

BRONTË ANNE, BRONTË
CHARLOTTE, BRONTË EMILY

**POEMS BY
CURRER, ELLIS,
AND ACTON
BELL**

**Anne Brontë
Emily Brontë
Charlotte Brontë
Poems by Currer,
Ellis, and Acton Bell**

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Anne Brontë

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POEMS BY CURRER BELL

PILATE'S WIFE'S DREAM

I've quenched my lamp, I struck it in that start
Which every limb convulsed, I heard it fall —
The crash blent with my sleep, I saw depart
Its light, even as I woke, on yonder wall;
Over against my bed, there shone a gleam
Strange, faint, and mingling also with my dream.

It sank, and I am wrapt in utter gloom;
How far is night advanced, and when will day
Retinge the dusk and livid air with bloom,
And fill this void with warm, creative ray?
Would I could sleep again till, clear and red,
Morning shall on the mountain-tops be spread!

I'd call my women, but to break their sleep,
Because my own is broken, were unjust;
They've wrought all day, and well-earn'd slumbers steep
Their labours in forgetfulness, I trust;
Let me my feverish watch with patience bear,
Thankful that none with me its sufferings share.

Yet, oh, for light! one ray would tranquillize
My nerves, my pulses, more than effort can;
I'll draw my curtain and consult the skies:
These trembling stars at dead of night look wan,
Wild, restless, strange, yet cannot be more drear
Than this my couch, shared by a nameless fear.

All black – one great cloud, drawn from east to west,
Conceals the heavens, but there are lights below;
Torches burn in Jerusalem, and cast
On yonder stony mount a lurid glow.
I see men station'd there, and gleaming spears;
A sound, too, from afar, invades my ears.

Dull, measured strokes of axe and hammer ring
From street to street, not loud, but through the night
Distinctly heard – and some strange spectral thing
Is now uprear'd – and, fix'd against the light
Of the pale lamps, defined upon that sky,
It stands up like a column, straight and high.

I see it all – I know the dusky sign —

A cross on Calvary, which Jews uprear
While Romans watch; and when the dawn shall shine
Pilate, to judge the victim, will appear —
Pass sentence—yield Him up to crucify;
And on that cross the spotless Christ must die.

Dreams, then, are true – for thus my vision ran;
Surely some oracle has been with me,
The gods have chosen me to reveal their plan,
To warn an unjust judge of destiny:
I, slumbering, heard and saw; awake I know,
Christ's coming death, and Pilate's life of woe.

I do not weep for Pilate – who could prove
Regret for him whose cold and crushing sway
No prayer can soften, no appeal can move:
Who tramples hearts as others trample clay,
Yet with a faltering, an uncertain tread,
That might stir up reprisal in the dead.

Forced to sit by his side and see his deeds;
Forced to behold that visage, hour by hour,
In whose gaunt lines the abhorrent gazer reads
A triple lust of gold, and blood, and power;
A soul whom motives fierce, yet abject, urge —
Rome's servile slave, and Judah's tyrant scourge.

How can I love, or mourn, or pity him?
I, who so long my fetter'd hands have wrung;

I, who for grief have wept my eyesight dim;
Because, while life for me was bright and young,
He robb'd my youth – he quench'd my life's fair ray —
He crush'd my mind, and did my freedom slay.

And at this hour-although I be his wife —
He has no more of tenderness from me
Than any other wretch of guilty life;
Less, for I know his household privacy —
I see him as he is – without a screen;
And, by the gods, my soul abhors his mien!

Has he not sought my presence, dyed in blood —
Innocent, righteous blood, shed shamelessly?
And have I not his red salute withstood?
Ay, when, as erst, he plunged all Galilee
In dark bereavement – in affliction sore,
Mingling their very offerings with their gore.

Then came he – in his eyes a serpent-smile,
Upon his lips some false, endearing word,
And through the streets of Salem clang'd the while
His slaughtering, hacking, sacrilegious sword —
And I, to see a man cause men such woe,
Trembled with ire – I did not fear to show.

And now, the envious Jewish priests have brought
Jesus – whom they in mock'ry call their king —
To have, by this grim power, their vengeance wrought;

By this mean reptile, innocence to sting.
Oh! could I but the purposed doom avert,
And shield the blameless head from cruel hurt!

Accessible is Pilate's heart to fear,
Omens will shake his soul, like autumn leaf;
Could he this night's appalling vision hear,
This just man's bonds were loosed, his life were safe,
Unless that bitter priesthood should prevail,
And make even terror to their malice quail.

Yet if I tell the dream – but let me pause.
What dream? Erewhile the characters were clear,
Graved on my brain – at once some unknown cause
Has dimm'd and razed the thoughts, which now appear,
Like a vague remnant of some by-past scene; —
Not what will be, but what, long since, has been.

I suffer'd many things – I heard foretold
A dreadful doom for Pilate, – lingering woes,
In far, barbarian climes, where mountains cold
Built up a solitude of trackless snows,
There he and grisly wolves prowld side by side,
There he lived famish'd – there, methought, he died;

But not of hunger, nor by malady;
I saw the snow around him, stain'd with gore;
I said I had no tears for such as he,
And, lo! my cheek is wet – mine eyes run o'er;

I weep for mortal suffering, mortal guilt,
I weep the impious deed, the blood self-spilt.

More I recall not, yet the vision spread
Into a world remote, an age to come —
And still the illumined name of Jesus shed
A light, a clearness, through the unfolding gloom —
And still I saw that sign, which now I see,
That cross on yonder brow of Calvary.

