

The Complete Poetical Works of William Gay

Gay, William (1865-1897)

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Preface

THE poems in this volume have, with one or two exceptions, already appeared in print. They are presented here as they were corrected by William Gay shortly before his death. He had then a large number of other poems, amounting to over a hundred, which he excluded from publication. Many of these were, in my opinion, little if at all inferior to those which he sanctioned, but, though I regret his decision in regard to them, I feel bound to respect it. Their publication would have shown that his genius was not confined to one particular sphere of poetry.

J. G. O.

BENDIGO,

June, 1911.

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The Complete Poetical Works Of William Gay

William Gay: His Life And Work

WILLIAM GAY was born on May 2, 1865, in the little village of Bridge of Weir, in Renfrewshire, Scotland. He was the eldest of a large family, his father being by trade an engraver of patterns on copper cylinders for the printing of wall-papers and calico cloths, who has been spoken of by his son as an industrious and capable worker, an upright and religious man, very strict in his notion of duty, and narrow-minded in his religion. His mother was a woman of more than average intelligence, gentle, and at the same time impartial towards her children. Among Gay's ancestors is particularly mentioned his maternal grandfather, by name Taff, who wrote a poem in honour of his wife, Ellen McAdam, a lady who claimed kinship with the great George Buchanan, tutor of Queen Mary of Scots, and her son, James I. A few years after Gay's birth, the family removed to the town of Alexandria, on the other side of the Clyde, near Dumbarton. This is the land of Tobias Smollett, the author of *Peregrine Pickle*, and of the poet David Gray, writer of *The Luggie, and other poems*. Gay went to the ordinary Board School, and at the age of fourteen became a monitor, having to teach pupils as old as himself, and often finding it a hard matter to keep them in proper discipline. He was ambitious to go to Glasgow University, and began to study for the Orr Ewing bursaries, which were open to students from Dumbartonshire. He found the strain of his duties very great, and often was despondent over his chances. But he was successful and took his way to the University. There he joined Professor Ramsay's Latin class, in which, however, the work was uncongenial, and beyond his strength. Another, and more prominent cause of his failure at his studies was that his mind was distracted by religious doubts. From his childhood he had been trained under a strict Calvinism, the doctrines of which he accepted without inquiry. But many of them were repugnant to his feelings, and caused him to doubt. He had long used prayer as a vehicle to express his wants to God, and nothing did he desire more earnestly than to be saved. He imagined that he had succeeded, and, among other things, attended an evangelistic meeting at St. Andrew's Hall, where he gave his experience. But this state of rapture did not last long, and he soon fell back into his doubts and difficulties. His family wished him to be a minister, and his father was pressing him to come to a decision. His own hesitation gave rise to quarrels and misunderstandings. It was inevitable that it should be so. Father and son were at opposite poles; the former had no doubts, everything was plain and clear to him, and the conflict which was raging in the mind of his son only seemed evidence of a perverse spirit, which required to be exorcised by discipline.

To escape the mental torture he was undergoing and, to breathe a freer atmosphere, Gay determined to set out for London to try his fortune there. Accordingly he ran away. He took little money with him. He lived in poor lodgings in Bloomsbury, near the British Museum. There his youth and forlorn condition excited the pity of the servant and she offered him £5 to go home. Some one living in the same house informed his father where he was, and the latter wrote, begging him to return. He did so, and on the journey, while stopping at Rugby, burst a blood vessel. He stayed at Stafford to recover, receiving unwonted kindness from the waiter of the hotel, and subsequently arrived home, being received like a truant child, who had to be drilled into submission. Recovering health somewhat, he took a clerkship in Glasgow at 12s. a week. But soon he tired of the work, and the old doubts, longings, and restlessness came back upon him with redoubled force, and again he set off for London, this time determined to see it out to the bitter end. His funds were quickly exhausted, and he found himself in the streets. He had no place to sleep and once dozed off in St. Paul's Cathedral, only to be roughly aroused by the verger. He lived on nothing but bread and water, and on one occasion was nearly being arrested as a suspected dynamiter. He endeavoured to enlist both in the army and navy, but was rejected by both branches. Writing to a number of prominent men for employment, from G. R. Sims and A. Moore he received replies, the first sending him £1, and the other granting him an interview and securing him some work. Illness prostrated him, but finally he secured a position in a sewing-machine shop, which he had to relinquish almost immediately through want of strength. And so months passed, until his father again found out his hiding-place, and once more entreated him to come home. This time he tossed up as between Scotland and the sea. Scotland won, and, taking his passage in a steamer bound for Leith, he speedily reached his father's house, meeting there with a reception of much the same nature as before. Many of his adventures in London he draws with a truly Hogarthian pencil. He was often asked in the streets for alms by people who were well dressed, but who were like himself—utterly destitute. Two of his fellow-lodgers were a curious pair. He thus describes them—“The lodgers in the next room were an artist and his wife, both claiming good birth, and both drunkards. The man painted fancy pictures in water colours very daintily, and then pawned them for a few shillings which he and his wife drank, progressing from public-house to public-house, and ordering whisky and gin respectively. They had frequent violent quarrels, and I have never heard a woman so fluent in abuse. Still they seemed to manage to pay their way. The man could paint in a day a picture which he could pawn for five or six shillings. Many of the female faces which tradesmen give to their customers at Christmas are from his brush. After one of their usual bouts the artist had not a

penny left even to buy cardboard for a new picture. He applied to me for a loan, which I could not furnish, being myself penniless. Then he suggested that as I had a good coat, while his was old and green, I should lend it to him to pawn. He would redeem it, he said, in the evening. I consented. The coat was pawned, the material bought, the picture painted and disposed of, and my coat redeemed before evening. Occasionally on Sundays they invited me to share their dinner, and, in spite of their very obvious failings, I thought them on the whole not bad-hearted people, till the day I was leaving for home, when they presented me with a bill for the little dinners. I had had mostly lamb and mint sauce, with green peas and draught London porter. I was thunderstruck, but I could not both pay and go home. Well, that was a nice bag I had; they would accept that. There was little in it. What there was I disposed of, and left the bag, glad now to be off at any cost.”

His arrival at home was followed by a period of convalescence in a Glasgow hospital, and then it was decided, as he seemed settling down into consumption, to try the effect of a voyage. A passage was secured for him in a steamer going to Rangoon, but an attack of illness before he reached Liverpool compelled his return home. Finally he left for New Zealand in the ship *Dunedin*, arriving at the town of that name in 1885. He kept to the sea at first, finding employment as purser's clerk on board the *Tarawera*, the steamer which used to do the Milford Sound excursion. On one of these trips he met Professor Morris, who subsequently got him to write some of the chapters in *Picturesque Australasia*, which the professor was then editing. He remained in the service of the Union Co. for nearly two years, being driven at last into Dunedin Hospital by a fresh outbreak of his disease. On leaving the hospital he went to live with some relatives on a farm at Hawke's Bay, and this life seems to have agreed with him, for in 1888 he had so far recovered that he determined to come to Victoria. He secured a mastership at the Scotch College. The work was quite beyond his strength, and he soon gave it up. He had in the meantime made the acquaintance of the Rev. Dr. Strong, who was always one of his closest friends, and whose influence on his life and thought was very great.

