

**GEORGE
MACDONALD**

A HIDDEN LIFE
AND OTHER
POEMS

George MacDonald
A Hidden Life and Other Poems

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A Hidden Life and Other Poems:

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George MacDonald

A Hidden Life and Other Poems

Ma poi ch' i' fui appiè d' un colle giunto,
Là ove terminava quella valle,
Che m' avea di paura il cuor compunto;
Guarda' in alto, e vidi le sue spalle
Vestite già de' raggi del pianeta,
Che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle.

DELL' INFERNO, Cant. I.

1864.

To My Father

I

Take of the first fruits, Father, of thy care,
Wrapped in the fresh leaves of my gratitude
Late waked for early gifts ill understood;
Claiming in all my harvests rightful share,

Whether with song that mounts the joyful air
I praise my God; or, in yet deeper mood,
Sit dumb because I know a speechless good,
Needing no voice, but all the soul for prayer.
Thou hast been faithful to my highest need;
And I, thy debtor, ever, evermore,
Shall never feel the grateful burden sore.
Yet most I thank thee, not for any deed,
But for the sense thy living self did breed
That fatherhood is at the great world's core.

II

All childhood, reverence clothed thee, undefined,
As for some being of another race;
Ah! not with it departing—grown apace
As years have brought me manhood's loftier mind
Able to see thy human life behind—
The same hid heart, the same revealing face—
My own dim contest settling into grace
Of sorrow, strife, and victory combined.
So I beheld my God, in childhood's morn,
A mist, a darkness, great, and far apart,
Moveless and dim—I scarce could say *Thou art*:
My manhood came, of joy and sadness born—
Full soon the misty dark, asunder torn,

Revealed man's glory, God's great human heart.

G.M.D. Jr.

Algiers, April, 1857.

POEMS

A HIDDEN LIFE

Proudly the youth, by manhood sudden crowned,
Went walking by his horses to the plough,
For the first time that morn. No soldier gay
Feels at his side the throb of the gold hilt
(Knowing the blue blade hides within its sheath,
As lightning in the cloud) with more delight,
When first he belts it on, than he that day
Heard still the clank of the plough-chains against
The horses' harnessed sides, as to the field
They went to make it fruitful. O'er the hill
The sun looked down, baptizing him for toil.

A farmer's son he was, and grandson too;
Yea, his great-grand sire had possessed these fields.
Tradition said they had been tilled by men
Who bore the name long centuries ago,
And married wives, and reared a stalwart race,
And died, and went where all had followed them,
Save one old man, his daughter, and the youth
Who ploughs in pride, nor ever doubts his toil;
And death is far from him this sunny morn.

Why should we think of death when life is high?
The earth laughs all the day, and sleeps all night.
Earth, give us food, and, after that, a grave;
For both are good, each better in its time.

The youth knew little; but he read old tales
Of Scotland's warriors, till his blood ran swift
As charging knights upon their death career.
And then he chanted old tunes, till the blood
Was charmed back into its fountain-well,
And tears arose instead. And Robert's songs,
Which ever flow in noises like his name,
Rose from him in the fields beside the kine,
And met the sky-lark's rain from out the clouds.
As yet he sang only as sing the birds,
From gladness simply, or, he knew not why.
The earth was fair—he knew not it was fair;
And he so glad—he knew not he was glad:
He walked as in a twilight of the sense,
Which this one day shall turn to tender light.

For, ere the sun had cleared the feathery tops
Of the fir-thicket on the eastward hill,
His horses leaned and laboured. His great hands
Held both the reins and plough-stilts: he was proud;
Proud with a ploughman's pride; nobler, may be,
Than statesman's, ay, or poet's pride sometimes,
For little praise would come that he ploughed well,
And yet he did it well; proud of his work,

And not of what would follow. With sure eye,
He saw the horses keep the arrow-track;
He saw the swift share cut the measured sod;
He saw the furrow folding to the right,
Ready with nimble foot to aid at need.
And there the slain sod lay, patient for grain,
Turning its secrets upward to the sun,
And hiding in a grave green sun-born grass,
And daisies clipped in carmine: all must die,
That others live, and they arise again.

Then when the sun had clomb to his decline,
And seemed to rest, before his slow descent,
Upon the keystone of his airy bridge,
They rested likewise, half-tired man and horse,
And homeward went for food and courage new;
Whereby refreshed, they turned again to toil,
And lived in labour all the afternoon.
Till, in the gloaming, once again the plough
Lay like a stranded bark upon the lea;
And home with hanging neck the horses went,
Walking beside their master, force by will.
Then through the deepening shades a vision came.

It was a lady mounted on a horse,
A slender girl upon a mighty steed,
That bore her with the pride horses must feel
When they submit to women. Home she went,
Alone, or else the groom lagged far behind.

But, as she passed, some faithless belt gave way;
The saddle slipped, the horse stopped, and the girl
Stood on her feet, still holding fast the reins.

Three paces bore him bounding to her side;
Her radiant beauty almost fixed him there;
But with main force, as one that gripes with fear,
He threw the fascination off, and saw
The work before him. Soon his hand and knife
Replaced the saddle firmer than before
Upon the gentle horse; and then he turned
To mount the maiden. But bewilderment
A moment lasted; for he knew not how,
With stirrup-hand and steady arm, to throne,
Elastic, on her steed, the ascending maid:
A moment only; for while yet she thanked,
Nor yet had time to teach her further will,
Around her waist he put his brawny hands,
That almost zoned her round; and like a child
Lifting her high, he set her on the horse;
Whence like a risen moon she smiled on him,
Nor turned away, although a radiant blush
Shone in her cheek, and shadowed in her eyes.
But he was never sure if from her heart
Or from the rosy sunset came the flush.
Again she thanked him, while again he stood
Bewildered in her beauty. Not a word
Answered her words that flowed, folded in tones
Round which dissolving lambent music played,

Like dropping water in a silver cup;
Till, round the shoulder of the neighbouring hill,
Sudden she disappeared. And he awoke,
And called himself hard names, and turned and went
After his horses, bending too his head.

Ah God! when Beauty passes by the door,
Although she ne'er came in, the house grows bare.
Shut, shut the door; there's nothing in the house.
Why seems it always that it should be ours?
A secret lies behind which Thou dost know,
And I can partly guess.

But think not then,
The holder of the plough had many sighs
Upon his bed that night; or other dreams
Than pleasant rose upon his view in sleep,
Within the magic crystal of the soul;
Nor that the airy castles of his brain
Had less foundation than the air admits.
But read my simple tale, scarce worth the name;
And answer, if he gained not from the fair
Beauty's best gift; and proved her not, in sooth,
An angel vision from a higher world.

Not much of her I tell. Her changeful life
Where part the waters on the mountain ridge,
Flowed down the other side apart from his.
Her tale hath wiled deep sighs on summer eves,

Where in the ancient mysteries of woods
Walketh a man who worships womanhood.
Soon was she orphaned of such parent-haunts;
Surrounded with dead glitter, not the shine
Of leaves in wind and sunlight; while the youth
Breathed on, as if a constant breaking dawn
Sent forth the new-born wind upon his brow;
And knew the morning light was climbing up
The further hill-side—morning light, which most,
They say, reveals the inner hues of earth.
Now she was such as God had made her, ere
The world had tried to spoil her; tried, I say,
And half-succeeded, failing utterly.
Fair was she, frank, and innocent as a child
That stares you in the eyes; fearless of ill,
Because she knew it not; and brave withal,
Because she drank the draught that maketh strong,
The charmed country air. Her father's house—
A Scottish laird was he, of ancient name—
Stood only two miles off amid the hills;
But though she often passed alone as now,
The youth had never seen her face before,
And might not twice. Yet was not once enough?
It left him not. She, as the harvest moon
That goeth on her way, and knoweth not
The fields of grain whose ripening ears she fills
With wealth of life and human joyfulness,
Went on, and knew not of the influence
She left behind; yea, never thought of him;

Save at those times when, all at once, old scenes
Return uncalled, with wonder that they come,
Amidst far other thoughts and other cares;
Sinking again into their ancient graves,
Till some far-whispered necromantic spell
Loose them once more to wander for a space.

Again I say, no fond romance of love,
No argument of possibilities,
If he were some one, and she claimed his aid,
Turned his clear brain into a nest of dreams.
As soon he had sat down and twisted cords
To snare, and carry home for daylight use,
Some woman-angel, wandering half-seen
On moonlight wings, o'er withered autumn fields.
But when he rose next morn, and went abroad,
(The exultation of his new-found rank
Already settling into dignity,)
He found the earth was beautiful. The sky,
Which shone with expectation of the sun,
Somehow, he knew not how, was like her face.
He grieved almost to plough the daisies down;
Something they shared in common with that smile
Wherewith she crowned his manhood; and they fell
Bent in the furrow, sometimes, with their heads
Just out imploringly. A hedgehog ran
With tangled mesh of bristling spikes, and face
Helplessly innocent, across the field:
He let it run, and blessed it as it ran.