What is this Hebrew Christ? – to me unknown
His lineage – doctrine – mission; yet how clear
Is God-like goodness in his actions shown,
How straight and stainless is his life's career!
The ray of Deity that rests on him,
In my eyes makes Olympian glory dim.

The world advances; Greek or Roman rite
Suffices not the inquiring mind to stay;
The searching soul demands a purer light
To guide it on its upward, onward way;
Ashamed of sculptured gods, Religion turns
To where the unseen Jehovah's altar burns.

Our faith is rotten, all our rites defiled,
Our temples sullied, and, methinks, this man,
With his new ordinance, so wise and mild,
Is come, even as He says, the chaff to fan
And sever from the wheat; but will his faith

Survive the terrors of to-morrow's death?

* * * * *

I feel a firmer trust – a higher hope
Rise in my soul – it dawns with dawning day;
Lo! on the Temple's roof – on Moriah's slope
Appears at length that clear and crimson ray
Which I so wished for when shut in by night;
Oh, opening skies, I hail, I bless pour light!

Part, clouds and shadows! Glorious Sun appear!
Part, mental gloom! Come insight from on high!
Dusk dawn in heaven still strives with daylight clear
The longing soul doth still uncertain sigh.
Oh! to behold the truth – that sun divine,
How doth my bosom pant, my spirit pine!

This day, Time travails with a mighty birth;
This day, Truth stoops from heaven and visits earth;
Ere night descends I shall more surely know
What guide to follow, in what path to go;
I wait in hope – I wait in solemn fear,
The oracle of God – the sole – true God – to hear.

MEMENTOS

Arranging long-locked drawers and shelves
Of cabinets, shut up for years,
What a strange task we've set ourselves!
How still the lonely room appears!
How strange this mass of ancient treasures,
Mementos of past pains and pleasures;
These volumes, clasped with costly stone,
With print all faded, gilding gone;

These fans of leaves from Indian trees —
These crimson shells, from Indian seas —
These tiny portraits, set in rings —
Once, doubtless, deemed such precious things;
Keepsakes bestowed by Love on Faith,
And worn till the receiver's death,
Now stored with cameos, china, shells,
In this old closet's dusty cells.

I scarcely think, for ten long years,
A hand has touched these relics old;
And, coating each, slow-formed, appears
The growth of green and antique mould.

All in this house is mossing over;
All is unused, and dim, and damp;

Nor light, nor warmth, the rooms discover —
Bereft for years of fire and lamp.

The sun, sometimes in summer, enters
The casements, with reviving ray;
But the long rains of many winters
Moulder the very walls away.

And outside all is ivy, clinging
To chimney, lattice, gable grey;
Scarcely one little red rose springing
Through the green moss can force its way.

Unscared, the daw and starling nestle,
Where the tall turret rises high,
And winds alone come near to rustle
The thick leaves where their cradles lie,

I sometimes think, when late at even
I climb the stair reluctantly,
Some shape that should be well in heaven,
Or ill elsewhere, will pass by me.

I fear to see the very faces,
Familiar thirty years ago,
Even in the old accustomed places
Which look so cold and gloomy now,

I've come, to close the window, hither,

At twilight, when the sun was down,
And Fear my very soul would wither,
Lest something should be dimly shown,

Too much the buried form resembling,
Of her who once was mistress here;
Lest doubtful shade, or moonbeam trembling,
Might take her aspect, once so dear.

Hers was this chamber; in her time
It seemed to me a pleasant room,
For then no cloud of grief or crime
Had cursed it with a settled gloom;

I had not seen death's image laid
In shroud and sheet, on yonder bed.
Before she married, she was blest —
Blest in her youth, blest in her worth;
Her mind was calm, its sunny rest
Shone in her eyes more clear than mirth.

And when attired in rich array,
Light, lustrous hair about her brow,
She yonder sat, a kind of day
Lit up what seems so gloomy now.
These grim oak walls even then were grim;
That old carved chair was then antique;
But what around looked dusk and dim
Served as a foil to her fresh cheek;

Her neck and arms, of hue so fair,
Eyes of unclouded, smiling light;
Her soft, and curled, and floating hair,
Gems and attire, as rainbow bright.

Reclined in yonder deep recess,
Ofttimes she would, at evening, lie
Watching the sun; she seemed to bless
With happy glance the glorious sky.
She loved such scenes, and as she gazed,
Her face evinced her spirit's mood;
Beauty or grandeur ever raised
In her, a deep-felt gratitude.
But of all lovely things, she loved
A cloudless moon, on summer night,
Full oft have I impatience proved
To see how long her still delight
Would find a theme in reverie,
Out on the lawn, or where the trees
Let in the lustre fitfully,
As their boughs parted momentarily,
To the soft, languid, summer breeze.
Alas! that she should e'er have flung
Those pure, though lonely joys away —
Deceived by false and guileful tongue,
She gave her hand, then suffered wrong;
Oppressed, ill-used, she faded young,
And died of grief by slow decay.