Brief terms of tutorship in Riverina and Melbourne followed, in each case illness terminating the engagement. His acquaintance with hospitals increased, and in 1891 the Austin Hospital had him as an inmate. Finally he came to Bendigo, which he had visited on two previous occasions,—in 1893, and there he remained—finding the climate most favourable to his disease—till his death in 1897. He lived first at Kangaroo Flat and then in Mundy Street. Up till a few months before his death, his disease had remained in a quiescent state, and he hoped, with the care and watchfulness which he was able to exercise, to enjoy a few years more of life as an invalid, but an invalid who was fit for some literary work. He was subject to sudden

attacks of haemoptysis, which greatly prostrated him. Still the ordinary symptoms of phthisis, such as high temperature, sleeplessness, and night-sweats were absent. His restless energy gave him little quiet, and suddenly the disease assumed an active form. He failed rapidly, and soon it was only too apparent that the end was near. His constitution originally must have been a good one, otherwise he could never have withstood all he came through. He trusted little to doctors, although he took a deep interest in medicine. His three great aids to health were—fresh air, abundance of light, and nourishing food. In appearance, he had a rather striking resemblance to Tennyson. He was slight in figure, and of moderate height; his countenance, when animated with excitement, would attract any one's notice. He seldom left his bed. Surrounded by his favourite books, in a cheerful room adorned with pictures and flowers, with his desk in front of him, he spent his day, reading, writing, or composing in the forenoon, receiving his friends in the afternoon, and entering eagerly into all the life around him. He was a brilliant conversationalist, and held decided views on many subjects of public interest. Frequent and lively were the meetings in his chamber, often too lively for an invalid's strength, yet he never wearied or refused to see his friends when well. He had a large correspondence, and paid one penalty to fame—he was constantly asked his opinion of other poets' work. He was not a great reader, preferring novels to heavier literature. His favourites were Stevenson, Laurence Oliphant, and of living authors, Thomas Hardy. In politics he was a strong Liberal and Democrat. The religious element tinged all his thoughts, and although he had drifted completely away from the dogmatic position of his childhood, the doctrines imbibed then held considerable sway to the end.

His poetical taste evinced itself at an early age. He wrote his first verses when fourteen, and his first appearance in print took place in 1881. But he himself maintained that he was cast more for a philosopher than a poet. Metaphysics was the study which always fascinated him, and he was a profound student of Hegelianism. His ambition all through his life, was to become a professor of philosophy. This tendency had an important influence on his poetry. He took it up more as a means towards gaining a livelihood, as he himself says, than from any belief in his own powers. In '92 he wrote a few sonnets and submitted them to friends for criticism. The answers he received were most encouraging, but still he distrusted himself. He had, previous to penning these sonnets, read but little poetry, and of that particular form had seen only the best of the best known poets. Poetry he found hard to read, and many of the longest and most famous poems in the language were known to him only by name. Isolated passages from Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Shakespeare and Tennyson exercised a great fascination over him, and he was never tired of repeating them. It was as pure poetry that these interested him; of anything

beyond that he soon tired. In his opinion, Wordsworth in single verses and single lines—such as “The sleep that is among the lonely hills”—wrote the finest pure poetry that has ever seen the light. The only hard reading he could ever bring himself to do was the study of metaphysics. Among other works he projected a *Pronouncing Dictionary of Geographical Names* and a pamphlet on *Consumption*, both of which works had to be abandoned. He had a high opinion of the American poet Walt Whitman—not of his style, but of his matter—and on becoming a member of the Australian Association for the advancement of Science, he wrote an essay on *Walt Whitman and his relation to Science and Philosophy*, which was remarkable not only for its clear and acute thinking, but also for its charming style, and the singular lucidity with which he presented in it some of the most abstruse questions of philosophy. The first of his works on federation, *The Commonwealth and the Empire*, involved him in a loss, but his publication of his sonnets in book form brought him in a return of £40. His second complete volume, entitled *Christ on Olympus*, was much more successful, and attracted attention from all quarters. In it he made his first essay in blank verse, intending, after he had proved his strength, to give it more extended play in this direction. When he died, he had many poems in contemplation and in preparation. They were of various kinds —lyric, narrative, epic and dramatic. He left behind a number which have never been published.

Gay was not an Australian poet. His poetry was universal, not local, and might have been written anywhere. There is not even a tinge of Australian colour in it, and it deals mainly with feelings, questions and sympathies that are common to humanity. In many respects he resembled Gray, in the finish, accuracy, and balance of his verse. His thought was always robust, vigorous, and acute, and his artistic sense led him rigorously to repress any tendency to sentimentality. Hence there is little that is weak in what he has given to the world. He has the philosophic vein and the tenderness for nature that distinguished Wordsworth, the same consciousness of the presence of moral force in the natural world and the same reverence for the humbler aspects of life. His faculty for expression was of the keenest and most critical kind, and hardly any poet is more felicitous in wedding words to thought. His sonnets will rank with the great classics of the English language. In other directions his genius would have shone equally had his life been spared, for he was only awakening to a full sense of his powers when he died.

J. GLEN OLIPHANT.

Christ On Olympus

WEARY, at last in Zeus' high hall he stood;
Where all was vast magnificence of light,
And multitudinous harmony of song,
And music sweet of all sweet instruments,
And godlike speech and laughter. Pale his cheek,
Yet from his eyes there beamed a sacred light
Of mild inalienable majesty,
That shone amid the brightness round, as shine
Ethereal starbeams on the glow of morn.

Apart he stood and silent, breathing prayer;
To sudden stillness feast and song were hushed;
The gods, amazed, to eager lips denied
The lifted cup; and Zeus frowned darkly, yet
One boding instant trembled as he frowned;
And momentary awe contagious smote
The hearts of all, as when a flying cloud
With transient gloom obscures the sunlit hills.

Then he, the Christ, as the great throne of Zeus
Grew terrible with thunder and swift fire,
Spake; and to hear the angry gods were moved
By sweet compulsion of the voice that stilled
On Galilee the dark insurgent wave.
Even Zeus his wrath forebore, and his great throne,
As breaks the sun from brief eclipse of storm,
Was bright again with unperturbèd light:
And these the words that he, the Christ, did speak:

“Great Zeus, who from of old o'er gods and men
Hast reigned in Greece, by ordinance of Him
Who high o'er all is Lord most absolute,
Yet Whose chief name is Love, Him unto thee,
Before unknown, at last I now declare;
Whose purposes beneficent have thou
And these, His sacred ministers, fulfilled,
Your own dominion seeking; and Whose power
What ye have done amiss to good hath wrought,
As when a craftsman skilled transforms to use
That which another's wantonness hath marred.

“Yet come I not reproachful but in peace,

For have ye not by oracle and shrine,
By symbol, rite, procession, sacrifice,
Made man to know that he is more than dust
And raise beyond the earth his reverent eye?
Have not your altars shed through his dark soul
Their unremitting fires, till God should set
The eternal glory of His light therein?
And have not risen to you the halting prayers
That wingèd yet shall mount to God's high Heaven?

“From Him I come, O gods, that ye may know
That now hath He in fulness of the time
Himself to man revealed through me His Son—
Sole Lord of man at last Himself declared,
Father, Upholder, Comforter, and Judge,
Who claims all worship and bestows all love,
And, loving, would be worshipped but in love;
Nor but Himself hath shown, but unto man
Hath also man revealed and called him son,
Deep in his secret spirit one with Him,
As I with Him, and He with me, and all
With all commutually one, yet God
O'er all supreme; as stem and branch and leaf
Are one yet diverse, and o'er all the tree.