At noon returning, something drew his feet
Into the barn. Entering, he gazed and stood.
Through the rent roof alighting, one sunbeam,
Blazing upon the straw one golden spot,
Dulled all the yellow heap, and sank far down,
Like flame inverted, through the loose-piled mound,
Crossing the splendour with the shadow-straws,
In lines innumerable. 'Twas so bright,
The eye was cheated with a spectral smoke
That rose as from a fire. He never knew,
Before, how beautiful the sunlight was;
Though he had seen it in the grassy fields,
And on the river, and the ripening corn,
A thousand times. He threw him on the heap,
And gazing down into the glory-gulf,
Dreamed as a boy half-sleeping by the fire;
And dreaming rose, and got his horses out.

God, and not woman, is the heart of all.
But she, as priestess of the visible earth,
Holding the key, herself most beautiful,
Had come to him, and flung the portals wide.
He entered in: each beauty was a glass
That gleamed the woman back upon his view.

Already in these hours his growing soul
Put forth the white tip of a floral bud,
Ere long to be a crown-like, shadowy flower.
For, by his songs, and joy in ancient tales,

He showed the seed lay hidden in his heart,
A safe sure treasure, hidden even from him,
And notwithstanding mellowing all his spring;
Until, like sunshine with its genial power,
Came the fair maiden's face: the seed awoke.
I need not follow him through many days;
Nor tell the joys that rose around his path,
Ministering pleasure for his labour's meed;
Nor how each morning was a boon to him;
Nor how the wind, with nature's kisses fraught,
Flowed inward to his soul; nor how the flowers
Asserted each an individual life,
A separate being, for and in his thought;
Nor how the stormy days that intervened
Called forth his strength, and songs that quelled their force;
Nor how in winter-time, when thick the snow
Armed the sad fields from gnawing of the frost,
And the low sun but skirted his far realms,
And sank in early night, he took his place
Beside the fire; and by the feeble lamp
Head book on book; and lived in other lives,
And other needs, and other climes than his;
And added other beings thus to his.
But I must tell that love of knowledge grew
Within him to a passion and a power;
Till, through the night (all dark, except the moon
Shone frosty o'er the lea, or the white snow
Gave back all motes of light that else had sunk
Into the thirsty earth) he bent his way

Over the moors to where the little town
Lay gathered in the hollow. There the man
Who taught the children all the shortened day,
Taught other scholars in the long fore-night;
And youths who in the shop, or in the barn,
Or at the loom, had done their needful work,
Came to his schoolroom in the murky night,
And found the fire aglow, the candles lit,
And the good master waiting for his men.
Here mathematics wiled him to their heights;
And strange consent of lines to form and law
Made Euclid like a great romance of truth.
The master saw with wonder how the youth
All eagerly devoured the offered food,
And straightway longed to lead him; with that hope
Of sympathy which urges him that knows
To multiply great knowledge by its gift;
That so two souls ere long may see one truth,
And, turning, see each others' faces shine.
So he proposed the classics; and the youth
Caught at the offer; and for many a night,
When others lay and lost themselves in sleep,
He groped his way with lexicon and rule,
Through ancient deeds embalmed in Latin old,
Or poet-woods alive with gracious forms;
Wherein his knowledge of the English tongue
(Through reading many books) much aided him—
For the soul's language is the same in all.
At length his progress, through the master's word,

Proud of his pupil, reached the father's ears.
Great joy arose within him, and he vowed,
If caring, sparing would accomplish it,
He should to college, and should have his fill
Of that same learning.

So to school he went,
Instead of to the plough; and ere a year,
He wore the scarlet gown with the close sleeves.

Awkward at first, but with a dignity
That soon found fit embodiment in speech
And gesture and address, he made his way,
Not seeking it, to the respect of youths,
In whom respect is of the rarer gifts.
Likewise by the consent of accidents,
More than his worth, society, so called,
In that great northern city, to its rooms
Invited him. He entered. Dazzled first,
Not only by the brilliance of the show,
In lights and mirrors, gems, and crowded eyes;
But by the surface lights of many minds
Cut like rose-diamonds into many planes,
Which, catching up the wandering rays of fact,
Reflected, coloured, tossed them here and there,
In varied brilliance, as if quite new-born
From out the centre, not from off the face—
Dazzled at first, I say, he soon began
To see how little thought could sparkle well,

And turn him, even in the midst of talk,
Back to the silence of his homely toils.
Around him still and ever hung an air
Born of the fields, and plough, and cart, and scythe;
A kind of clumsy grace, in which gay girls
Saw but the clumsiness; while those with light,
Instead of glitter, in their quiet eyes,
Saw the grace too; yea, sometimes, when he talked,
Saw the grace only; and began at last,
As he sought none, to seek him in the crowd
(After a maiden fashion), that they might
Hear him dress thoughts, not pay poor compliments.
Yet seldom thus was he seduced from toil;
Or if one eve his windows showed no light,
The next, they faintly gleamed in candle-shine,
Till far into the morning. And he won
Honours among the first, each session's close.

And if increased familiarity
With open forms of ill, not to be shunned
Where youths of all kinds meet, endangered there
A mind more willing to be pure than most—
Oft when the broad rich humour of a jest,
Did, with its breezy force, make radiant way
For pestilential vapours following—
Arose within his sudden silent mind,
The maiden face that smiled and blushed on him;
That lady face, insphered beyond his earth,
Yet visible to him as any star

That shines unwavering. I cannot tell
In words the tenderness that glowed across
His bosom—burned it clean in will and thought;
"Shall that sweet face be blown by laughter rude
Out of the soul where it has deigned to come,
But will not stay what maidens may not hear?"
He almost wept for shame, that those two thoughts
Should ever look each other in the face,
Meeting in *his* house. Thus he made to her,
For love, an offering of purity.

And if the homage that he sometimes found,
New to the country lad, conveyed in smiles,
Assents, and silent listenings when he spoke,
Threatened yet more his life's simplicity;
An antidote of nature ever came,
Even nature's self. For, in the summer months,
His former haunts and boyhood's circumstance
Received him back within old influences.
And he, too noble to despise the past,
Too proud to be ashamed of manhood's toil,
Too wise to fancy that a gulf lay wide
Betwixt the labouring hand and thinking brain,
Or that a workman was no gentleman,
Because a workman, clothed himself again
In his old garments, took the hoe or spade,
Or sowing sheet, or covered in the grain,
Smoothing with harrows what the plough had ridged.
With ever fresher joy he hailed the fields,

Returning still with larger powers of sight:
Each time he knew them better than before,
And yet their sweetest aspect was the old.
His labour kept him true to life and fact,
Casting out worldly judgments, false desires,
And vain distinctions. Ever, at his toil,
New thoughts arose; which, when still night awoke,
He ever sought, like stars, with instruments;
By science, or by wise philosophy,
Bridging the gulf between them and the known;
And thus preparing for the coming months,
When in the time of snow, old Scotland's sons
Reap wisdom in the silence of the year.

His sire was proud of him; and, most of all,
Because his learning did not make him proud.
A wise man builds not much upon his lore.
The neighbours asked what he would make his son.
"I'll make a man of him," the old man said;
"And for the rest, just what he likes himself.
But as he is my only son, I think
He'll keep the old farm joined to the old name;
And I shall go to the churchyard content,
Leaving my name amongst my fellow men,
As safe, thank God, as if I bore it still."
But sons are older than their sires full oft
In the new world that cometh after this.

So four years long his life went to and fro

Betwixt the scarlet gown and rough blue coat;
The garret study and the wide-floored barn;
The wintry city, and the sunny fields.
In each his quiet mind was well content,
Because he was himself, where'er he was.

Not in one channel flowed his seeking thoughts;
To no profession did he ardent turn:
He knew his father's wish—it was his own.
"Why should a man," he said, "when knowledge grows,
Leave therefore the old patriarchal life,
And seek distinction in the noise of men?"
And yet he turned his face on every side;
Went with the doctors to the lecture-room,
And saw the inner form of man laid bare;
Went with the chymists, where the skilful hand,
Revering laws higher than Nature's self,
Makes Nature do again, before our eyes,
And in a moment, what, in many years,
And in the veil of vastness and lone deeps,
She laboureth at alway, then best content
When man inquires into her secret ways;
Yea, turned his asking eye on every source
Whence knowledge floweth for the hearts of men,
Kneeling at some, and drinking freely there.
And at the end, when he had gained the right
To sit with covered head before the rank
Of black-gowned senators; and all these men
Were ready at a word to speed him on,

Proud of their pupil, towards any goal
Where he might fix his eye; he took his books,
What little of his gown and cap remained,
And, leaving with a sigh the ancient walls,
With the old stony crown, unchanging, grey,
Amidst the blandishments of airy Spring,
He sought for life the lone ancestral farm.

