged, and there their beauty is,
And, being snow, their coldness; tho' the shelf
Be shoulder if a baby, scarcely clad,
And dying of it, or the cosy eaves
That hold the flakes away from ruder lives,
Fitter to weather winter circumstance—
Admiring and not dying of the snow.

I do not trust the unreflective praise
That would appropriate the fair "must be"
As man's especial, heaven-sent heritage.
For he who calls the glory of the world
His own, his right, his message from a God
Intent on beautifying life for man,

Will find his logic sadly overset,
And all his music stricken out of tune
When he, perchance, shall find his own delight
Hangs on that fact that strikes a brother dead.

We skim the surface of the Actual,
Daub it with moral, wall it round with names,
Fit puny, arbitrary adjectives
Where Fact is subtle, mergent, and *itself*,
Until we see no more the real drift
Of Being, nor coherence in the tale
Perpetually uttered everywhere.

Meanings are made and fastened by our moods,
Things only mean themselves : each fact proclaims
By its existence, but that it exists :
What *is*—not what it stands for—is the theme
Of Nature's teaching. Let us learn that first,
Grave lessons learnt of cosmic constancy

Work in us patience. Thence, more safely true
Live we our lives, law-tempered, soberly,
But ever law-rewarded. And, unchilled
By doubt of irony in sun or sky,
We learn to smile up in the face of fact
And praise its fitness, fitly. Let us learn :
For certainty attained we acquiesce ;
And acquiescence wins the way to Happiness.

1874.

LISTENING.

HARK ! how the inarticulate hum of crowds
Grows to a sad-voiced, individual cry
Of massive meaning : an immense demand—
Flung from a deeper depth than consciousness
Up to the highest sky of thronèd law ;—
It questions Cause and Fate, with passionèd will
To know why souls are driven through the world
From womb to grave, relentlessly, and forced
To ache all day but to forget at night.
Hear how the babble grows ! A piteous throng
Swear by their gods a new lie every day :
Each busy with some flimsy, trivial thread,
Man-woven, which he deems of fibre fit
To string the worlds upon, or moor the ship

Of Being in eternity's mid-sea.

We want a gospel, brothers!—some fair truth
To tell to souls all sickened with despair
At daily missing of their daily hope,
Spent with the ceaseless beating up the stream
Of counter-circumstance, or fiercer tides
Within the soul;—so spent, and asking why.
We want a gospel that is not a lie,
Nor will be proved one in to-morrow's light;
Yet no severe negation, to undo
The meaning of the world for those who toil:
No utterance, however propped with proof,
That shall untune the heart, or paralyse
Men's will to live. E'en truth rings false when told
In ears unripe for hearing; and to eyes
Unready for the strength of its great shine
The prophet-vision of a transient Self

Flashing into a blent, undying life
Seems but a lurid mockery of dawn :
A revelation ;—but of ghastliest gloom.

Arise, ye prophets ! See, we ask a Creed
For meek, dependent souls that, shivering, stand
Aghast to see their deity dissolve
In evanescent mist of prejudice.
Chaunt us some hymn to re-inspire poor hearts
That wisdom's echo mocks of their fair dream.
Laws thicken round so unexplainingly,
And hearts grow weary of their taunting claim
For aye demanding, and when all is given
Sending them empty down the years to die.

Unbend, ye sages ! See, we want a Code ;
Men are aglow to live for some great sake,
Or die, if need be. Willing souls, alert
To seize on duty, ask where it is due.

Have ye no answer? Must your gospel wait
A few slow centuries, while men fight on
For myths, or for negations, or deny
All law because your code is not quite shaped
To suit their manners yet? Oh! surely, morn
Grows through the twilight ere it reaches noon
And is but differing daylight all the while.

Prophets! who have the vision and the speech,
Who see in fitful darkness total light,—
Who clothe eternal tones in syllable,—
Give men their gospel writ so they may read.
Gods are all dwindling in the eye of Man,
Yet as they fade he reaches after them
Crying aloud for "duty," and the "right."
He must be noble yet! though altars fall,
And oracles grow silent; for the law

That made him, made him love nobility,
And claims his soul from out its very midst.

Ye sages ! find him reason for his law !

Ye poets ! sing it into warmth and light !

For truth lives on in fluctuating shape,
And utterance as shifting as the hour
That sees a flower venture from the bud
To try the air of April. Yea, it lives
All up the conscience-lighted slope of thought
Where science travels humbly, lamp in hand,
And the rough ore of verity lies locked
From the unskilled and asking multitude.
Send down a cry from heights these have not trode ;
“ We see a light ahead in Reason’s road ! ”

Well ! well ! our night is full of earnestness—
Blind earnestness to see, and deaf to hear,

And holy earnestness in sorest pain
Labouring for the birth of better good.
Hark ! far and near a beautiful behest
Bids every soul seek tunefulness with all ;
Whereto obedient, gathering mind to mind,
Most wistfully we seek for harmony,
Though it be but companionship in loss,
Though it be but a harmony of sighs.

And so men seem to strive beneath the stars
In the deep hunger of their common need ;
They *might* be happy, but they *would* be just,
And only happy so. The godless band
Have slain their very gods for conscience-sake,
And with a human, disallowed regret
Stand sternly yet upon the sepulchres,
Clam'ring for purity, for equity,

Scarce knowing why they clamour.

Truth, bend down !

Soft clothed in some emotion deep as life,

Wide as all Living, loveable as man,—

Bend down to meet all upward-yearning souls ;

Let them not sob themselves to sleep again

Till each has felt the universal Heart

Waking within him, and the great "worth while"

Of Time and Nature claiming his least deed

To weave in fabric of a new world-blessedness.

1876.

THE END.