“Thus man, O gods, whose vows to you ascend,
Is peer of whom he worships, yet can ne'er
Unto the glories of his sonship rise,
If he receive not me whom God hath sent,
If free to know, to know doth yet refuse,
And free to mount, prefers the shameful dust.
But unto them that hear doth God make known
Of life in Him the fixed and sovereign law—
Divinest, holiest of the laws that speak
His sure and perfect Will: that none shall rise
Who humble not themselves, none reign but them
Who serve, none have who yield not freely all.
Yea, by His law doth God Himself abide,
From His own life in love gives life to all,
And even to death in me His Son descends
That man may know his immortality.

“To you likewise, O listening gods, I bear
The message glad, to you, God's mightiest sons:
Not man alone His care, but all that draws

From His sole Spirit life To seek what joy,
What selfish joy, what wearisome delight,
Song and carouse and dalliance can afford,
Free in this lesser heaven may ye retain,
Immortal still, your vain divinity;
But if your godhood ye renounce, and leave
These heights to which no more ascends devout
The smoke of sacrifice, and be on earth
As men with men, and toil in mortal flesh,
To who shall be your neighbour helpful, kind,
And all the greatness of your powers still left
Bestowing freely to all loving ends,
Then ye at last on Death's strong wing shall mount
To God's eternal presence, and within
The immediate glory of His countenance live—
From heaven to heaven advanced, and power to power,
Through heaven relinquished, and through power renounced.”

Brief silence held the throng, as when a lull
Foreboding tells the imminent thunder blast:
Then burst a noise derisive, wrathful, forth,
That shook Olympus, towering, manyridged,
Deep to its base; while patiently the Christ
Upon the outskirts of the tumult stood,
Steadfast, serene, as when in tempest shines
A new-risen planet at the sea's wild edge.
Yet Hera joined not, nor august Apollo,
Nor swift Athena with the flaming eyes,
Nor lame Hephaistos: bright around them broke
Strange gleams confused of new, diviner light
The others saw not, intimations high
Of holy things that held them mute, with eyes
Now turned on Christ and now on Zeus their lord:
For Zeus, the first and mightiest, deepliest felt
Within his soul profound the word of God,
And silent sat, unprecedented thoughts
Of sanctity and love perplexed revolving,
Nor heard the uproar, to which at last awake:

“Peace, insolent gods, nor tempt the wrath that ill
Would fit my thoughts! Though hate and scorn inflame
Your furious hearts, yet what to me is due
Forget ye not! When rage befits, then rage
Shall first be mine. Nor what this stranger saith

In haste reject. If thou, O Ares, who
Delight'st in blood, thou Aphrodite, who,
Faithless thyself, promot'st the adulterous bed,
Thou, O Poseidon, plotting dark revenge,
And all ye gods of meaner state and power,
Naught see in him of worth, be ye rebuked
That unto me, the first, and those who next
In deity approach me, he hath brought
Truth that bewilders, light that blinds, a mien,
A presence, influence, divinity,
That reverence compels, yea, most compels
From those who most are to be revered.
Peace, therefore, nor with blatant voice, O gods,
Proclaim your own defect!

“What Power is that
Which from the topmost height of high Olympus
Even to the black Tartarean abyss
Hath from the first, inscrutable, unseen,
Held mightiest sway, which both of gods and men
Confounds the counsel and defeats the will,
Whose name is Fate? What if that Power hath now
Unveiled itself a God, not less in power
Than Fate, but greater far in righteousness
And love? Shall we revile His messenger?
His message spurn of amity and peace?
Here still remain, a crew of wrangling gods,
Cooped in a rebel heaven, divine in naught
Save in our dull interminable years,
All power on earth revoked, our altars dark,
Our temples desolate, our worshippers
To scoffers turned that mock the name of god?
Nay! rather than remain a worthless god
Within a sluggard, circumscribed heaven,
Would I a slave on mortal earth become,
Would find in labour, service, sacrifice,
Even unrewarded, greater joy than here
Immortal sloth and lechery could give.”

Then rose a mingled noise of praise and blame,
And towards Apollo Zeus inclined and said:
‘What saith Apollo, whom in prophecy
No god in heaven excels?’

To which Apollo:

“Great Zeus, while yet he spake, this god or man,
I seemed to see a wider world than ours,
To see therein ten thousand temples stand,
Ten thousand times ten thousand voices hear
In praise uplifted to a loftier Heaven
Where dwell one only God and Christ His Son.”

Then bright Athena, virgin of the gods,
Whose radiant eyes, the Christ beholding, seemed
To burn to adoration, suppliant spake:
“O Father Zeus, I know the words are true
This godlike stranger speaks: not one but struck
Me, half unwilling, on some inward ear,
And drew a swift assent, as though from one,
Another yet myself, that unawaked
Had until now unknown within me slept.
O Father Zeus, renounce this slothful heaven,
This empty show of poor divinity:
A newer reign let us on earth begin,
A humbler reign of labour and of love,
Humbler yet higher, joyfuller, diviner.—
O Father Zeus, renounce!”

Then low was heard
From out the throng a single voice that said,
“O Father Zeus, renounce!” Then silence fell,
Till with more certain voice another cried,
“Great Zeus, renounce!” Then silence fell, yet brief,
For now another and another cried,
“Renounce!” “Renounce!” till at the last, as spreads
From flaming tree to tree a forest fire,
A universal cry the throne of Zeus
Besieged.

Then from his throne imperial Zeus
Uprose majestic. Ne'er more godlike he
Than now when moved with noble reverence
He turned him to the Christ, who waiting stood,
Apart, transfigured, girt with effluent light
Of joy and love. And with deliberate voice
The great irrevocable word he spake:

“Son of almighty God! Such thou declar'st
Thyself, nor less than such couldst overcome
Olympus: unto Him Who sent thee I

Do now for all yield up the deity
Which erst He gave, and make His will our law.”

Scarce had he spoken when, where late had dwelt
In bright aërial halls a race of gods,
There stood upon the cool and naked heights
A band of goodly men and women fair
Who turned at length, and, not without a sigh,
Yet strong in hope, began to wend their way
In slow procession down the mountain side.

A Christmas Greeting

A GREETING to you, my friend, in rhyme,
Since North and South 'tis Christmas-time.

The sun, like the eye of a wrathful god,
Glares down on the grey and dusty sod.
The moon with a stare of ice looks down
On the sparkling roofs of the frozen town.

How much I wish you well is told
By here the heat and there the cold.

To The Queen

On the Sixtieth Year of Her Reign

FOR thee, Victoria, is the world this day
 Circled with acclamation; and for thee
The sun, advancing on his westward way,
 Leads on a pageant bright o'er land and sea.

For thee the earth is loud with jubilant hymns,
 And festal joy her utmost wealth unbars;
At eve flames out a myriad fire, that dims
 The shining of the wonder-stricken stars.

O 'tis on us that first descends the dawn
 Of this great day, then flies from land to land,
Till into one triumphant sphere are drawn
 Thy farthest sons, who facing towards thee stand.

And in thy Imperial Throne the warrant see
Of their inalienable unity.

The Sabbath-Breakers

FOUR ragged boys in a dingy street
Did frolic one summer day;
They leapt, they laughed, they shouted, they ran,
They joined in mimic fray.

And the Lord of Heaven, as He gazed across
His universe wide and far,
Saw four young faces that beamed with joy
In a grimy nook in a star.

And His heart with happiness filled, and the light
Grew brighter about His throne,
And even to the farthest courts of Heaven
A clearer glory shone.

But there came through the street one formal and grave,
Who asked with a look severe:
For the day of God had they no regard,
For the anger of God no fear?

And they hushed their mirth for awe of the God
Who had banned one day of the seven;
And a pang went through the heart of the Lord,
And a shadow fell upon Heaven.