With simple gladness met him on the road
His grey-haired father, elder brother now.
Few words were spoken, little welcome said,
But much was understood on either side.
If with a less delight he brought him home
Than he that met the prodigal returned,
Yet with more confidence, more certain joy;
And with the leaning pride that old men feel
In young strong arms that draw their might from them,
He led him to the house. His sister there,
Whose kisses were not many, but whose eyes
Were full of watchfulness and hovering love,
Set him beside the fire in the old place,
And heaped the table with best country fare.
And when the night grew deep, the father rose,
And led his son (who wondered why they went,
And in the darkness made a tortuous path
Through the corn-ricks) to an old loft, above
The stable where his horses rested still.
Entering, he saw some plan-pursuing hand
Had been at work. The father, leading on

Across the floor, heaped up with waiting grain,
Opened a door. An unexpected light
Flashed on them from a cheerful lamp and fire,
That burned alone, as in a fairy tale.
And lo! a little room, white-curtained bed,
An old arm-chair, bookshelves, and writing desk,
And some old prints of deep Virgilian woods,
And one a country churchyard, on the walls.
The young man stood and spoke not. The old love
Seeking and finding incarnation new,
Drew from his heart, as from the earth the sun,
Warm tears. The good, the fatherly old man,
Honouring in his son the simple needs
Which his own bounty had begot in him,
Thus gave him loneliness for silent thought,
A simple refuge he could call his own.
He grasped his hand and shook it; said good night,
And left him glad with love. Faintly beneath,
The horses stamped and drew the lengthening chain.

Three sliding years, with gently blending change,
Went round 'mid work of hands, and brain, and heart.
He laboured as before; though when he would,
With privilege, he took from hours of toil,
When nothing pressed; and read within his room,
Or wandered through the moorland to the hills;
There stood upon the apex of the world,
With a great altar-stone of rock beneath,
And looked into the wide abyss of blue

That roofed him round; and then, with steady foot,
Descended to the world, and worthy cares.

And on the Sunday, father, daughter, son
Walked to the country church across the fields.
It was a little church, and plain, almost
To ugliness, yet lacking not a charm
To him who sat there when a little boy.
And the low mounds, with long grass waving on,
Were quite as solemn as great marble tombs.
And on the sunny afternoons, across
This well-sown field of death, when forth they came
With the last psalm still lingering in their hearts,
He looked, and wondered where the heap would rise
That rested on the arch of his dead breast.
But in the gloom and rain he turned aside,
And let the drops soak through the sinking clay—
What mattered it to him?

And as they walked
Together home, the father loved to hear
The new streams pouring from his son's clear well.
The old man clung not only to the old;
Nor bowed the young man only to the new;
Yet as they walked, full often he would say,
He liked not much what he had heard that morn.
He said, these men believed the past alone;
Honoured those Jewish times as they were Jews;
And had no ears for this poor needy hour,

That up and down the centuries doth go,
Like beggar boy that wanders through the streets,
With hand held out to any passer by;
And yet God made it, and its many cries.

He used to say: "I take the work that comes
All ready to my hand. The lever set,
I grasp and heave withal. Or rather, I
Love where I live, and yield me to the will
That made the needs about me. It may be
I find them nearer to my need of work
Than any other choice. I would not choose
To lack a relish for the thing that God
Thinks worth. Among my own I will be good;
A helper to all those that look to me.
This farm is God's, as much as yonder town;
These men and maidens, kine and horses, his;
And need his laws of truth made rules of fact;
Or else the earth is not redeemed from ill."
He spoke not often; but he ruled and did.
No ill was suffered there by man or beast
That he could help; no creature fled from him;
And when he slew, 'twas with a sudden death,
Like God's benignant lightning. For he knew
That God doth make the beasts, and loves them well,
And they are sacred. Sprung from God as we,
They are our brethren in a lower kind;
And in their face he saw the human look.
They said: "Men look like different animals;"

But he: "The animals are like to men,
Some one, and some another." Cruelty,
He said, would need no other fiery hell,
Than that the ghosts of the sad beasts should come,
And crowding, silent, all their heads one way,
Stare the ill man to madness.

By degrees,
They knew not how, men trusted in him. When
He spoke, his word had all the force of deeds
That lay unsaid within him. To be good
Is more than holy words or definite acts;
Embodying itself unconsciously
In simple forms of human helpfulness,
And understanding of the need that prays.
And when he read the weary tales of crime,
And wretchedness, and white-faced children, sad
With hunger, and neglect, and cruel words,
He would walk sadly for an afternoon,
With head down-bent, and pondering footstep slow;
And to himself conclude: "The best I can
For the great world, is, just the best I can
For this my world. The influence will go
In widening circles to the darksome lanes
In London's self." When a philanthropist
Said pompously: "With your great gifts you ought
To work for the great world, not spend yourself
On common labours like a common man;"
He answered him: "The world is in God's hands.

This part he gives to me; for which my past,
Built up on loves inherited, hath made
Me fittest. Neither will He let me think
Primeval, godlike work too low to need,
For its perfection, manhood's noblest powers
And deepest knowledge, far beyond my gifts.
And for the crowds of men, in whom a soul
Cries through the windows of their hollow eyes
For bare humanity, and leave to grow,—
Would I could help them! But all crowds are made
Of individuals; and their grief, and pain,
And thirst, and hunger, all are of the one,
Not of the many. And the power that helps
Enters the individual, and extends
Thence in a thousand gentle influences
To other hearts. It is not made one's own
By laying hold of an allotted share
Of general good divided faithfully.
Now here I labour whole upon the place
Where they have known me from my childhood up.
I know the individual man; and he
Knows me. If there is power in me to help,
It goeth forth beyond the present will,
Clothing itself in very common deeds
Of any humble day's necessity:
—I would not always consciously do good;
Not always feel a helper of the men,
Who make me full return for my poor deeds
(Which I *must* do for my own highest sake,

If I forgot my brethren for themselves)
By human trust, and confidence of eyes
That look me in the face, and hands that do
My work at will—'tis more than I deserve.
But in the city, with a few lame words,
And a few scanty handfuls of weak coin,
Misunderstood, or, at the best, unknown,
I should toil on, and seldom reach the mail.
And if I leave the thing that lieth next,
To go and do the thing that is afar,
I take the very strength out of my deed,
Seeking the needy not for pure need's sake."
Thus he. The world-wise schemer for the good
Held his poor peace, and left him to his way.

What of the vision now? the vision fair
Sent forth to meet him, when at eve he went
Home from his first day's ploughing? Oft she passed
Slowly on horseback, in all kinds of dreams;
For much he dreamed, and loved his dreaming well.
Nor woke he from such dreams with vain regret;
But, saying, "I have seen that face once more,"
He smiled with his eyes, and rose to work.
Nor did he turn aside from other maids,
But loved the woman-faces and dear eyes;
And sometimes thought, "One day I wed a maid,
And make her mine;" but never came the maid,
Or never came the hour, that he might say,
"I wed this maid." And ever when he read

A tale of lofty aim, or when the page
Of history spoke of woman very fair,
Or wondrous good, her face arose, and stayed,
The face for ever of that storied page.

Meantime how fared the lady? She had wed
One of those common men, who serve as ore
For the gold grains to lie in. Virgin gold
Lay hidden there—no richer was the dross.
She went to gay assemblies, not content;
For she had found no hearts, that, struck with hers,
Sounded one chord. She went, and danced, or sat
And listlessly conversed; or, if at home,
Read the new novel, wishing all the time
For something better; though she knew not what,
Or how to search for it.

What had she felt,
If, through the rhythmic motion of light forms,
A vision, had arisen; as when, of old,
The minstrel's art laid bare the seer's eye,
And showed him plenteous waters in the waste?
If she had seen her ploughman-lover go
With his great stride across some lonely field,
Beneath the dark blue vault, ablaze with stars,
And lift his full eyes to earth's radiant roof
In gladness that the roof was yet a floor
For other feet to tread, for his, one day?
Or the emerging vision might reveal

Him, in his room, with space-compelling mind,
Pursue, upon his slate, some planet's course;
Or read, and justify the poet's wrath,
Or wise man's slow conclusion; or, in dreams,
All gently bless her with a trembling voice
For that old smile, that withered nevermore,
That woke him, smiled him into what he is;
Or, kneeling, cry to God for better still.
Would those dark eyes have beamed with darker light?
Would that fair soul, all tired of emptiness,
Have risen from the couch of its unrest,
And looked to heaven again, again believed
In God's realities of life and fact?
Would not her soul have sung unto itself,
In secret joy too good for that vain throng:
"I have a friend, a ploughman, who is wise,
And knoweth God, and goodness, and fair faith;
Who needeth not the outward shows of things,
But worships the unconquerable truth:
And this man loveth me; I will be proud
And humble—would he love me if he knew?"

In the third year, a heavy harvest fell,
Full filled, beneath the reaping-hook and scythe.
The men and maidens in the scorching heat
Held on their toil, lightened by song and jest;
Resting at mid-day, and from brimming bowl,
Drinking brown ale, and white abundant milk;
Until the last ear fell, and stubble stood

Where waved the forests of the murmuring corn;
And o'er the land rose piled the tent-like shocks,
As of an army resting in array
Of tent by tent, rank following on rank;
Waiting until the moon should have her will
Of ripening on the ears.

And all went well.