Open that casket—look how bright
Those jewels flash upon the sight;
The brilliants have not lost a ray
Of lustre, since her wedding day.
But see — upon that pearly chain —
How dim lies Time's discolouring stain!
I've seen that by her daughter worn:
For, ere she died, a child was born; —
A child that ne'er its mother knew,
That lone, and almost friendless grew;
For, ever, when its step drew nigh,
Averted was the father's eye;
And then, a life impure and wild
Made him a stranger to his child:
Absorbed in vice, he little cared
On what she did, or how she fared.
The love withheld she never sought,
She grew uncherished — learnt untaught;
To her the inward life of thought
Full soon was open laid.
I know not if her friendlessness
Did sometimes on her spirit press,
But plaint she never made.
The book-shelves were her darling treasure,
She rarely seemed the time to measure
While she could read alone.
And she too loved the twilight wood
And often, in her mother's mood,
Away to yonder hill would hie,

Like her, to watch the setting sun,
Or see the stars born, one by one,
Out of the darkening sky.
Nor would she leave that hill till night
Trembled from pole to pole with light;
Even then, upon her homeward way,
Long – long her wandering steps delayed
To quit the sombre forest shade,
Through which her eerie pathway lay.
You ask if she had beauty's grace?
I know not – but a nobler face
My eyes have seldom seen;
A keen and fine intelligence,
And, better still, the truest sense
Were in her speaking mien.
But bloom or lustre was there none,
Only at moments, fitful shone
An ardour in her eye,
That kindled on her cheek a flush,
Warm as a red sky's passing blush
And quick with energy.
Her speech, too, was not common speech,
No wish to shine, or aim to teach,
Was in her words displayed:
She still began with quiet sense,
But oft the force of eloquence
Came to her lips in aid;
Language and voice unconscious changed,
And thoughts, in other words arranged,

Her fervid soul transfused
Into the hearts of those who heard,
And transient strength and ardour stirred,
In minds to strength unused,
Yet in gay crowd or festal glare,
Grave and retiring was her air;
'Twas seldom, save with me alone,
That fire of feeling freely shone;
She loved not awe's nor wonder's gaze,
Nor even exaggerated praise,
Nor even notice, if too keen
The curious gazer searched her mien.
Nature's own green expanse revealed
The world, the pleasures, she could prize;
On free hill-side, in sunny field,
In quiet spots by woods concealed,
Grew wild and fresh her chosen joys,
Yet Nature's feelings deeply lay
In that endowed and youthful frame;
Shrined in her heart and hid from day,
They burned unseen with silent flame.
In youth's first search for mental light,
She lived but to reflect and learn,
But soon her mind's maturer might
For stronger task did pant and yearn;
And stronger task did fate assign,
Task that a giant's strength might strain;
To suffer long and ne'er repine,
Be calm in frenzy, smile at pain.

Pale with the secret war of feeling,
Sustained with courage, mute, yet high;
The wounds at which she bled, revealing
Only by altered cheek and eye;

She bore in silence – but when passion
Surged in her soul with ceaseless foam,
The storm at last brought desolation,
And drove her exiled from her home.

And silent still, she straight assembled
The wrecks of strength her soul retained;
For though the wasted body trembled,
The unconquered mind, to quail, disdained.

She crossed the sea – now lone she wanders
By Seine's, or Rhine's, or Arno's flow;
Fain would I know if distance renders
Relief or comfort to her woe.

Fain would I know if, henceforth, ever,
These eyes shall read in hers again,
That light of love which faded never,
Though dimmed so long with secret pain.

She will return, but cold and altered,
Like all whose hopes too soon depart;
Like all on whom have beat, unsheltered,

The bitter blasts that blight the heart.

No more shall I behold her lying
Calm on a pillow, smoothed by me;
No more that spirit, worn with sighing,
Will know the rest of infancy.

If still the paths of lore she follow,
'Twill be with tired and goaded will;
She'll only toil, the aching hollow,
The joyless blank of life to fill.

And oh! full oft, quite spent and weary,
Her hand will pause, her head decline;
That labour seems so hard and dreary,
On which no ray of hope may shine.

Thus the pale blight of time and sorrow
Will shade with grey her soft, dark hair;
Then comes the day that knows no morrow,
And death succeeds to long despair.

So speaks experience, sage and hoary;
I see it plainly, know it well,
Like one who, having read a story,
Each incident therein can tell.

Touch not that ring; 'twas his, the sire
Of that forsaken child;

And nought his relics can inspire
Save memories, sin-defiled.

I, who sat by his wife's death-bed,
I, who his daughter loved,
Could almost curse the guilty dead,
For woes the guiltless proved.

And heaven did curse – they found him laid,
When crime for wrath was rife,
Cold – with the suicidal blade
Clutched in his desperate gripe.

'Twas near that long deserted hut,
Which in the wood decays,
Death's axe, self-wielded, struck his root,
And lopped his desperate days.

You know the spot, where three black trees,
Lift up their branches fell,
And moaning, ceaseless as the seas,
Still seem, in every passing breeze,
The deed of blood to tell.

They named him mad, and laid his bones
Where holier ashes lie;
Yet doubt not that his spirit groans
In hell's eternity.

But, lo! night, closing o'er the earth,
Infects our thoughts with gloom;
Come, let us strive to rally mirth
Where glows a clear and tranquil hearth
In some more cheerful room.

THE WIFE'S WILL

Sit still – a word – a breath may break
(As light airs stir a sleeping lake)
The glassy calm that soothes my woes —
The sweet, the deep, the full repose.
O leave me not! for ever be
Thus, more than life itself to me!

Yes, close beside thee let me kneel —
Give me thy hand, that I may feel
The friend so true – so tried – so dear,
My heart's own chosen – indeed is near;
And check me not – this hour divine
Belongs to me – is fully mine.

'Tis thy own hearth thou sitt'st beside,
After long absence – wandering wide;
'Tis thy own wife reads in thine eyes
A promise clear of stormless skies;
For faith and true love light the rays
Which shine responsive to her gaze.