The Sorrowful Fate of Bartholomew Jones

BARTHOLOMEW JONES made his money in mines,
And although he has left us his fame still shines
As a man who was knowing in various lines.

It wasn't his line to write or to spell,
To teach or to preach, to dig or to fell,
But to handle his shares, and to keep out of hell.

He knelt every day at the foot of the Throne
(To use his own words), yet he wore (it was known)
His garments of grace o'er a heart made of stone.

And when Death would no longer concede a respite,
He hied straight away to the regions of light,
As a man of whom no one could question the right.

He wandered for long o'er the pavements of gold,
Saw wonders and glories around him unfold,
But somehow all seemed to him dismal and cold.

He tired of the sun's everlasting rays,
Grew sick of the harps and the hymns and the praise,
And drooped in the glare of the glittering ways.

“If this be the heaven I laboured to win,
I'd better have taken full measure of sin,”
He moaned to the angel who first let him in.

Said the angel, while looking to bolt and to bar,
“I fear, sir, you're somewhat mistaken so far,
But this is the hell where the hypocrites are.”

The Gateway of Light

WEARY and cold in the darkness I
stood at the gateway of Light:
Within, all was sunshine and gladness,
without, all was terror and night;
And I cried aloud at the portal:
“Ye guardians of Light, O give ear,
O hearken to one who would enter, who
faints on your threshold here!
Unbar your wide gates that give entrance
to peace everlasting and sure,
For long have I battled unyielding, endured
what a man may endure.”
Yet moved not the gates to give welcome,
but black still they faced the black night,
Nor paused the glad voices a moment
that murmured from innermost light.
Then aloud I cried in my anguish:
“Ye guardians of Light, O but hear!
I have toiled, I have fought, I have suffered,
have striven with famine and fear,
I have faced, overcome all the terrors that
stalk thro' this dark outer world,
And the eviller monsters of passion from
the throne of my soul I have hurled.
Long, long, thro' the years I have waited,
stood faithful and strong in my place,
Never winced 'neath the lashes of fortune,
nor begged for a cowardly grace,
But my youth and my manhood have
spent, thro' the flame and the frost of the year,
When buds were bursting in spring and
when leaves were falling and sere—
Spent all in the duties appointed, and
now am I come to the goal,
Having vanquished the fears of the night
and the powers of my riotous soul;
For now am I aged and stricken, no more
strong of limb, keen of sight,
And I claim the reward of my labours—to
pass thro' the gateway of Light,

To abide in the homes of the blessed, to
wonder thro' evergreen dells,
To rest in the peace of the sunshine, to
drink of rejuvenant wells.”
Yet my words echoed back to me fruitless,
despairingly died down the night,
And the gates of all good and all pity, the
gates of all love and all right,
Remorseless, immovable, yielded no
hand's-breadth to welcome me through,
While the blood in my heart seemed to
dry, and my forehead was cold with death's dew;
And once more I cried:
“O ye bright ones, if duty right faithfully done
Avail not, look down, that by pity perchance
may your favour be won:
Behold me, an old man and feeble, an old
man, and wretched and poor,
An old man, and hungry and naked, who
begs for a refuge secure,
Who falters and faints in the darkness,
who shivers and shrinks in the cold.”
Thus abasing myself, I entreated those
pitiless gates to unfold,
Implored with a lowly submission, with
suppliant writhings and groans,
But in vain; and I sank, lost and hopeless,
blind, broken, and dumb, on the stones.
How long there I lay, still and silent, I
know not, for time ceased with hope,
And my stunned senses, sluggish and
heedless, thro' regions of death seemed to grope,
Knew nought of an end or beginning,
forgot all of sorrow and sin,
And painless and joyless crept on, knowing
nought of without and within;
Till at last I was thrilled and awakened,
to thought was recalled, and to woe,
By a touch; as a man half in slumber is
startled to life by the glow
Of a dazzling swift splendour that smites
his somnolent sense with its ray,
Or as souls shall awake when the heavens

are rent at the great judgment day.
And I strained my dim eyes, and beheld
a young child lying prone at my side;
And the fiends of all envy and hatred,
through the doors of my soul, lying wide,
Through the doors of my soul, all
unguarded, came trooping, a dark, hellish crew;
And I seemed to see the great portal
unclose, and a glory stream through,
And the child seemed uplifted and drawn
by invisible hands to the light,
And the gates seemed again to glide backward,
and leave me alone in the night.
And the demons of hell that within me
crowded thick in the dark of my soul,
Gave me strength, and I rose up with
curses, and clutched at the babe with the whole
Of a power diabolic, and almost had
crushed him to death in my grip,
And hurled him far into the night, when,
as with the scourge of a whip,
My heart into pity was stung, as he lifted
to mine his bright eyes,
That burned in his face wan and wasted,
like great glowing stars in grey skies,
As he moaned a low moan that was tearless,
that spoke all the pain of a world,
That pierced with its infinite woe to the
quick of my spirit, and hurled
From his secret and dark domination the
tyrant of self; and again
I cried:
“O ye gates of the blessed, since I, most
unworthy of men,
May not pass your bright threshold, yet
humbly, with tears penitential, I cry,
Open wide! O receive in your mercy
this suffering infant”—but I
No more of my prayer could utter, nor
speak the hot words of my heart,
For about me there sprang instant glory,
as widely the gates flew apart,
And there fell on my ears the sweet summons:

“Yea, enter both thou and the child!”
And the voice of the unseen speaker was
glad, and majestic, and mild.
Then over the threshold I faltered with
thankful and lowliest joy,
And peace settled soft on my heart, like
a dove white-plumaged and coy;
And as on thro' the radiance I wandered,
as fragrant green meadows I trod,
The face of the child in my bosom was
bright like the face of a God.

Storm

I LOVE not when the oily seas
 Heave huge and slow beneath the sun,
When decks are hot, and dead the breeze,
 And wits are dropping one by one.

But when the South wind fiercely breaks
 His frozen bonds and rushes forth
Across the roaring sea and shakes
 His icy spear against the North;

When breakers thunder on the lee,
 When timbers crash and sails are rent,
When wild and louder grows the sea,
 And black the reeling firmament;

O then at last my soul awakes,
 A thousand joys within her rise,
And all the bounds of sense she breaks
 To soar exulting through the skies.

I love not when my ship of Fate
 Glides on before some fragrant breeze,
And slowly tracks with costly freight
 The sapphire deeps of prosperous seas.

But when beneath the sky of death
 She staggers through the seas of pain,
When passion's hot tempestuous breath
 Through shroud and tackle shrieks amain,

When deepening glooms the day o'erwhelm,
 And all is one wild wreck of form,
O then resolved I grasp the helm
 And proudly guide her through the storm.

Thanksgiving

I THANK Thee, Lord, for birds and flowers,
For radiant suns, reviving showers,
I thank Thee for the cheerful gale,
The curious frost, the dancing hail.

I thank Thee, Lord, for all sweet sounds,
For scents wherewith the Spring abounds,
For sun and shadow interlaced,
For all things pleasant to the taste.

I thank Thee for the azure sky,
The clouds thereon that sleeping lie,
For eve and morn with glories hung,
The moon that walks the stars among.

I thank Thee, Lord, for day and night,
I thank Thee for the air and light,
I thank Thee for the grass and trees,
For mountains, rivers, valleys, seas.

I thank Thee, Lord, for book and pen,
I thank Thee for my fellow-men,
I thank Thee for Thy grapes and corn,
I thank Thee, Lord, that I was born.