The grain was fully ripe. The harvest carts
Went forth broad-platformed for the towering load,
With frequent passage 'twixt homeyard and field.
And half the oats already hid their tops,
Of countless spray-hung grains—their tops, by winds
Swayed oft, and ringing, rustling contact sweet;
Made heavy oft by slow-combining dews,
Or beaten earthward by the pelting rains;
Rising again in breezes to the sun,
And bearing all things till the perfect time—
Had hid, I say, this growth of sun and air
Within the darkness of the towering stack;
When in the north low billowy clouds appeared,
Blue-based, white-topped, at close of afternoon;
And in the west, dark masses, plashed with blue,
With outline vague of misty steep and dell,
Clomb o'er the hill-tops; there was thunder there.
The air was sultry. But the upper sky
Was clear and radiant.

Downward went the sun;

Down low, behind the low and sullen clouds
That walled the west; and down below the hills
That lay beneath them hid. Uprose the moon,
And looked for silence in her moony fields,
But there she found it not. The staggering cart,
Like an o'erladen beast, crawled homeward still,
Returning light and low. The laugh broke yet,
That lightning of the soul, from cloudless skies,
Though not so frequent, now that labour passed
Its natural hour. Yet on the labour went,
Straining to beat the welkin-climbing toil
Of the huge rain-clouds, heavy with their floods.
Sleep, like enchantress old, soon sided with
The crawling clouds, and flung benumbing spells
On man and horse. The youth that guided home
The ponderous load of sheaves, higher than wont,
Daring the slumberous lightning, with a start
Awoke, by falling full against the wheel,
That circled slow after the sleepy horse.
Yet none would yield to soft-suggesting sleep,
Or leave the last few shocks; for the wild rain
Would catch thereby the skirts of Harvest-home,
And hold her lingering half-way in the storm.

The scholar laboured with his men all night.
Not that he favoured quite this headlong race
With Nature. He would rather say: "The night
Is sent for sleep, we ought to sleep in it,
And leave the clouds to God. Not every storm

That climbeth heavenward, overwhelms the earth.
And if God wills, 'tis better as he wills;
What he takes from us never can be lost."
But the old farmer ordered; and the son
Went manful to the work, and held his peace.

The last cart homeward went, oppressed with sheaves,
Just as a moist dawn blotted pale the east,
And the first drops fell, overfed with mist,
O'ergrown and helpless. Darker grew the morn.
Upstraining racks of clouds, tumultuous borne
Upon the turmoil of opposing winds,
Met in the zenith. And the silence ceased:
The lightning brake, and flooded all the earth,
And its great roar of billows followed it.
The deeper darkness drank the light again,
And lay unslaked. But ere the darkness came,
In the full revelation of the flash,
He saw, along the road, borne on a horse
Powerful and gentle, the sweet lady go,
Whom years ago he saw for evermore.
"Ah me!" he said; "my dreams are come for me,
Now they shall have their time." And home he went,
And slept and moaned, and woke, and raved, and wept.
Through all the net-drawn labyrinth of his brain
The fever raged, like pent internal fire.
His father soon was by him; and the hand
Of his one sister soothed him. Days went by.
As in a summer evening, after rain,

He woke to sweet quiescent consciousness;
Enfeebled much, but with a new-born life.

As slow the weeks passed, he recovered strength;
And ere the winter came, seemed strong once more.
But the brown hue of health had not returned
On his thin face; although a keener fire
Burned in his larger eyes; and in his cheek
The mounting blood glowed radiant (summoning force,
Sometimes, unbidden) with a sunset red.

Before its time, a biting frost set in;
And gnawed with fangs of cold his shrinking life;
And the disease so common to the north
Was born of outer cold and inner heat.
One morn his sister, entering, saw he slept;
But in his hand he held a handkerchief
Spotted with crimson. White with terror, she
Stood motionless and staring. Startled next
By her own pallor, when she raised her eyes,
Seen in the glass, she moved at last. He woke;
And seeing her dismay, said with a smile,
"Blood-red was evermore my favourite hue,
And see, I have it in me; that is all."
She shuddered; and he tried to jest no more;
And from that hour looked Death full in the face.

When first he saw the red blood outward leap,
As if it sought again the fountain heart,

Whence it had flowed to fill the golden bowl;
No terror, but a wild excitement seized
His spirit; now the pondered mystery
Of the unseen would fling its portals wide,
And he would enter, one of the awful dead;
Whom men conceive as ghosts that fleet and pine,
Bereft of weight, and half their valued lives;—
But who, he knew, must live intenser life,
Having, through matter, all illumed with sense,
Flaming, like Horeb's bush, with present soul,
And by the contact with a thousand souls,
Each in the present glory of a shape,
Sucked so much honey from the flower o' the world,
And kept the gain, and cast the means aside;
And now all eye, all ear, all sense, perhaps;
Transformed, transfigured, yet the same life-power
That moulded first the visible to its use.
So, like a child he was, that waits the show,
While yet the panting lights restrained burn
At half height, and the theatre is full.

But as the days went on, they brought sad hours,
When he would sit, his hands upon his knees,
Drooping, and longing for the wine of life.
Ah! now he learned what new necessities
Come when the outer sphere of life is riven,
And casts distorted shadows on the soul;
While the poor soul, not yet complete in God,
Cannot with inward light burn up the shades,

And laugh at seeming that is not the fact.
For God, who speaks to man on every side,
Sending his voices from the outer world,
Glorious in stars, and winds, and flowers, and waves,
And from the inner world of things unseen,
In hopes and thoughts and deep assurances,
Not seldom ceases outward speech awhile,
That the inner, isled in calm, may clearer sound;
Or, calling through dull storms, proclaim a rest,
One centre fixed amid conflicting spheres;
And thus the soul, calm in itself, become
Able to meet and cope with outward things,
Which else would overwhelm it utterly;
And that the soul, saying *I will the light*,
May, in its absence, yet grow light itself,
And man's will glow the present will of God,
Self-known, and yet divine.

Ah, gracious God!

Do with us what thou wilt, thou glorious heart!
Thou art the God of them that grow, no less
Than them that are; and so we trust in thee
For what we shall be, and in what we are.

Yet in the frequent pauses of the light,
When fell the drizzling thaw, or flaky snow;
Or when the heaped-up ocean of still foam
Reposed upon the tranced earth, breathing low;
His soul was like a frozen lake beneath

The clear blue heaven, reflecting it so dim
That he could scarce believe there was a heaven;
And feared that beauty might be but a toy
Invented by himself in happier moods.
"For," said he, "if my mind can dim the fair,
Why should it not enhance the fairness too?"
But then the poor mind lay itself all dim,
And ruffled with the outer restlessness
Of striving death and life. And a tired man
May drop his eyelids on the visible world,
To whom no dreams, when fancy flieth free,
Will bring the sunny excellence of day;
Nor will his utmost force increase his sight.
'Tis easy to destroy, not so to make.
No keen invention lays the strata deep
Of ancient histories; or sweeps the sea
With purple shadows and blue breezes' tracks,
Or rosy memories of the down-gone sun.
And if God means no beauty in these shows,
But drops them, helpless shadows, from his sun,
Ah me, my heart! thou needst another God.
Oh! lack and doubt and fear can only come
Because of plenty, confidence, and love:
Without the mountain there were no abyss.
Our spirits, inward cast upon themselves,
Because the delicate ether, which doth make
The mediator with the outer world,
Is troubled and confused with stormy pain;
Not glad, because confined to shuttered rooms,

Which let the sound of slanting rain be heard,
But show no sparkling sunlight on the drops,
Or ancient rainbow dawning in the west;—
Cast on themselves, I say, nor finding there
The thing they need, because God has not come,
And, claiming all their Human his Divine,
Revealed himself in all their inward parts,
Go wandering up and down a dreary house.
Thus reasoned he. Yet up and down the house
He wandered moaning. Till his soul and frame,
In painful rest compelled, full oft lay still,
And suffered only. Then all suddenly
A light would break from forth an inward well—
God shone within him, and the sun arose.
And to its windows went the soul and looked:—
Lo! o'er the bosom of the outspread earth
Flowed the first waves of sunrise, rippling on.

Much gathered he of patient faith from off
These gloomy heaths, this land of mountains dark,
By moonlight only, like the sorcerer's weeds;
As testify these written lines of his
Found on his table, when his empty chair
Stood by the wall, with yet a history
Clinging around it for the old man's eyes.

I am weary, and something lonely;
And can only think, think.
If there were some water only,

That a spirit might drink, drink!
And rise
With light in the eyes,
And a crown of hope on the brow;
And walk in outgoing gladness,—
Not sit in an inward sadness—
As now!

But, Lord, thy child will be sad,
As sad as it pleaseth thee;
Will sit, not needing to be glad,
Till thou bid sadness flee;
And drawing near
With a simple cheer,
Speak one true word to me.

Another song in a low minor key
From awful holy calm, as this from grief,
I weave, a silken flower, into my web,
That goes straight on, with simply crossing lines,
Floating few colours upward to the sight.

Ah, holy midnight of the soul,
When stars alone are high;
When winds are dead, or at their goal,
And sea-waves only sigh!