Ay, – well that single tear may fall;
Ten thousand might mine eyes recall,
Which from their lids ran blinding fast,
In hours of grief, yet scarcely past;

Well mayst thou speak of love to me,
For, oh! most truly – I love thee!

Yet smile – for we are happy now.
Whence, then, that sadness on thy brow?
What sayst thou?" We muse once again,
Ere long, be severed by the main!"
I knew not this – I deemed no more
Thy step would err from Britain's shore.

"Duty commands!" 'Tis true – 'tis just;
Thy slightest word I wholly trust,
Nor by request, nor faintest sigh,
Would I to turn thy purpose try;
But, William, hear my solemn vow —
Hear and confirm! – with thee I go.

"Distance and suffering," didst thou say?
"Danger by night, and toil by day?"
Oh, idle words and vain are these;
Hear me! I cross with thee the seas.
Such risk as thou must meet and dare,
I – thy true wife – will duly share.

Passive, at home, I will not pine;
Thy toils, thy perils shall be mine;
Grant this – and be hereafter paid
By a warm heart's devoted aid:
'Tis granted – with that yielding kiss,

Entered my soul unmingled bliss.

Thanks, William, thanks! thy love has joy,
Pure, undefiled with base alloy;
'Tis not a passion, false and blind,
Inspires, enchains, absorbs my mind;
Worthy, I feel, art thou to be
Loved with my perfect energy.

This evening now shall sweetly flow,
Lit by our clear fire's happy glow;
And parting's peace-embittering fear,
Is warned our hearts to come not near;
For fate admits my soul's decree,
In bliss or bale – to go with thee!

THE WOOD

But two miles more, and then we rest!
Well, there is still an hour of day,
And long the brightness of the West
Will light us on our devious way;
Sit then, awhile, here in this wood —
So total is the solitude,
We safely may delay.

These massive roots afford a seat,
Which seems for weary travellers made.
There rest. The air is soft and sweet
In this sequestered forest glade,
And there are scents of flowers around,
The evening dew draws from the ground;
How soothingly they spread!

Yes; I was tired, but not at heart;
No – that beats full of sweet content,
For now I have my natural part
Of action with adventure blent;
Cast forth on the wide world with thee,
And all my once waste energy
To weighty purpose bent.

Yet – sayst thou, spies around us roam,

Our aims are termed conspiracy?
Haply, no more our English home
An anchorage for us may be?
That there is risk our mutual blood
May redden in some lonely wood
The knife of treachery?

Sayst thou, that where we lodge each night,
In each lone farm, or lonelier hall
Of Norman Peer – ere morning light
Suspicion must as duly fall,
As day returns – such vigilance
Presides and watches over France,
Such rigour governs all?

I fear not, William; dost thou fear?
So that the knife does not divide,
It may be ever hovering near:
I could not tremble at thy side,
And strenuous love – like mine for thee —
Is buckler strong 'gainst treachery,
And turns its stab aside.

I am resolved that thou shalt learn
To trust my strength as I trust thine;
I am resolved our souls shall burn
With equal, steady, mingling shine;
Part of the field is conquered now,
Our lives in the same channel flow,

Along the self-same line;

And while no groaning storm is heard,
Thou seem'st content it should be so,
But soon as comes a warning word
Of danger – straight thine anxious brow
Bends over me a mournful shade,
As doubting if my powers are made
To ford the floods of woe.

Know, then it is my spirit swells,
And drinks, with eager joy, the air
Of freedom – where at last it dwells,
Chartered, a common task to share
With thee, and then it stirs alert,
And pants to learn what menaced hurt
Demands for thee its care.

Remember, I have crossed the deep,
And stood with thee on deck, to gaze
On waves that rose in threatening heap,
While stagnant lay a heavy haze,
Dimly confusing sea with sky,
And baffling, even, the pilot's eye,
Intent to thread the maze —

Of rocks, on Bretagne's dangerous coast,
And find a way to steer our band
To the one point obscure, which lost,

Flung us, as victims, on the strand; —
All, elsewhere, gleamed the Gallic sword,
And not a wherry could be moored
Along the guarded land.

I feared not then – I fear not now;
The interest of each stirring scene
Wakes a new sense, a welcome glow,
In every nerve and bounding vein;
Alike on turbid Channel sea,
Or in still wood of Normandy,
I feel as born again.

The rain descended that wild morn
When, anchoring in the cove at last,
Our band, all weary and forlorn
Ashore, like wave-worn sailors, cast —
Sought for a sheltering roof in vain,
And scarce could scanty food obtain
To break their morning fast.

Thou didst thy crust with me divide,
Thou didst thy cloak around me fold;
And, sitting silent by thy side,
I ate the bread in peace untold:
Given kindly from thy hand, 'twas sweet
As costly fare or princely treat
On royal plate of gold.

Sharp blew the sleet upon my face,
And, rising wild, the gusty wind
Drove on those thundering waves apace,
Our crew so late had left behind;
But, spite of frozen shower and storm,
So close to thee, my heart beat warm,
And tranquil slept my mind.

So now – nor foot-sore nor oppress
With walking all this August day,
I taste a heaven in this brief rest,
This gipsy-halt beside the way.
England's wild flowers are fair to view,
Like balm is England's summer dew
Like gold her sunset ray.

But the white violets, growing here,
Are sweeter than I yet have seen,
And ne'er did dew so pure and clear
Distil on forest mosses green,
As now, called forth by summer heat,
Perfumes our cool and fresh retreat —
These fragrant limes between.