I thank Thee both for work and sleep,
That oft I smile, yet sometimes weep;
I thank Thee, Lord, for love and friends,
And for the pang my frame that rends.

I thank Thee, Lord, that here I lie,
I thank Thee, Lord, that I shall die,
For all that Thou hast shown to me,
For all that still is hid in Thee.

The Crazy World

THE World did say to me,
 “My bread thou shalt not eat,
I have no place for thee
 In house nor field nor street.

“I have no land nor sea
 For thee, nor home nor bread;
I scarce can give to thee
 A grave when thou art dead.”

“O crazy World,” said I,
 “What is it thou canst give,
Which wanting, I must die,
 Or having, I shall live?

“When thou thy all hast spent,
 And all thy harvests cease,
I still have nutriment
 That groweth by decrease.

“Thy streets will pass away,
 Thy towers of steel be rust,
Thy heights to plains decay,
 Thyself be whirling dust.

“But I go ever on,
 I mount from prime to prime,
From an eternal throne
 I govern Chance and Time.

“Then, crazy World,” said I,
 “What is it thou canst give,
Which wanting, I must die,
 Or having, I shall live?”

A Sick-Room Idyll

WHEN Nellie sits beside my bed,
She thinks, to please a Poet,
Her talk must be of books, although
I'd rather she'd forego it.

For oft she makes such queer mistakes
I must break out in laughter,
And then she looks so grieved, that I
Repent the minute after.

Yet though she talks of Ruskin's plays,
Of Dickens' *Tristram Shandy*,
There's none can clearer jellies make,
Or match with her in candy.

What though she strays from Pope to Poe
With fancy wild and vagrant,
There's none brings oranges so big
Or apples half so fragrant.

And then her eyes are clear and kind,
Her mouth is sweet and rosy,
She brings me now chrysanthemums,
Now violets in a posy.

Her pastry, too, is always crisp,
Her sweets are never gritty,
Her frocks are always neat and fine,
Her face is good and pretty.

So while in kindness she is rich,
What though her lore be scanty?
What though she talk of Homer's *Faust*,
Or *Don Quixote* by Dante?

What though she asks what Jane Eyre wrote?
If Wordsworth still be living?
O, I forgive her all, for she
Herself is so forgiving.

Up!

OFIE, thou lazy lie-a-bed!
The sun is mounting overhead,
The winds are singing on the heights,
The woods are crowded with delights.

Of dew the grass hath long been dry,
While thou—for shame—dost dreaming lie,
And shadows creep from less to less,
While thou art filled with drowsiness.

O fie, thou lazy lie-a-bed!
The birds their young ones all have fed,
The morning's milk hath risen to cream,
While thou—for shame—dost lie and dream.

To Queensland

FAREWELL a season! yet thou wilt arise
Ere long and follow in our steps who lead,
Resolved at last, from word to living deed,
To certain mind from babble and surmise.
Farewell! yet not for long: the secret ties
Of blood will draw thee, and the poor man's need,
The youth's ambition, and the miser's greed,
The patriot's love, the wisdom of the wise.
We grieve that thou art left, yet joyful see
Our nation's sun upon the morning's verge;
And though its earliest beams shine not on thee,
Yet will its splendours mount not far on high
Ere thou from thy unhappy dusk emerge
And be with us beneath one radiant sky.

(On learning that Queensland would have no delegates at the Federal Convention of 1897.)

The Fourth Of March

LET none put forth a sacrilegious hand
 This sole and sacred day, none dare to name
 Him fit for honour who, but fit for shame,
Prefers before the glory of his land
A faction's petty profit, or would stand
“Stiff-necked and blatant in the hall of fame,
 His heart enkindled with no patriot-flame,
And mouth with selfish heat his fool's demand.
But ye who for this day have waited long
 And now at last in splendid vision see
 For you and for your sons begin to rise
A mansion beautiful, a fortress strong,
 See ye this day its architects shall be
 Then upright, patient, fearless, generous, wise.

(The day on which were elected the Victorian delegates to the Federal Convention of 1897.)

A Sonnet of the Empire

EMPIRE that hast with empires girt the world,
And with the bonds of the imperial sea,
Where moves no wind but stirs thy flag unfurled,
Hast knit in one thy farthest states with thee!

Thou frontest day and night, and not a star
That shines remotest in the polar sky
But they who love thee, on thy bounds afar,
At eve behold it born, at morning die.

Yet to be great is nought, if nought but great,
And thou from glory must to shame decline,
And we in love and fealty abate,
When from thy greatness dies the soul divine.

And thou no more, with all thy sovereign might,
Art great for peace, for freedom, and for right.

To the People of the United States

MEN of our blood and speech! O let us be
Brothers once more as in the former time,
When Chaucer shaped for us his sturdy rhyme,
Or Howard swept the Armada from the sea:
Men of our blood and speech! If ye did flee
For God and freedom to an alien clime,
Forget not them who, resolute, sublime,
Grappling with kings at home, made England free;
 And if in your red blood and if in theirs,
Yea, even in ours, who wax in Southern peace,
There runs a redder strain that brooks not wrong,
But hot, unquenchable, the veins along,
Burns for the right until its pulses cease,
From one dear source we are alike its heirs.

A Jubilee Hymn

OUR youthful voices, Lord, to Heaven
We lift unanimous in praise,
That Thou to her who reigns hast given
A glorious plenitude of days;
And still upon her throne may she,
While Thou dost will, established be.

Her realm Thou hast extended wide,
Her flag streams out on every breeze,
In every clime her sons abide,
And subject are to her the seas;
And O, where'er she reigns may Thou
With righteousness her rule endow!

And loud beneath the assenting skies
Our thankful song goes up to Thee,
That unto us a monarch wise,
That unto her a people free—
To each the happiest gift of Heaven—
Thou in Thy providence hast given.

For unto Thee is due the praise,
All greatness is from Thee alone—
Imperial splendours, length of days,
The glories of an ancient throne;
And monarchs, as their subjects, must
Look up to Thee with lowly trust.

A Fable

O SWEETLY sang the Bird on the bough,
All Creatures hushed to hear her sing;
The ploughman halted his clattering plough,
For fear too soon she might take wing.

But a vain young Fox came soon along,
And sat himself down beneath the bough
And jeered aloud at the Bird and the song,
At the listening Beasts and the halted plough.

Then, "O Great Jupiter," prayed the Bird,
"A snake in the grass I fain would be";
And Jupiter straight her petition heard,
And a snake in the grass forthwith was she.

With hate in her heart she waited long
For that foolish Fox, his hole beside,
Till at last with a blow exact and strong
She darted her venom, and so he died.

Then, "O Great Jupiter," she prayed,
"A Bird on the bough again I would be";
And answer swift to her prayer was made,
And a Bird on the bough again was she.

Then every Creature hushed to hear,
The ploughman halted his clattering plough,
But all that fell on the waiting ear
Was a serpent hiss from the Bird on the bough.

The ploughman laughed, and called "Gee-hup,"
The Beasts of the field went off in scorn,
And the Bird on the bough, flying down and up,
By the Fowls of the air was hunted and torn.

Love's Menu Pommes De Terre Frites

(Lines to a picture.)

FRIED potatoes is a dish

Good as any one could wish:

Cheap it is, and appetizing;

Turn a saint to gormandizing:

Good and cheap and tasty too,

Just the thing for Love's Menu.

Love is dainty, and his food,

Even though common, must be good:

Love hath little to disburse,

So his fare must fit his purse:

Love hath fickle appetite,

We his palate must invite:

Crisp and hot, the price a sou,

Fried potatoes, Love's Menu.