Ambition faints from out the will;
Asleep sad longing lies;

All hope of good, all fear of ill,
All need of action dies;

Because God is; and claims the life
He kindled in thy brain;
And thou in Him, rapt far from strife,
Diest and liv'st again.

It was a changed and wintry time to him;
But visited by April airs and scents,
That came with sudden presence, unforetold;
As brushed from off the outer spheres of spring
In the new singing world, by winds of sighs,
That wandering swept across the glad *To be*.
Strange longings that he never knew till now,
A sense of want, yea of an infinite need,
Cried out within him—rather moaned than cried.
And he would sit a silent hour and gaze
Upon the distant hills with dazzling snow
Upon their peaks, and thence, adown their sides,
Streaked vaporous, or starred in solid blue.
And then a shadowy sense arose in him,
As if behind those world-inclosing hills,
There sat a mighty woman, with a face
As calm as life, when its intensity
Pushes it nigh to death, waiting for him,
To make him grand for ever with a kiss,
And send him silent through the toning worlds.

The father saw him waning. The proud sire
Beheld his pride go drooping in the cold
Down, down to the warm earth; and gave God thanks
That he was old. But evermore the son
Looked up and smiled as he had heard strange news,
Across the waste, of primrose-buds and flowers.
Then again to his father he would come
Seeking for comfort, as a troubled child,
And with the same child's hope of comfort there.
Sure there is one great Father in the heavens,
Since every word of good from fathers' lips
Falleth with such authority, although
They are but men as we: God speaks in them.
So this poor son who neared the unknown death,
Took comfort in his father's tenderness,
And made him strong to die. One day he came,
And said: "What think you, father, is it hard,
This dying?" "Well, my boy," he said, "We'll try
And make it easy with the present God.
But, as I judge, though more by hope than sight,
It seemeth harder to the lookers on,
Than him that dieth. It may be, each breath,
That they would call a gasp, seems unto him
A sigh of pleasure; or, at most, the sob
Wherewith the unclothed spirit, step by step,
Wades forth into the cool eternal sea.
I think, my boy, death has two sides to it,
One sunny, and one dark; as this round earth
Is every day half sunny and half dark.

We on the dark side call the mystery *death*;
They on the other, looking down in light,
Wait the glad birth, with other tears than ours."
"Be near me, father, when I die;" he said.
"I will, my boy, until a better sire
Takes your hand out of mine, and I shall say:
I give him back to thee; Oh! love him, God;
For he needs more than I can ever be.
And then, my son, mind and be near in turn,
When my time comes; you in the light beyond,
And knowing all about it; I all dark."

And so the days went on, until the green
Shone through the snow in patches, very green:
For, though the snow was white, yet the green shone.
And hope of life awoke within his heart;
For the spring drew him, warm, soft, budding spring,
With promises. The father better knew.
God, give us heaven. Remember our poor hearts.
We never grasp the zenith of the time;
We find no spring, except in winter prayers.

Now he, who strode a king across his fields,
Crept slowly through the breathings of the spring;
And sometimes wept in secret, that the earth,
Which dwelt so near his heart with all its suns,
And moons, and maidens, soon would lie afar
Across some unknown, sure-dividing waste.
Yet think not, though I fall upon the sad,

And lingering listen to the fainting tones,
Before I strike new chords that seize the old
And waft their essence up the music-stair—
Think not that he was always sad, nor dared
To look the blank unknown full in the void:
For he had hope in God, the growth of years,
Ponderings, and aspirations from a child,
And prayers and readings and repentances.
Something within him ever sought to come
At peace with something deeper in him still.
Some sounds sighed ever for a harmony
With other deeper, fainter tones, that still
Drew nearer from the unknown depths, wherein
The Individual goeth out in God,
And smoothed the discord ever as they grew.
Now he went back the way the music came,
Hoping some nearer sign of God at hand;
And, most of all, to see the very face
That in Judea once, at supper time,
Arose a heaven of tenderness above
The face of John, who leaned upon the breast
Soon to lie down in its last weariness.

And as the spring went on, his budding life
Swelled up and budded towards the invisible,
Bursting the earthy mould wherein it lay.
He never thought of churchyards, as before,
When he was strong; but ever looked above,
Away from the green earth to the blue sky,

And thanked God that he died not in the cold.
"For," said he, "I would rather go abroad
When the sun shines, and birds are happy here.
For, though it may be we shall know no place,
But only mighty realms of making thought,
(Not living in creation any more,
But evermore creating our own worlds)
Yet still it seems as if I had to go
Into the sea of air that floats and heaves,
And swings its massy waves around our earth,
And may feel wet to the unclothed soul;
And I would rather go when it is full
Of light and blueness, than when grey and fog
Thicken it with the steams of the old earth.
Now in the first of summer I shall die;
Lying, mayhap, at sunset, sinking asleep,
And going with the light, and from the dark;
And when the earth is dark, they'll say: 'He is dead;'
But I shall say: 'Ah God! I live and love;
The earth is fair, but this is fairer still;
My dear ones, they were very dear; but now
The past is past; for they are dearer still.'
So I shall go, in starlight, it may be,
Or lapt in moonlight ecstasies, to seek
The heart of all, the man of all, my friend;
Whom I shall know my own beyond all loves,
Because he makes all loving true and deep;
And I live on him, in him, he in me."

The weary days and nights had taught him much;
Had sent him, as a sick child creeps along,
Until he hides him in his mother's breast,
Seeking for God. For all he knew before
Seemed as he knew it not. He needed now
To feel God's arms around him hold him close,
Close to his heart, ere he could rest an hour.
And God was very good to him, he said.

Ah God! we need the winter as the spring;
And thy poor children, knowing thy great heart,
And that thou bearest thy large share of grief,
Because thou lovest goodness more than joy
In them thou lovest,—so dost let them grieve,
Will cease to vex thee with their peevish cries,
Will look and smile, though they be sorrowful;
And not the less pray for thy help, when pain
Is overstrong, coming to thee for rest.
One day we praise thee for, without, the pain.

One night, as oft, he lay and could not sleep.
His soul was like an empty darkened room,
Through which strange pictures pass from the outer world;
While regnant will lay passive and looked on.
But the eye-tube through which the shadows came
Was turned towards the past. One after one
Arose old scenes, old sorrows, old delights.
Ah God! how sad are all things that grow old;
Even the rose-leaves have a mournful scent,

And old brown letters are more sad than graves;
Old kisses lie about the founts of tears,
Like autumn leaves around the winter wells;
And yet they cannot die. A smile once smiled
Is to eternity a smile—no less;
And that which smiles and kisses, liveth still;
And thou canst do great wonders, Wonderful!

At length, as ever in such vision-hours,
Came the bright maiden, riding the great horse.
And then at once the will sprang up awake,
And, like a necromantic sage, forbade
What came unbidden to depart at will.
So on that form he rested his sad thoughts,
Till he began to wonder what her lot;
How she had fared in spinning history
Into a psyche-cradle, where to die;
And then emerge—what butterfly? pure white,
With silver dust of feathers on its wings?
Or that dull red, seared with its ebon spots?
And then he thought: "I know some women fail,
And cease to be so very beautiful.
And I have heard men rave of certain eyes,
In which I could not rest a moment's space."
Straightway the fount of possibilities
Began to gurgle, under, in his soul.
Anon the lava-stream burst forth amain,
And glowed, and scorched, and blasted as it flowed.
For purest souls sometimes have direst fears,

In ghost-hours when the shadow of the earth
Is cast on half her children, from the sun
Who is afar and busy with the rest.
"If my high lady be but only such
As some men say of women—very pure
When dressed in white, and shining in men's eyes,
And with the wavings of great unborn wings
Around them in the aether of the souls,
Felt at the root where senses meet in one
Like dim-remembered airs and rhymes and hues;
But when alone, at best a common thing,
With earthward thoughts, and feet that are of earth!
Ah no—it cannot be! She is of God.
But then, fair things may perish; higher life
Gives deeper death; fair gifts make fouler faults:
Women themselves—I dare not think the rest.
And then they say that in her London world,
They have other laws and judgments than in ours."
And so the thoughts walked up and down his soul,
And found at last a spot wherein to rest,
Building a resolution for the day.

But next day, and the next, he was too worn
With the unrest of this chaotic night—
As if a man had sprung to life before
The spirit of God moved on the waters' face,
And made his dwelling ready, who in pain,
Himself untuned, groaned for a harmony,
For order and for law around his life—

Too tired he was to do as he had planned.
But on the next, a genial south-born wind
Waved the blue air beneath the golden sun,
Bringing glad news of summer from the south.
Into his little room the bright rays shone,
And, darting through the busy blazing fire,
Turning it ghostly pale, slew it almost;
As the great sunshine of the further life
Quenches the glow of this, and giveth death.
He had lain gazing at the wondrous strife
And strange commingling of the sun and fire,
Like spiritual and vital energies,
Whereof the one doth bear the other first,
And then destroys it for a better birth;
And now he rose to help the failing fire,
Because the sunshine came not near enough
To do for both. And then he clothed himself,
And sat him down betwixt the sun and fire,
And got him ink and paper, and began
And wrote with earnest dying heart as thus.
"Lady, I owe thee much. Nay, do not look
To find my name; for though I write it here,
I date as from the churchyard, where I lie
Whilst thou art reading; and thou know'st me not.
I dare to write, because I am crowned by death
Thy equal. If my boldness should offend,
I, pure in my intent, hide with the ghosts,
Where thou wilt never meet me, until thou
Knowest that death, like God, doth make of one.