That sunset! Look beneath the boughs,
Over the copse – beyond the hills;
How soft, yet deep and warm it glows,
And heaven with rich suffusion fills;
With hues where still the opal's tint,

Its gleam of prisoned fire is blent,
Where flame through azure thrills!

Depart we now – for fast will fade
That solemn splendour of decline,
And deep must be the after-shade
As stars alone to-night will shine;
No moon is destined – pale – to gaze
On such a day's vast Phoenix blaze,
A day in fires decayed!

There – hand-in-hand we tread again
The mazes of this varying wood,
And soon, amid a cultured plain,
Girt in with fertile solitude,
We shall our resting-place descry,
Marked by one roof-tree, towering high
Above a farmstead rude.

Refreshed, erelong, with rustic fare,
We'll seek a couch of dreamless ease;
Courage will guard thy heart from fear,
And Love give mine divinest peace:
To-morrow brings more dangerous toil,
And through its conflict and turmoil
We'll pass, as God shall please.

[The preceding composition refers, doubtless, to the scenes acted in France during the last year of the Consulate.]

FRANCES

She will not sleep, for fear of dreams,
But, rising, quits her restless bed,
And walks where some beclouded beams
Of moonlight through the hall are shed.

Obedient to the goad of grief,
Her steps, now fast, now lingering slow,
In varying motion seek relief
From the Eumenides of woe.

Wringing her hands, at intervals —
But long as mute as phantom dim —
She glides along the dusky walls,
Under the black oak rafters grim.

The close air of the grated tower
Stifles a heart that scarce can beat,
And, though so late and lone the hour,
Forth pass her wandering, faltering feet;

And on the pavement spread before
The long front of the mansion grey,
Her steps imprint the night-frost hoar,
Which pale on grass and granite lay.

Not long she stayed where misty moon
And shimmering stars could on her look,
But through the garden archway soon
Her strange and gloomy path she took.

Some firs, coeval with the tower,
Their straight black boughs stretched o'er her head;
Unseen, beneath this sable bower,
Rustled her dress and rapid tread.

There was an alcove in that shade,
Screening a rustic seat and stand;
Weary she sat her down, and laid
Her hot brow on her burning hand.

To solitude and to the night,
Some words she now, in murmurs, said;
And trickling through her fingers white,
Some tears of misery she shed.

"God help me in my grievous need,
God help me in my inward pain;
Which cannot ask for pity's meed,
Which has no licence to complain,

"Which must be borne; yet who can bear,
Hours long, days long, a constant weight —
The yoke of absolute despair,
A suffering wholly desolate?"

"Who can for ever crush the heart,
Restrain its throbbing, curb its life?
Dissemble truth with ceaseless art,
With outward calm mask inward strife?"

She waited – as for some reply;
The still and cloudy night gave none;
Ere long, with deep-drawn, trembling sigh,
Her heavy plaint again begun.

"Unloved – I love; unwept – I weep;
Grief I restrain – hope I repress:
Vain is this anguish – fixed and deep;
Vainer, desires and dreams of bliss.

"My love awakes no love again,
My tears collect, and fall unfelt;
My sorrow touches none with pain,
My humble hopes to nothing melt.

"For me the universe is dumb,
Stone-deaf, and blank, and wholly blind;
Life I must bound, existence sum
In the strait limits of one mind;

"That mind my own. Oh! narrow cell;
Dark – imageless – a living tomb!
There must I sleep, there wake and dwell

Content, with palsy, pain, and gloom."

Again she paused; a moan of pain,
A stifled sob, alone was heard;
Long silence followed – then again
Her voice the stagnant midnight stirred.

"Must it be so? Is this my fate?
Can I nor struggle, nor contend?
And am I doomed for years to wait,
Watching death's lingering axe descend?

"And when it falls, and when I die,
What follows? Vacant nothingness?
The blank of lost identity?
Erasure both of pain and bliss?

"I've heard of heaven – I would believe;
For if this earth indeed be all,
Who longest lives may deepest grieve;
Most blest, whom sorrows soonest call.

"Oh! leaving disappointment here,
Will man find hope on yonder coast?
Hope, which, on earth, shines never clear,
And oft in clouds is wholly lost.

"Will he hope's source of light behold,
Fruition's spring, where doubts expire,

And drink, in waves of living gold,
Contentment, full, for long desire?

"Will he find bliss, which here he dreamed?
Rest, which was weariness on earth?
Knowledge, which, if o'er life it beamed,
Served but to prove it void of worth?

"Will he find love without lust's leaven,
Love fearless, tearless, perfect, pure,
To all with equal bounty given;
In all, unfeigned, unfailing, sure?

"Will he, from penal sufferings free,
Released from shroud and wormy clod,
All calm and glorious, rise and see
Creation's Sire – Existence' God?

"Then, glancing back on Time's brief woes,
Will he behold them, fading, fly;
Swept from Eternity's repose,
Like sullyng cloud from pure blue sky?

"If so, endure, my weary frame;
And when thy anguish strikes too deep,
And when all troubled burns life's flame,
Think of the quiet, final sleep;

"Think of the glorious waking-hour,

Which will not dawn on grief and tears,
But on a ransomed spirit's power,
Certain, and free from mortal fears.

"Seek now thy couch, and lie till morn,
Then from thy chamber, calm, descend,
With mind nor tossed, nor anguish-torn,
But tranquil, fixed, to wait the end.