A Love Song

ALTHOUGH the sun has left the sky,
For me 'tis only dawn;
'Tis only now the morning breaks,
Although the day be gone.

For through the dusk she sweetly comes,
Who brings to me the dawn,
And darkness never falls on me
But only when she's gone.

Dirge

CAULD, cauld she lies where snaws are deep
And bitter blaws the muirland win',
And over her grave the icy stars
Are keepin' watch abune.

But braw, O braw, the blooms that deck
The grave where he that lo'ed her lies,
And saftly blaws the simmer breeze,
And cloudless are the skies.

Broom Blossoms

O BLOOMS of flame and gold,
What magic is't you hold
In every shining fold?

O tell to me, I pray,
What you to me would say,
I die while you delay.

You tell of lands all bright
With morn's advancing light
While here descends the night?

You speak of Spring's sweet smells,
Of cool and gushing wells
In green and lonely dells?

Is this what you would say?
O tell to me I pray,
I die while you delay.

*We speak of wood nor well,
Nor is it ours to tell
Of any lonely dell.*

*We speak of no far land,
But of a maid's white hand,
And come at her command.*

*We speak of her bright eyes
Who brake our earthly ties
And raised us towards the skies.*

*She gave us happy death,
And still her fragrant breath
Around us lingereth.*

O blooms of flame and gold,
Is this the magic old
That haunts each shining fold?

The Babe and the Star

BABE who once grasped at the star,
Now art thou grown to a man,
Craving no more what is far,
Meting but what thou canst span.

Yet was thy infancy wise,
Spoke with a gesture divine,
Still were thy hands to the skies,
Now might the star have been thine.

Nearing Port

O SEE, my lads, yon glimmering peak
That slowly mounts 'twixt sea and sky!

O safe and sure the homes we seek
About its green foundations lie.

O see, my lads, yon glint of white
That trembles on the sea afar!

O 'tis the lighthouse on the height
That sentinels the harbour bar.

O see, my lads, yon pigmy tower
That grows and grows above the foam!

O near and nearer draws the hour,
Its bells will bid us welcome home.

O haste, my lads, clew up the sails!
Let go the anchor from the bow!

No more we heed the shifting gales,
No more the unfruitful ocean plough.

Love's Infinity

DEAR lowly flower that liftest up
Among the grass thy golden cup,
I take thee from thy earthly bed
And plant thee in my heart instead.

Ye ocean waves that mount on high
As emulous of the lofty sky,
'Tis in my breast ye onward sweep
Which as the sea is wide and deep.

Great sun, from thy supernal height
On flower and wave who pourest light,
My soul doth clasp thee in the skies,
And thou in me dost set and rise.

O thou I love, thy lips of fire
Have waked an infinite desire,
And unto all things as to thee
Flames out the love that burns in me.

The Song

BY the side of the great High Road,
Through the Universe that goes,
A man there stood in rags,
His heart o'ercome with woes.

And along that great High Road
Came the World's Triumphal Car,
With loud and vaunting wheels
Proclaimed itself afar.

And as it passed him by
He cast beneath its wheels
Himself and all his woes,
As a drunkard forward reels.

And as it crushed his limbs
And heedless roared along,
His heart sent forth a cry
That left his lips a song.

And they who sat aloft,
"How beautiful," did say;
Yet looked not back nor saw
Where dead in rags he lay.

Primroses

THEY shine upon my table there,
A constellation mimic, sweet,
No stars in Heaven could shine more fair,
Nor Earth has beauty more complete;
And on my table there they shine,
And speak to me of things Divine.

In Heaven at first they grew, and when
God could no fairer make them, He
Did plant them by the ways of men
For all the pure in heart to see,
That each might shine upon its stem
And be a light from Him to them.

They speak of things above my verse,
Of thoughts no earthly language knows,
That loftiest bard could ne'er rehearse,
Nor holiest prophet e'er disclose,
Which God Himself no other way
Than by a primrose could convey.

The War of the Ghosts

I

THREE Ghosts that haunt me have I,
Three Ghosts in my soul that fight,
Three grandsire Ghosts in my soul,
That haunt me by day and by night.

II

The first was a dark mountaineer,
Who hunted with arrow and knife,
To whom the turf was a bed,
And the wind of the moorland was life.

And the next was a mariner rude,
Whose home and whose grave was the sea,
For whom the land was a prison
And only the ocean was free.

And the last was a shrunken recluse,
Who lived with the dust and the gloom
And wrote of the Saints and of Him
Who went for us to His doom.

III

And all through the days and years
These ancient Ghosts contend,
And my soul is a battle-field
Of passions that pierce and rend.

And whenever a sunbeam alights
All gleaming and fresh on my page,
I am wild for the hills and the bush,
I am torn with the hunter's rage.

I am sick of the smell of a book,
I am off with the dogs or a gun,
Or I gallop my fifty miles
Before the set of the sun.

And yet from some loftier peak

When I catch the scent of the wave,
When I look on the sea from afar,
I feel like one in a grave;

And I long for a ship full-sailed
And an ocean wide on the lee—
I choke on the solid land
For the lift of the undulant sea.

IV

Yet ever the battle goes on,
And ever there rises a day
When the Ghosts of the wave and the wood
To the Ghost of the cell give way.

Then the land is a wilderness drear,
And dismal and vast is the sea,
But cloistered in peace with my books
My soul is uplifted and free.

V

Three Ghosts that haunt me have I,
Three Ghosts in my soul that fight,
Three grandsire Ghosts in my soul,
That haunt me by day and by night.

Yet oftentimes there joins in the fray
One gross and sluggish of limb,
No spectre is he but a man,
Whose strokes are heavy and grim.

For a man is not nothing, I swear,
Nor a braggart am I when I boast
That though he be slothful or sleep,
A man is more than a ghost.

And my soul is my own, I aver,
The master and lord of it I,
And whenever I will to bestir,
All ghostly usurpers shall fly.

Then I what is mine will assume,
Nor diverge from the path of my will.
Though the Ghosts I have routed still call

From the desk and the sea and the hill,

The Pursuit

O' LOVE for long did fly from me,
And I did flee from Death—
“O Love, I burn, I die for thee!”
I cried with anguished breath.

“O Death, I fear thy dark pursuit!
O Love, I burn, I die!
O Death, withhold thy evil foot!
O Love, no longer fly!”

Then Love no longer fled, but turned
And stabbed me through and through;
And Death, whom I with fear had spurned,
My pains did all subdue.

The Voyage

DRIVE on, my ship, before the blast!
Rave on, wild sea, I fear thee not!
My sails are reefed, and stout the mast
And good whate'er the gods allot.

Mount up, ye threatening waves, and mix
Your darkness with the darkened skies!
Engulf the stars my course that fix!
My soul your terrors all defies.

Ye hungry rocks that bellow near,
Ye maniac winds that menace shriek,
Ye cannot strike my heart with fear,
Nor stay me from the port I seek!

Where I shall land on any shore,
'Tis thither joyful I repair;
Of if I sink 'neath ocean's roar,
The heavenly port I seek is there.

The Rope

A MAN hung down by a rope from Heaven:
Below him was Hell
With its writhing souls; and his heart was glad
That with him it was well;

For the rope was good, and from Heaven it hung;
And he prayed that strength
Might be given to him ere long to climb
Its arduous length.

Then an Angel appeared with a flaming sword,
And bade him hope;
For he came, he said, by the will of God
To sever the rope.