"But pardon, lady. Ere I had begun,
My thoughts moved towards thee with a gentle flow
That bore a depth of waters. When I took
My pen to write, they rushed into a gulf,
Precipitate and foamy. Can it be,
That death who humbles all hath made me proud?
Lady, thy loveliness hath walked my brain,
As if I were thy heritage in sooth,
Bequeathed from sires beyond all story's reach.
For I have loved thee from afar, and long;
Joyous in having seen what lifted me,
By very power to see, above myself.
Thy beauty hath made beautiful my life;
Thy virtue made mine strong to be itself.
Thy form hath put on every changing dress
Of name, and circumstance, and history,
That so the life, dumb in the wondrous page
Recording woman's glory, might come forth
And be the living fact to longing eyes—
Thou, thou essential womanhood to me;
Afar as angels or the sainted dead,
Yet near as loveliness can haunt a man,
And taking any shape for every need.

"Years, many years, have passed since the first time,
Which was the last, I saw thee. What have they
Made or unmade in thee? I ask myself.
O lovely in my memory! art thou

As lovely in thyself? Thy features then
Said what God made thee; art thou such indeed?
Forgive my boldness, lady; I am dead;
And dead men may cry loud, they make no noise.

"I have a prayer to make thee—hear the dead.
Lady, for God's sake be as beautiful
As that white form that dwelleth in my heart;
Yea, better still, as that ideal Pure
That waketh in thee, when thou prayest God,
Or helpst thy poor neighbour. For myself
I pray. For if I die and find that she,
My woman-glory, lives in common air,
Is not so very radiant after all,
My sad face will afflict the calm-eyed ghosts,
Not used to see such rooted sadness there,
At least in fields where I may hope to walk
And find good company. Upon my knees
I could implore thee—justify my faith
In womanhood's white-handed nobleness,
And thee, its revelation unto me.

"But I bethink me, lady. If thou turn
Thy thoughts upon thyself, for the great sake
Of purity and conscious whiteness' self,
Thou wilt but half succeed. The other half
Is to forget the first, and all thyself,
Quenching thy moonlight in the blaze of day;
Turning thy being full unto thy God;

Where shouldst thou quite forget the name of Truth,
Yet thou wouldst be a pure, twice holy child,
(Twice born of God, once of thy own pure will
Arising at the calling Father's voice,)
Doing the right with sweet unconsciousness;
Having God in thee, a completer soul,
Be sure, than thou alone; thou not the less
Complete in choice, and individual life,
Since that which sayeth *I*, doth call him *Sire*.

"Lady, I die—the Father holds me up.
It is not much to thee that I should die;
(How should it be? for thou hast never looked
Deep in my eyes, as I once looked in thine)
But it is much that He doth hold me up.

"I thank thee, lady, for a gentle look
Thou lettest fall upon me long ago.
The same sweet look be possible to thee
For evermore;—I bless thee with thine own,
And say farewell, and go into my grave—
Nay, nay, into the blue heaven of my hopes."

Then came his name in full, and then the name
Of the green churchyard where he hoped to lie.
And then he laid him back, weary, and said:
"O God! I am only an attempt at life.
Sleep falls again ere I am full awake.
Life goeth from me in the morning hour.

I have seen nothing clearly; felt no thrill
Of pure emotion, save in dreams, wild dreams;
And, sometimes, when I looked right up to thee.
I have been proud of knowledge, when the flame
Of Truth, high Truth, but flickered in my soul.
Only at times, in lonely midnight hours,
When in my soul the stars came forth, and brought
New heights of silence, quelling all my sea,
Have I beheld clear truth, apart from form,
And known myself a living lonely thought,
Isled in the hyaline of Truth away.
I have not reaped earth's harvest, O my God;
Have gathered but a few poor wayside flowers,
Harebells, red poppies, closing pimpernels—
All which thou hast invented, beautiful God,
To gather by the way, for comforting.
Have I aimed proudly, therefore aimed too low,
Striving for something visible in my thought,
And not the unseen thing hid far in thine?
Make me content to be a primrose-flower
Among thy nations; that the fair truth, hid
In the sweet primrose, enter into me,
And I rejoice, an individual soul,
Reflecting thee; as truly then divine,
As if I towered the angel of the sun.
All in the night, the glowing worm hath given
Me keener joy than a whole heaven of stars:
Thou camest in the worm more near me then.
Nor do I think, were I that green delight,

I'd change to be the shadowy evening star.
Ah, make me, Father, anything thou wilt,
So be thou will it; I am safe with thee.
I laugh exulting. Make me something, God;
Clear, sunny, veritable purity
Of high existence, in itself content,
And in the things that are besides itself,
And seeking for no measures. I have found
The good of earth, if I have found this death.
Now I am ready; take me when thou wilt."

He laid the letter in his desk, with seal
And superscription. When his sister came,
He said, "You'll find a note there—afterwards—
Take it yourself to the town, and let it go.
But do not see the name, my sister true—
I'll tell you all about it, when you come."

And as the eve, through paler, darker shades,
Insensibly declines, and is no more,
The lordly day once more a memory,
So died he. In the hush of noon he died.
Through the low valley-fog he brake and climbed.
The sun shone on—why should he not shine on?
The summer noises rose o'er all the land.
The love of God lay warm on hill and plain.
'Tis well to die in summer.

When the breath,

After a long still pause, returned no more,
The old man sank upon his knees, and said:
"Father, I thank thee; it is over now;
And thou hast helped him well through this sore time.
So one by one we all come back to thee,
All sons and brothers, thanking thee who didst
Put of thy fatherhood in our poor hearts,
That, having children, we might guess thy love.
And at the last, find all loves one in thee."
And then he rose, and comforted the maid,
Who in her brother lost the pride of life,
Weeping as all her heaven were full of rain.

When that which was so like him—so unlike—
Lay in the churchyard, and the green turf soon
Would grow together, healing up the wounds
Of the old Earth who took her share again,
The sister went to do his last request.
Then found she, with his other papers, this,—
A farewell song, in lowland Scottish tongue:—

Greetna, father, that I'm gaein'.
For fu' weel ye ken the gaet.
I' the winter, corn ye're sawin'—
I' the hairst, again ye hae't.

I'm gaein' hame to see my mither—
She'll be weel acquant or this,
Sair we'll muse at ane anither,

'Tween the auld word an' new kiss.

Love, I'm doubtin', will be scanty
Roun' ye baith, when I'm awa';
But the kirk has happin' plenty
Close aside me, for you twa.

An' aboon, there's room for mony—
'Twas na made for ane or twa;
But it grew for a' an' ony
Countin' love the best ava'.

Here, aneath, I ca' ye father:
Auld names we'll nor tyne nor spare;
A' my sonship I maun gather,
For the Son is King up there.

Greetna, father, that I'm gaein';
For ye ken fu' weel the gaet:
Here, in winter, cast yer sawin'—
There, in hairst, again ye hae't.

What of the lady? Little more I know.
Not even if, when she had read the lines,
She rose in haste, and to her chamber went,
And shut the door; nor if, when she came forth,
A dawn of holier purpose shone across
The sadness of her brow; unto herself
Convicted; though the great world, knowing all,

Might call her pure as day—yea, truth itself.
Of these things I know nothing—only know
That on a warm autumnal afternoon,
When half-length shadows fell from mossy stones,
Darkening the green upon the grassy graves,
While the still church, like a said prayer, arose
White in the sunshine, silent as the graves,
Empty of souls, as is the tomb itself;
A little boy, who watched a cow near by
Gather her milk from alms of clover fields,
Flung over earthen dykes, or straying out
Beneath the gates upon the paths, beheld
All suddenly—he knew not how she came—
A lady, closely veiled, alone, and still,
Seated upon a grave. Long time she sat
And moved not, "greetin' sair," the boy did say;
"Just like my mither whan my father deed.
An' syne she rase, an' pu'd at something sma',
A glintin' gowan, or maybe a blade
O' the dead grass," and glided silent forth,
Over the low stone wall by two old steps,
And round the corner, and was seen no more.
The clang of hoofs and sound of carriage wheels
Arose and died upon the listener's ear.

THE HOMELESS GHOST

Still flowed the music, flowed the wine.

The youth in silence went;
Through naked streets, in cold moonshine,
His homeward way he bent,
Where, on the city's seaward line,
His lattice seaward leant.

He knew not why he left the throng,
But that he could not rest;
That something pained him in the song,
And mocked him in the jest;
And a cold moon-glitter lay along
One lovely lady's breast.

He sat him down with solemn book
His sadness to beguile;
A skull from off its bracket-nook
Threw him a lipless smile;
But its awful, laughter-mocking look,
Was a passing moonbeam's wile.