"And when thy opening eyes shall see
Mementos, on the chamber wall,
Of one who has forgotten thee,
Shed not the tear of acrid gall.

"The tear which, welling from the heart,
Burns where its drop corrosive falls,
And makes each nerve, in torture, start,
At feelings it too well recalls:

"When the sweet hope of being loved
Threw Eden sunshine on life's way:
When every sense and feeling proved
Expectancy of brightest day.

"When the hand trembled to receive
A thrilling clasp, which seemed so near,
And the heart ventured to believe
Another heart esteemed it dear.

"When words, half love, all tenderness,
Were hourly heard, as hourly spoken,
When the long, sunny days of bliss
Only by moonlight nights were broken.

"Till, drop by drop, the cup of joy
Filled full, with purple light was glowing,
And Faith, which watched it, sparkling high
Still never dreamt the overflowing.

"It fell not with a sudden crashing,
It poured not out like open sluice;
No, sparkling still, and redly flashing,
Drained, drop by drop, the generous juice.

"I saw it sink, and strove to taste it,
My eager lips approached the brim;
The movement only seemed to waste it;
It sank to dregs, all harsh and dim.

"These I have drunk, and they for ever
Have poisoned life and love for me;
A draught from Sodom's lake could never
More fiery, salt, and bitter, be.

"Oh! Love was all a thin illusion
Joy, but the desert's flying stream;
And glancing back on long delusion,
My memory grasps a hollow dream.

"Yet whence that wondrous change of feeling,
I never knew, and cannot learn;
Nor why my lover's eye, congealing,
Grew cold and clouded, proud and stern.

"Nor wherefore, friendship's forms forgetting,
He careless left, and cool withdrew;
Nor spoke of grief, nor fond regretting,
Nor ev'n one glance of comfort threw.

"And neither word nor token sending,
Of kindness, since the parting day,
His course, for distant regions bending,
Went, self-contained and calm, away.

"Oh, bitter, blighting, keen sensation,
Which will not weaken, cannot die,
Hasten thy work of desolation,
And let my tortured spirit fly!

"Vain as the passing gale, my crying;
Though lightning-struck, I must live on;
I know, at heart, there is no dying
Of love, and ruined hope, alone.

"Still strong and young, and warm with vigour,
Though scathed, I long shall greenly grow;
And many a storm of wildest rigour

Shall yet break o'er my shivered bough.

"Rebellious now to blank inertia,
My unused strength demands a task;
Travel, and toil, and full exertion,
Are the last, only boon I ask.

"Whence, then, this vain and barren dreaming
Of death, and dubious life to come?
I see a nearer beacon gleaming
Over dejection's sea of gloom.

"The very wildness of my sorrow
Tells me I yet have innate force;
My track of life has been too narrow,
Effort shall trace a broader course.

"The world is not in yonder tower,
Earth is not prisoned in that room,
'Mid whose dark panels, hour by hour,
I've sat, the slave and prey of gloom.

"One feeling – turned to utter anguish,
Is not my being's only aim;
When, lorn and loveless, life will languish,
But courage can revive the flame.

"He, when he left me, went a roving
To sunny climes, beyond the sea;

And I, the weight of woe removing,
Am free and fetterless as he.

"New scenes, new language, skies less clouded,
May once more wake the wish to live;
Strange, foreign towns, astir, and crowded,
New pictures to the mind may give.

"New forms and faces, passing ever,
May hide the one I still retain,
Defined, and fixed, and fading never,
Stamped deep on vision, heart, and brain.

"And we might meet – time may have changed him;
Chance may reveal the mystery,
The secret influence which estranged him;
Love may restore him yet to me.

"False thought – false hope – in scorn be banished!
I am not loved – nor loved have been;
Recall not, then, the dreams scarce vanished;
Traitors! mislead me not again!

"To words like yours I bid defiance,
'Tis such my mental wreck have made;
Of God alone, and self-reliance,
I ask for solace – hope for aid.

"Morn comes – and ere meridian glory

O'er these, my natal woods, shall smile,
Both lonely wood and mansion hoary
I'll leave behind, full many a mile."

GILBERT

I. THE GARDEN

Above the city hung the moon,
Right o'er a plot of ground
Where flowers and orchard-trees were fenced
With lofty walls around:
'Twas Gilbert's garden – there to-night
Awhile he walked alone;
And, tired with sedentary toil,
Mused where the moonlight shone.

This garden, in a city-heart,
Lay still as houseless wild,
Though many-windowed mansion fronts
Were round it; closely piled;
But thick their walls, and those within
Lived lives by noise unstirred;
Like wafting of an angel's wing,
Time's flight by them was heard.

Some soft piano-notes alone
Were sweet as faintly given,
Where ladies, doubtless, cheered the hearth

With song that winter-even.
The city's many-mingled sounds
Rose like the hum of ocean;
They rather lulled the heart than roused
Its pulse to faster motion.

Gilbert has paced the single walk
An hour, yet is not weary;
And, though it be a winter night
He feels nor cold nor dreary.
The prime of life is in his veins,
And sends his blood fast flowing,
And Fancy's fervour warms the thoughts
Now in his bosom glowing.

Those thoughts recur to early love,
Or what he love would name,
Though haply Gilbert's secret deeds
Might other title claim.
Such theme not oft his mind absorbs,
He to the world clings fast,
And too much for the present lives,
To linger o'er the past.

But now the evening's deep repose
Has glided to his soul;
That moonlight falls on Memory,
And shows her fading scroll.
One name appears in every line

The gentle rays shine o'er,
And still he smiles and still repeats
That one name – Elinor.