But the Man to his rope the tightlier clung,
And besought with tears;
But the Angel upraised the flaming sword,
Nor regarded his fears.

Then he struck with might; and exultant Hell
Heard the Man's wild cry;
But straightway he mounted to God, Who said:
"Thy rope am I."

A Sea Maiden

HER tresses are as golden bright
As yellow sands that catch the sun,
Her lips are rosy as the light
That dyes the wave when night is done.

Her skin is like the white sea-foam,
Her eyes are like the morning star,
Her smile is like the lights of home
To weary voyagers from afar.

Her breath in sweets doth more abound
Than fragrant equatorial gales,
Her voice is pleasant as the sound
Of rising winds in idle sails.

Like white sea-birds her thoughts do fly,
And sweet and calm and pure is she
As April moons that imaged lie
Within the unimpassioned sea.

The Picture

THAT saint's face there, that seems as though the eyes
Saw straight to Heaven, as though, if you could look
Deep into them, you'd see reflected there
God's very glory? 'Tis by one long dead:
In youth he wrought at it for many a day;
But ever foiled by some divine ideal
He could not wholly capture, he at length
Forbore the quest. To years he lived, and grew
In artist skill, in nobleness of soul,
And all men's love, until, for friendship's sake,
He came one day to lie upon the bed
Of death. Then calling for this picture, he
With one stroke, so, and with another, so,
And so, and so, upon the unfinished face
Drew forth the look you see, and shortly died.

Sonnets

To My Mother

“Her children arise up and call her blessed.”

MOTHER, who hast in heavenly places been
A radiant dweller even as long as I
Have been a wanderer 'neath this Southern sky,
And o'er these lands and every sea between
The shapes of Famine and of Death have seen
Me ever following, from where I lie
This song of love I send where thou on high
O'er Heaven's verge perchance dost listening lean.
Or if to inner glories thou art called,
Where earth no more disturbs the immortal sense,
Then in my heart my song I will enclose
And reach through death some nigher region, whence
The dearest strains my love's invention knows
Shall mount to thee where thou art high installed.

To The Sea

ON MY SISTER'S DEPARTURE FROM THE OLD COUNTRY

BE kind, O gusty Sea, to her who dares
To yield herself to thy inconstant surge:
Love's sweet ambassadress, alone she fares
On his high mission to thy farthest verge;
Be kind, O gusty Sea, for she is young,
Look thou with favour on her innocence,
Let not for her thy loud storm-hymn be sung,
Nor be to her a fear but a defence;
But if, O Sea, nor innocence nor youth
Can win thee from thy turbulence awhile,
Nor for a season turn thy heart to ruth,
Nor from thee charm an undeceitful smile,
May sacred love o'er-awe thy wild caprice
And cow thy churlish billows into peace.

Reconciliation

I SAW of late one running here and there
About the world, who beat his breast and cried,
“O God, art Thou dethroned and dost Thou hide,
All impotent, in his infernal lair
Who now, meseems, Thy Godhood seeks to wear
And Thy just laws in scorn to over-ride,
Bestowing pain where joy should most abide,
And cursing Innocence with Hell's despair?”—
Then saw I later one of ordered mien,
With meekest dignity he passed along,
And said (as to a friend at his right hand),
“Foolish my cries, who ne'er of pain had seen
The heart divine,—O Lord, forgive the wrong!
Now have I suffered, and now understand.”

The Eavesdropper

I WALKED, said one, about a burial-place
One recent morn, and from a grave up-thrown
I saw an earth-stained heap of crumbled bone,
Which once was he who sang with power and grace.
Ah no! another said, in nought so base
Doth he survive: 'tis in those songs alone
Wherewith he made the hearts of men his own
That all that yet endures of him we trace.—
Then kindest laughter, full of sweet content,
Around them broke (which yet they could not hear),
As he they spoke of lingered in his work
To catch their talk: as soul to body near,
Within his heavenly ambush he did lurk,
And smiling heard their sad, wise argument.

A Homily

IN me behold a man but late grown wise,
Whose hairs are grey, as well with toil as years,
Who in my cradle dreamt of great emprise,
And in my youth did vow with blood or tears
To write my name across the world's wide page
In bold emblazonry; who thence confined
My manhood hale as in an iron cage
Of tasks and discipline, nor looked behind
On all the joys of wife and child and friend
Which I with sternest hand had thrust aside;
And who at last securely reached the end,
Yet found therein what most I craved denied,
And from a penny on a beggar spent
Than from a world's applause gained more content.

To A Fellow-Traveller

[Alice Marion Sampson, who died at the age of twenty-three, on August 23, 1896, a few days after the Sonnet was written. She was remarkable for sweetness of disposition, strength of intellect, and nobility of character.]

TOGETHER, comrade, o'er the same rough way
We travel, thou and I, yet know right well
That roughest ways to faithful travellers tell
Of fairest lands beyond, wherein shall they
Have respite sweet from peril and dismay
And all the woes that ever yet befell
All who, like thee, their toiling steps compel
Through pain and darkness unto peace and day.—
Look up then, sister, from the weary path!
Methinks that yonder groves and flowers I see,
And golden light on many a grassy lea:
Look up, my sister, one short hour be brave,
For see! no hindrance more the journey hath
Than one poor ditch no wider than a grave.

The Rally

DOST thou again, dire Shape, in midnight's gloom,
As on my couch I draw my fearful breath,
Assail me with thy terrors, and entomb
Me in the blackness of thy living death,
From arid sockets urging fiery tears,
And from the midmost anguish of my heart
Forcing the rooted sighs?—But know that fears
Do I, at last arising, bid depart;
For I will face thee to thy overthrow—
From thy dark power will set my spirit free—
Once more at day a man erect will go
For all the world and God in Heaven to see,
And will, O Shadow of my ancient sin,
Again resolved, the upward path begin!

Robert Burns

DIED JULY 21, 1796

LIKE some lone meteor from the zenith sprung
That burns with radiant sweep across the night,
A moment blazing on the startled sight
To plunge its headlong glories low among
The fatal glooms by rising tempests hung
About the wild horizon: such the height
Belovèd bard, thy spirit swift and bright
Did first enjoy, to such a doom was flung.—
But yet from where the fleeting, falling star
Of thy brief life to stormy death went down
Thy fixèd star of fame hath risen on high,
To shine with orbs that everlasting are,
And o'er the southern as the northern sky
To pour the steadfast rays of thy renown.

To James Brunton Stephens

ELDEST and first of Austral singers! Thee,
Who for thy work now tak'st of fame thy wage,
I, least and latest of thy lineage,
Do greet with reverence: yet 'twixt thee and me
'Tis not sole tie that I have dared to be
A lowly craftsman of the minstrel page,
For in thy ear and mine is still the rage
Of storms that scourge the Caledonian sea.—
Nor kin through these alone, nor that we are
Of one august dominion, yet to rise,
Even now enfranchised; but of kindred most,
That not removed from my scant youth more far
Than from thy opulent age, the Ocean lies
That frets for ever Time's unstable coast.

A Sonnet Of Faith.

I AM not daunted by the show of things,
Nor do I pass them with averted eyes,
Feigning I do not see, nor on the wings
Of fair deluding fancy lightly rise
And from afar the radiant world behold
In happy silence spinning smoothly by.—
Nay, but by night and day, in heat and cold,
Among the multitudes who toil and die
I come and go observant, near at hand,
Regarding Life with eyes that do not shrink:
I see the victor on his carrion stand,
And see in impious blood the vanquished sink,
Yea, even behold where waits the delved sod,
Yet sing unfaltering of the soul and God.