An hour he sat, and read in vain,
Nought but mirrors were his eyes;
For to and fro through his helpless brain,
Went the dance's mysteries;

Till a gust of wind against the pane,
Mixed with a sea-bird's cries,
And the sudden spatter of drifting rain
Bade him mark the altered skies.

The moon was gone, intombed in cloud;
The wind began to rave;
The ocean heaved within its shroud,
For the dark had built its grave;
But like ghosts brake forth, and cried aloud,
The white crests of the wave.

Big rain. The wind howled out, aware
Of the tread of the watery west;
The windows shivered, back waved his hair,
The fireside seemed the best;
But lo! a lady sat in his chair,
With the moonlight across her breast.

The moonbeam passed. The lady sat on.
Her beauty was sad and white.
All but her hair with whiteness shone,
And her hair was black as night;
And her eyes, where darkness was never gone,
Although they were full of light.

But her hair was wet, and wept like weeds
On her pearly shoulders bare;
And the clear pale drops ran down like beads,

Down her arms, to her fingers fair;
And her limbs shine through, like thin-filmed seeds,
Her dank white robe's despair.

She moved not, but looked in his wondering face,
Till his blushes began to rise;
But she gazed, like one on the veiling lace,
To something within his eyes;
A gaze that had not to do with place,
But thought and spirit tries.

Then the voice came forth, all sweet and clear,
Though jarred by inward pain;
She spoke like one that speaks in fear
Of the judgment she will gain,
When the soul is full as a mountain-mere,
And the speech, but a flowing vein.

"Thine eyes are like mine, and thou art bold;
Nay, heap not the dying fire;
It warms not me, I am too cold,
Cold as the churchyard spire;
If thou cover me up with fold on fold,
Thou kill'st not the coldness dire."

Her voice and her beauty, like molten gold,
Thrilled through him in burning rain.
He was on fire, and she was cold,
Cold as the waveless main;

But his heart-well filled with woe, till it rolled
A torrent that calmed him again.

"Save me, Oh, save me!" she cried; and flung
Her splendour before his feet;—

"I am weary of wandering storms among,
And I hate the mouldy sheet;
I can dare the dark, wind-vexed and wrung,
Not the dark where the dead things meet.

"Ah! though a ghost, I'm a lady still—"

The youth recoiled aghast.
With a passion of sorrow her great eyes fill;
Not a word her white lips passed.
He caught her hand; 'twas a cold to kill,
But he held it warm and fast.

"What can I do to save thee, dear?"

At the word she sprang upright.
To her ice-lips she drew his burning ear,
And whispered—he shivered—she whispered light.
She withdrew; she gazed with an asking fear;
He stood with a face ghost-white.

"I wait—ah, would I might wait!" she said;

"But the moon sinks in the tide;
Thou seest it not; I see it fade,
Like one that may not bide.
Alas! I go out in the moonless shade;

Ah, kind! let me stay and hide."

He shivered, he shook, he felt like clay;
And the fear went through his blood;
His face was an awful ashy grey,
And his veins were channels of mud.
The lady stood in a white dismay,
Like a half-blown frozen bud.

"Ah, speak! am I so frightful then?
I live; though they call it death;
I am only cold—say *dear* again"—
But scarce could he heave a breath;
The air felt dank, like a frozen fen,
And he a half-conscious wraith.

"Ah, save me!" once more, with a hopeless cry,
That entered his heart, and lay;
But sunshine and warmth and rosiness vie
With coldness and moonlight and grey.
He spoke not. She moved not; yet to his eye,
She stood three paces away.

She spoke no more. Grief on her face
Beauty had almost slain.
With a feverous vision's unseen pace
She had flitted away again;
And stood, with a last dumb prayer for grace,
By the window that clanged with rain.

He stood; he stared. She had vanished quite.

The loud wind sank to a sigh;
Grey faces without paled the face of night,
As they swept the window by;
And each, as it passed, pressed a cheek of fright
To the glass, with a staring eye.

And over, afar from over the deep,
Came a long and cadenced wail;
It rose, and it sank, and it rose on the steep
Of the billows that build the gale.
It ceased; but on in his bosom creep
Low echoes that tell the tale.

He opened his lattice, and saw afar,
Over the western sea,
Across the spears of a sparkling star,
A moony vapour flee;
And he thought, with a pang that he could not bar,
The lady it might be.

He turned and looked into the room;
And lo! it was cheerless and bare;
Empty and drear as a hopeless tomb,—
And the lady was not there;
Yet the fire and the lamp drove out the gloom,
As he had driven the fair.

And up in the manhood of his breast,
Sprang a storm of passion and shame;
It tore the pride of his fancied best
In a thousand shreds of blame;
It threw to the ground his ancient crest,
And puffed at his ancient name.

He had turned a lady, and lightly clad,
Out in the stormy cold.
Was she a ghost?—Divinely sad
Are the guests of Hades old.
A wandering ghost? Oh! terror bad,
That refused an earthly fold!

And sorrow for her his shame's regret
Into humility wept;
He knelt and he kissed the footprints wet,
And the track by her thin robe swept;
He sat in her chair, all ice-cold yet,
And moaned until he slept.

He woke at dawn. The flaming sun
Laughed at the bye-gone dark.
"I am glad," he said, "that the night is done,
And the dream slain by the lark."
And the eye was all, until the gun
That boomed at the sun-set—hark!

And then, with a sudden invading blast,

He knew that it was no dream.
And all the night belief held fast,
Till thinned by the morning beam.
Thus radiant mornings and pale nights passed
On the backward-flowing stream.

He loved a lady with heaving breath,
Red lips, and a smile always;
And her sighs an odour inhabiteth,
All of the rose-hued may;
But the warm bright lady was false as death,
And the ghost is true as day.

And the spirit-face, with its woe divine,
Came back in the hour of sighs;
As to men who have lost their aim, and pine,
Old faces of childhood rise:
He wept for her pleading voice, and the shine
Of her solitary eyes.

And now he believed in the ghost all night,
And believed in the day as well;
And he vowed, with a sorrowing tearful might,
All she asked, whate'er befel,
If she came to his room, in her garment white,
Once more at the midnight knell.

She came not. He sought her in churchyards old
That lay along the sea;

And in many a church, when the midnight tolled,
 And the moon shone wondrously;
And down to the crypts he crept, grown bold;
 But he waited in vain: ah me!

And he pined and sighed for love so sore,
 That he looked as he were lost;
And he prayed her pardon more and more,
 As one who had sinned the most;
Till, fading at length, away he wore,
 And he was himself a ghost.

But if he found the lady then,
 The lady sadly lost,
Or she had found 'mongst living men
 A love that was a host,
I know not, till I drop my pen,
 And am myself a ghost.

ABU MIDJAN

"It is only just
To laud good wine:
If I sit in the dust,
So sits the vine."

Abu Midjan sang, as he sat in chains,
For the blood of the grape was the juice of his veins.
The prophet had said, "O Faithful, drink not"—
Abu Midjan drank till his heart was hot;
Yea, he sang a song in praise of wine,
And called it good names, a joy divine.
And Saad assailed him with words of blame,
And left him in irons, a fettered flame;
But he sang of the wine as he sat in chains,
For the blood of the grape ran fast in his veins.

"I will not think
That the Prophet said,
*Ye shall not drink
Of the flowing red.*

"But some weakling head,
In its after pain,
Moaning said,
Drink not again.

"But I will dare,
With a goodly drought,
To drink and not spare,
Till my thirst be out.

"For as I quaff
The liquor cool,
I do not laugh,
Like a Christian fool;

"But my bosom fills,
And my faith is high;
Through the emerald hills
Goes my lightning eye.

"I see *them* hearken,
I see them wait;
Their light eyes darken
The diamond gate.

"I hear the float
Of their chant divine;
Each heavenly note
Mingles with mine.

"Can an evil thing
Make beauty more?
Or a sinner bring

To the heavenly door?

"'Tis the sun-rays fine
That sink in the earth,
And are drunk by the vine,
For its daughters' birth.

"And the liquid light,
I drink again;
And it flows in might
Through the shining brain,

"Making it know
The things that are
In the earth below,
Or the farthest star.

"I will not think
That the Prophet said,
*Ye shall not drink
Of the flowing Red.*

"For his promise, lo!
Shows more divine,
When the channels o'erflow
With the singing wine.

"But if he did, 'tis a small annoy
To sit in chains for a heavenly joy."

Away went the song on the light wind borne.
His head sank down, and a ripple of scorn,
At the irons that fettered his brown limbs' strength.
Waved on his lip the dark hair's length.
But sudden he lifted his head to the north—
Like a mountain-beacon his eye blazed forth:
'Twas a cloud in the distance that caught his eye,
Whence a faint clang shot on the light breeze by;
A noise and a smoke on the plain afar—
'Tis the cloud and the clang of the Moslem war.
And the light that flashed from his black eyes, lo!
Was a light that paled the red wine's glow;
And he shook his fetters in bootless ire,
And called on the Prophet, and named his sire.
But the lady of Saad heard the clang,
And she knew the far sabres his fetters rang.
Oh! she had the heart where a man might rest,
For she knew the tempest in his breast.
She rose. Ere she reached him, he called her name,
But he called not twice ere the lady came;
And he sprang to his feet, and the irons cursed,
And wild from his lips the Tecbir burst:
"Let me go," he said, "and, by Allah's fear,
At sundown I sit in my fetters here,
Or lie 'neath a heaven of starry eyes,
Kissed by moon-maidens of Paradise."