There is no sorrow in his smile,
No kindness in his tone;
The triumph of a selfish heart
Speaks coldly there alone;
He says: "She loved me more than life;
And truly it was sweet
To see so fair a woman kneel,
In bondage, at my feet.

"There was a sort of quiet bliss
To be so deeply loved,
To gaze on trembling eagerness
And sit myself unmoved.
And when it pleased my pride to grant
At last some rare caress,
To feel the fever of that hand
My fingers deigned to press.

"'Twas sweet to see her strive to hide
What every glance revealed;
Endowed, the while, with despot-might
Her destiny to wield.
I knew myself no perfect man,
Nor, as she deemed, divine;
I knew that I was glorious – but

By her reflected shine;

"Her youth, her native energy,
Her powers new-born and fresh,
'Twas these with Godhead sanctified
My sensual frame of flesh.
Yet, like a god did I descend
At last, to meet her love;
And, like a god, I then withdrew
To my own heaven above.

"And never more could she invoke
My presence to her sphere;
No prayer, no plaint, no cry of hers
Could win my awful ear.
I knew her blinded constancy
Would ne'er my deeds betray,
And, calm in conscience, whole in heart.
I went my tranquil way.

"Yet, sometimes, I still feel a wish,
The fond and flattering pain
Of passion's anguish to create
In her young breast again.
Bright was the lustre of her eyes,
When they caught fire from mine;
If I had power – this very hour,
Again I'd light their shine.

"But where she is, or how she lives,
I have no clue to know;
I've heard she long my absence pined,
And left her home in woe.
But busied, then, in gathering gold,
As I am busied now,
I could not turn from such pursuit,
To weep a broken vow.

"Nor could I give to fatal risk
The fame I ever prized;
Even now, I fear, that precious fame
Is too much compromised."
An inward trouble dims his eye,
Some riddle he would solve;
Some method to unloose a knot,
His anxious thoughts revolve.

He, pensive, leans against a tree,
A leafy evergreen,
The boughs, the moonlight, intercept,
And hide him like a screen
He starts – the tree shakes with his tremor,
Yet nothing near him pass'd;
He hurries up the garden alley,
In strangely sudden haste.

With shaking hand, he lifts the latchet,
Steps o'er the threshold stone;

The heavy door slips from his fingers —
It shuts, and he is gone.
What touched, transfixed, appalled, his soul? —
A nervous thought, no more;
'Twill sink like stone in placid pool,
And calm close smoothly o'er.

II. THE PARLOUR

Warm is the parlour atmosphere,
Serene the lamp's soft light;
The vivid embers, red and clear,
Proclaim a frosty night.
Books, varied, on the table lie,
Three children o'er them bend,
And all, with curious, eager eye,
The turning leaf attend.

Picture and tale alternately
Their simple hearts delight,
And interest deep, and tempered glee,
Illume their aspects bright.
The parents, from their fireside place,
Behold that pleasant scene,
And joy is on the mother's face,
Pride in the father's mien.

As Gilbert sees his blooming wife,
Beholds his children fair,
No thought has he of transient strife,
Or past, though piercing fear.
The voice of happy infancy
Lisps sweetly in his ear,
His wife, with pleased and peaceful eye,
Sits, kindly smiling, near.

The fire glows on her silken dress,
And shows its ample grace,
And warmly tints each hazel tress,
Curled soft around her face.
The beauty that in youth he wooed,
Is beauty still, unfaded;
The brow of ever placid mood
No churlish grief has shaded.

Prosperity, in Gilbert's home,
Abides the guest of years;
There Want or Discord never come,
And seldom Toil or Tears.
The carpets bear the peaceful print
Of comfort's velvet tread,
And golden gleams, from plenty sent,
In every nook are shed.

The very silken spaniel seems

Of quiet ease to tell,
As near its mistress' feet it dreams,
Sunk in a cushion's swell
And smiles seem native to the eyes
Of those sweet children, three;
They have but looked on tranquil skies,
And know not misery.

Alas! that Misery should come
In such an hour as this;
Why could she not so calm a home
A little longer miss?
But she is now within the door,
Her steps advancing glide;
Her sullen shade has crossed the floor,
She stands at Gilbert's side.

She lays her hand upon his heart,
It bounds with agony;
His fireside chair shakes with the start
That shook the garden tree.
His wife towards the children looks,
She does not mark his mien;
The children, bending o'er their books,
His terror have not seen.

In his own home, by his own hearth,
He sits in solitude,
And circled round with light and mirth,

Cold horror chills his blood.
His mind would hold with desperate clutch
The scene that round him lies;
No – changed, as by some wizard's touch,
The present prospect flies.

A tumult vague – a viewless strife
His futile struggles crush;
'Twixt him and his an unknown life
And unknown feelings rush.
He sees – but scarce can language paint
The tissue fancy weaves;
For words oft give but echo faint
Of thoughts the mind conceives.

Noise, tumult strange, and darkness dim,
Efface both light and quiet;
No shape is in those shadows grim,
No voice in that wild riot.
Sustain'd and strong, a wondrous blast
Above and round him blows;
A greenish gloom, dense overcast,
Each moment denser grows.

He nothing knows – nor clearly sees,
Resistance checks his breath,
The high, impetuous, ceaseless breeze
Blows on him cold as death.
And still the undulating gloom

Mocks sight with formless motion:
Was such sensation Jonah's doom,
Gulphed in the depths of ocean?