The lady unlocked his fetters stout,

Brought her husband's horse and his armour out,
Clothed the warrior, and bid him go
An angel of vengeance upon the foe;
Then turned her in, and from the roof,
Beheld the battle, far aloof.

Straight as an arrow she saw him go,
Abu Midjan, the singer, upon the foe.
Like home-spiced lightning he pierced the cloud,
And the thunder of battle burst more loud;
And like lightning along a thunderous steep,
She saw the sickle-shaped sabres sweep,
Keen as the sunlight they dashed away
When it broke against them in flashing spray;
Till the battle ebbed o'er the plain afar,
Borne on the flow of the holy war.
As sank from the edge the sun's last flame,
Back to his bonds Abu Midjan came.

"O lady!" he said, "'tis a mighty horse;
The Prophet himself might have rode a worse.
I felt beneath me his muscles' play,
As he tore to the battle, like fiend, away.
I forgot him, and swept at the traitor weeds,
And they fell before me like broken reeds;
Dropt their heads, as a boy doth mow
The poppies' heads with his unstrung bow.
They fled. The faithful follow at will.
I turned. And lo! he was under me still.

Give him water, lady, and barley to eat;
Then come and help me to fetter my feet."

He went to the terrace, she went to the stall,
And tended the horse like a guest in the hall;
Then to the singer in haste returned.
The fire of the fight in his eyes yet burned;
But he said no more, as if in shame
Of the words that had burst from his lips in flame.
She left him there, as at first she found,
Seated in fetters upon the ground.

But the sealed fountain, in pulses strong,
O'erflowed his silence, and burst in song.

"Oh! the wine
Of the vine
Is a feeble thing;
In the rattle
Of battle
The true grapes spring.

"When on force
Of the horse,
The arm flung abroad
Is sweeping,
And reaping
The harvest of God.

"When the fear
Of the spear
 Makes way for its blow;
And the faithless
Lie breathless
 The horse-hoofs below.

"The wave-crest,
Round the breast,
 Tosses sabres all red;
But under,
Its thunder
 Is dumb to the dead.

"They drop
From the top
 To the sear heap below;
And deeper,
Down steeper,
 The infidels go.

"But bright
Is the light
 On the true-hearted breaking;
Rapturous faces,
Bent for embraces,
 Wait on his waking.

"And he hears

In his ears
The voice of the river,
Like a maiden,
Love-laden,
Go wandering ever.

"Oh! the wine
Of the vine
May lead to the gates;
But the rattle
Of battle
Wakes the angel who waits.

"To the lord
Of the sword
Open it must;
The drinker,
The thinker,
Sits in the dust.

"He dreams
Of the gleams
Of their garments of white:
He misses
Their kisses,
The maidens of light.

"They long
For the strong,

Who has burst through alarms,
Up, by the labour
Of stirrup and sabre,
Up to their arms.

"Oh! the wine of the grape is a feeble ghost;
But the wine of the fight is the joy of a host."

When Saad came home from the far pursuit,
He sat him down, and an hour was mute.
But at length he said: "Ah! wife, the fight
Had been lost full sure, but an arm of might
Sudden rose up on the crest of the war,
With its sabre that circled in rainbows afar,
Took up the battle, and drove it on—
Enoch sure, or the good St. John.
Wherever he leaped, like a lion he,
The fight was thickest, or soon to be;
Wherever he sprang, with his lion cry,
The thick of the battle soon went by.
With a headlong fear, the sinners fled;
We followed—and passed them—for they were dead.
But him who had saved us, we saw no more;
He had gone, as he came, by a secret door;
And strange to tell, in his holy force,
He wore my armour, he rode my horse."

The lady arose, with her noble pride,
And she walked with Saad, side by side;

As she led him, a moon that would not wane,
Where Midjan counted the links of his chain!

"I gave him thy horse, and thy armour to wear;
If I did a wrong, I am here to bear."

"Abu Midjan, the singer of love and of wine!
The arm of the battle—it also was thine?
Rise up, shake the fetters from off thy feet;
For the lord of the battle, are fetters meet?
Drink as thou wilt—till thou be hoar—
Let Allah judge thee—I judge no more."

Abu Midjan arose and flung aside
The clanging fetters, and thus he cried:
"If thou give me to God and his decrees,
Nor purge my sin by the shame of these;
I dare not do as I did before—
In the name of Allah, I drink no more."

AN OLD STORY

They were parted at last, although
Each was tenderly dear;
As asunder their eyes did go,
When first alone and near.

'Tis an old story this—
A trembling and a sigh,
A gaze in the eyes, a kiss—
Why will it *not* go by?

A BOOK OF DREAMS

PART I

1.

I lay and dreamed. The master came
In his old woven dress;
I stood in joy, and yet in shame,
Oppressed with earthliness.

He stretched his arms, and gently sought
To clasp me to his soul;
I shrunk away, because I thought
He did not know the whole.

I did not love him as I would,
Embraces were not meet;
I sank before him where he stood,
And held and kissed his feet.

Ten years have passed away since then,
Oft hast thou come to me;
The question scarce will rise again,
Whether I care for thee.

To every doubt, in thee my heart
An answer hopes to find;
In every gladness, Lord, thou art,
The deeper joy behind.

And yet in other realms of life,
Unknown temptations rise,
Unknown perplexities and strife,
New questions and replies.

And every lesson learnt, anew,
The vain assurance lends
That now I know, and now can do,
And now should see thy ends.

So I forget I am a child,
And act as if a man;
Who through the dark and tempest wild
Will go, because he can.

And so, O Lord, not yet I dare
To clasp thee to my breast;
Though well I know that only there
Is hid the secret rest.

And yet I shrink not, as at first:
Be thou the judge of guilt;
Thou knowest all my best and worst,
Do with me as thou wilt.

Spread thou once more thine arms abroad,
Lay bare thy bosom's beat;
Thou shalt embrace me, O my God,
And I will kiss thy feet.

2.

I stood before my childhood's home,
Outside the belt of trees;
All round, my dreaming glances roam
On well-known hills and leas.

When sudden, from the westward, rushed
A wide array of waves;
Over the subject fields they gushed
From far-off, unknown caves.

And up the hill they clomb and came,
On flowing like a sea:
I saw, and watched them like a game;
No terror woke in me.

For just the belting trees within,
I saw my father wait;
And should the waves the summit win,
I would go through the gate.

For by his side all doubt was dumb,
And terror ceased to foam;
No great sea-billows dared to come,
And tread the holy home.

Two days passed by. With restless toss,
The red flood brake its doors;
Prostrate I lay, and looked across
To the eternal shores.

The world was fair, and hope was nigh,
Some men and women true;
And I was strong, and Death and I
Would have a hard ado.

And so I shrank. But sweet and good
The dream came to my aid;
Within the trees my father stood,
I must not be dismayed.

My grief was his, not mine alone;
The waves that burst in fears,
He heard not only with his own,
But heard them with my ears.

My life and death belong to thee,
For I am thine, O God;
Thy hands have made and fashioned me,
'Tis thine to bear the load.

And thou shalt bear it. I will try
To be a peaceful child,
Whom in thy arms right tenderly
Thou carriest through the wild.

3.

The rich man mourns his little loss,
And knits the brow of care;
The poor man tries to bear the cross,
And seeks relief in prayer.

Some gold had vanished from my purse,
Which I had watched but ill;
I feared a lack, but feared yet worse
Regret returning still.

And so I knelt and prayed my prayer
To Him who maketh strong,
That no returning thoughts of care
Should do my spirit wrong.

I rose in peace, in comfort went,
And laid me down to rest;
But straight my soul grew confident
With gladness of the blest.

For ere the sleep that care redeems,
My soul such visions had,
That never child in childhood's dreams
Was more exulting glad.

No white-robed angels floated by
On slow, reposing wings;
I only saw, with inward eye,
Some very common things.

First rose the scarlet pimpernel,
With burning purple heart;
I saw it, and I knew right well
The lesson of its art.

Then came the primrose, childlike flower;
It looked me in the face;
It bore a message full of power,
And confidence, and grace.

And winds arose on uplands wild,
And bathed me like a stream;
And sheep-bells babbled round the child
Who loved them in a dream.

Henceforth my mind was never crossed
By thought of vanished gold,
But with it came the guardian host
Of flowers both meek and bold.

The loss is riches while I live,
A joy I would not lose:
Choose ever, God, what Thou wilt give,
Not leaving me to choose.

*"What said the flowers in whisper low,
To soothe me into rest?"*

I scarce have words—they seemed to grow
Right out of God's own breast.

They said, God meant the flowers He made,
As children see the same;
They said the words the lilies said

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