Streaking the air, the nameless vision,
Fast-driven, deep-sounding, flows;
Oh! whence its source, and what its mission?
How will its terrors close?
Long-sweeping, rushing, vast and void,
The universe it swallows;
And still the dark, devouring tide
A typhoon tempest follows.

More slow it rolls; its furious race
Sinks to its solemn gliding;
The stunning roar, the wind's wild chase,
To stillness are subsiding.
And, slowly borne along, a form
The shapeless chaos varies;
Poised in the eddy to the storm,
Before the eye it tarries.

A woman drowned – sunk in the deep,
On a long wave reclining;
The circling waters' crystal sweep,
Like glass, her shape enshrining.
Her pale dead face, to Gilbert turned,
Seems as in sleep reposing;
A feeble light, now first discerned,

The features well disclosing.

No effort from the haunted air
The ghastly scene could banish,
That hovering wave, arrested there,
Rolled – throbbed – but did not vanish.
If Gilbert upward turned his gaze,
He saw the ocean-shadow;
If he looked down, the endless seas
Lay green as summer meadow.

And straight before, the pale corpse lay,
Upborne by air or billow,
So near, he could have touched the spray
That churned around its pillow.
The hollow anguish of the face
Had moved a fiend to sorrow;
Not death's fixed calm could rase the trace
Of suffering's deep-worn furrow.

All moved; a strong returning blast,
The mass of waters raising,
Bore wave and passive carcase past,
While Gilbert yet was gazing.
Deep in her isle-conceiving womb,
It seemed the ocean thundered,
And soon, by realms of rushing gloom,
Were seer and phantom sundered.

Then swept some timbers from a wreck.
On following surges riding;
Then sea-weed, in the turbid rack
Uptorn, went slowly gliding.
The horrid shade, by slow degrees,
A beam of light defeated,
And then the roar of raving seas,
Fast, far, and faint, retreated.

And all was gone – gone like a mist,
Corse, billows, tempest, wreck;
Three children close to Gilbert prest
And clung around his neck.
Good night! good night! the prattlers said,
And kissed their father's cheek;
'Twas now the hour their quiet bed
And placid rest to seek.

The mother with her offspring goes
To hear their evening prayer;
She nought of Gilbert's vision knows,
And nought of his despair.
Yet, pitying God, abridge the time
Of anguish, now his fate!
Though, haply, great has been his crime:
Thy mercy, too, is great.

Gilbert, at length, uplifts his head,
Bent for some moments low,

And there is neither grief nor dread
Upon his subtle brow.
For well can he his feelings task,
And well his looks command;
His features well his heart can mask,
With smiles and smoothness bland.

Gilbert has reasoned with his mind —
He says 'twas all a dream;
He strives his inward sight to blind
Against truth's inward beam.
He pitied not that shadowy thing,
When it was flesh and blood;
Nor now can pity's balmy spring
Refresh his arid mood.

"And if that dream has spoken truth,"
Thus musingly he says;
"If Elinor be dead, in sooth,
Such chance the shock repays:
A net was woven round my feet,
I scarce could further go;
Ere shame had forced a fast retreat,
Dishonour brought me low.

"Conceal her, then, deep, silent sea,
Give her a secret grave!
She sleeps in peace, and I am free,
No longer terror's slave:

And homage still, from all the world,
Shall greet my spotless name,
Since surges break and waves are curled
Above its threatened shame."

III. THE WELCOME HOME

Above the city hangs the moon,
Some clouds are boding rain;
Gilbert, erewhile on journey gone,
To-night comes home again.
Ten years have passed above his head,
Each year has brought him gain;
His prosperous life has smoothly sped,
Without or tear or stain.

'Tis somewhat late – the city clocks
Twelve deep vibrations toll,
As Gilbert at the portal knocks,
Which is his journey's goal.
The street is still and desolate,
The moon hid by a cloud;
Gilbert, impatient, will not wait, —
His second knock peals loud.

The clocks are hushed – there's not a light

In any window nigh,
And not a single planet bright
Looks from the clouded sky;
The air is raw, the rain descends,
A bitter north-wind blows;
His cloak the traveller scarce defends —
Will not the door unclose?

He knocks the third time, and the last
His summons now they hear,
Within, a footstep, hurrying fast,
Is heard approaching near.
The bolt is drawn, the clanking chain
Falls to the floor of stone;
And Gilbert to his heart will strain
His wife and children soon.

The hand that lifts the latchet, holds
A candle to his sight,
And Gilbert, on the step, beholds
A woman, clad in white.
Lo! water from her dripping dress
Runs on the streaming floor;
From every dark and clinging tress
The drops incessant pour.

There's none but her to welcome him;
She holds the candle high,
And, motionless in form and limb,

Stands cold and silent nigh;
There's sand and sea-weed on her robe,
Her hollow eyes are blind;
No pulse in such a frame can throb,
No life is there defined.

Gilbert turned ashy-white, but still
His lips vouchsafed no cry;
He spurred his strength and master-will
To pass the figure by, —
But, moving slow, it faced him straight,
It would not flinch nor quail:
Then first did Gilbert's strength abate,
His stony firmness quail.

He sank upon his knees and prayed
The shape stood rigid there;
He called aloud for human aid,
No human aid was near.
An accent strange did thus repeat
Heaven's stern but just decree:
"The measure thou to her didst mete,
To thee shall measured be!"

Gilbert sprang from his bended knees,
By the pale spectre pushed,
And, wild as one whom demons seize,
Up the hall-staircase rushed;
Entered his chamber — near the bed

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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