Io Triumphe!

I HAD a mirror brought to me to-day,
Wherein I scanned for long what there appeared—
The haggard lines and hues of slow decay,
The hollow cheek, the thin, dishevelled beard,
The sunken weary eye, the pillowed head—
Then looked beyond and saw, where all was stilled,
The faithful mourning ones by death's white bed,
And still beyond, and saw a grave new filled:
Then had I brought to me a pen, and wrote
Of man immortal, free, and uncreate,
In whose wide realm is death but as a mote
In heaven's great sunshine, and whom hostile fate
No more from heights eternal can debar
Than petulant winds can bind the morning star.

Sub Specie ÆTernitatis

I ASK not, Lord, to have in some far heaven
Thy recompense for ills I now endure,
For earthly pains I seek not heavenly cure,
Nor pray that unto me the crown be given
That waits ('tis said) all who with wrong have striven;
For well, O Lord, my soul doth me assure
That Thou in skill and love art none so poor
That thus to mar and mend Thy hand is driven.—
But I would ask to be uplifted, whence,
As with an angel's sight, I may behold
The plan eternal of Thy works unrolled,
View all things naked of the veil of sense,
And see in death and hunger, pain and cold,
Thy wisdom, Lord, that needs no recompense.

The Great Epiphany

I AM the Lord: My well-beloved Son
Is man; who, spirit of My Spirit, yet
Did know Me not. So therefore I did set
The heavenly orbs their course of light to run
Athwart the empty night; from chaos won
The stable earth, the surging seas that fret
The girdling coasts, the aspiring mountains met
In middle air by stooping clouds: which done,
Man out of spirit into flesh was born;
And he, I hindering not, then forth did call
The various show of city, temple, throne,
Of nations, councils, wars, feasts, ships, herds, corn:
Then I, the Lord, raised high in midst of all,
Myself upon a cross to man made known.

The Singer

NAY! sing no more thy wild delusive strain
(I heard them say, while I my song pursued),
'Tis but the rage of thy delirious brain
(I heard them say, yet still my song renewed);
Nay! sing no more with reckless, idle breath
Of man immortal and of life to come,
For one brief moment scan the face of death,
Then be thy foolish song for ever dumb;
Behold the dusty ash that once was fire,
And mark the summer leaf in autumn fall,
Watch thou the wavering breath of man expire,
And know that Death hath lordship over all
(I heard them say with many a scornful word,
Yet still sang on as one who nothing heard).

Australia Infelix

HOW long, O Lord, shall this, my country, be
A nation of the dead? How long shall they
Who seek their own and live but for the day,
My country hinder from her destiny?
Around me, Lord, I seem again to see
That ancient valley where the dry bones lay,
And 'tis in vain that long I wait and pray
To see them rise to men resolved and free.
Yet sure, O Lord, upon this land of death
At last Thy Spirit will descend with power;
And Thou wilt kindle patriots with Thy breath,
Who, venturing all to win their country's good,
Shall toil and suffer for the sacred hour
That brings the fulness of her nationhood.

Australian Federation

FROM all division let our land be free,
For God has made her one: complete she lies
Within the unbroken circle of the skies,
And round her indivisible the sea
Breaks on her single shore; while only we,
Her foster children, bound with sacred ties
Of one dear blood, one storied enterprise,
Are negligent of her integrity.—
Her seamless garment, at great Mammon's nod,
With hands unfilial we have basely rent,
With petty variance our souls are spent,
And ancient kinship under foot is trod:
O let us rise, united, penitent,
And be one people,—mighty, serving God!

The Eternal Parting

I STAND alone with thee on Life's dark verge
And scan with fearful gaze the gulfs beyond,
Whilst thou with futile arms, lamenting, fond,
Dost hold me from the deeps that would submerge
Thy lover in their dim eternal surge—
The deeps that reck not of love's holy bond
Nor but with awful silence e'er respond
To cries that loss from human hearts doth urge.—
Yet grieve thou not, Beloved! Mortal sight
Serves but the uses of this mortal state:
When we would look on what beyond it lies
We but behold a vast and vacant night,
That doth from our defect illusive rise
To hide a sphere of joy immaculate.

To M.

WITH SOME VERSES

IF in the summer of thy bright regard
For one brief season these poor
Rhymes shall live
I ask no more, nor think my fate too hard
If other eyes but wintry looks should give;
Nor will I grieve though what I here have writ
O'erburdened Time should drop among the ways,
And to the unremembering dust commit
Beyond the praise and blame of other days:
The song doth pass, but I who sing, remain,
I pluck from Death's own heart a life more deep,
And as the Spring, that dies not, in her train
Doth scatter blossoms for the Winds to reap,
So I, immortal, as I fare along,
Will strew my path with mortal flowers of song.

The Burial-Place Of The Gods

ABOUT me lay a region vague and vast,
 A shadowy region strange and terrible,
 And I, entranced beneath its awful spell,
Did know not if my soul from Life had passed,
Or whether, on the wastes of Death outcast,
 I trembled now, amazed, in Heaven or Hell;
 And then a sudden fear across me fell,
As on my straining sight there grew at last
 Huge shapes, phantasmal, mute, unmoving, dead,
 That dim along the formless glooms did lie,
Incorporate grown with the sepulchral night—
The shapes of Them who once the Olympian height
Or Asgard of the North inhabited,
 Or dwelt unseen beyond the Syrian sky.

The Quest Divine

ONCE, sitting in my cottage, rapt in thought,
When winds of winter shook the noisy pane,
I seemed to hear a Voice across the rain,
The Lord thy God too long thou hast forgot:
Then I arose, and faced the storm, and sought
The Lord my God through all the Earth and main,
And knelt apart with tears in many a fane,
And wrestled sore with books, but found Him not.—
So deeming Earth was but an empty shrine,
Unto my lowly cottage I returned
With wasted limbs and soul within me dead,
When lo! upon the threshold I had spurned,
Mine eyes were opened, and I wept and said,
My Lord! my God! the Voice that spake was Thine!

Resurge

COME forth, O Man, from darkness into light,
Renounce the dust, break through thy sordid bars,
For ever leave the crawling shapes of Night,
And move erect among thy native stars:
No longer grovel in a foetid cell
When all the spaces of the sky are thine,
With Sloth and Want no more a beggar dwell
When thou canst claim a heritage divine;
Awake and live! nor dream the dreams of death
That brood, fantastic, fearful, o'er thy grave,
Thou art not of the stuff that perisheth,
Nor unto Fate and Time art thou a slave;
Thy power extends beyond the starry Pole,
And worlds and suns revolve within thy soul.

TO A. S.

LIKE some wild bird that warbles to itself
Secure among the leaves, I piped my song,
But little thinking I of name or self,
And caring only I might sing as long
As the rude chant could please my partial ear,
Or till the heart that out of fulness sang,
Content with utterance, ceased.—That thou shouldst hear,
With whose own strains of late the forest rang,
I could not dream; but now that thou hast heard,
And claimed for brother-singer of the wood
One who but thought to carol undeterred
And all unknown, I quit my solitude,
And from the topmost branch of all the tree
I sing this song, not for myself, but thee.

Inconstancy

I LOVED thee once, and now I love thee not,
And why I love thee not I do not know:
When we were young together, long ago,
Thy form was fair, thy soul without a blot,
Thy life, as now, in every act and thought,
A holy, sweet self-sacrifice; and so,
Thy excellence compelling, I did grow
To strength of love, and love responsive sought
Not vainly; but—O end most sad and strange—
The love that oft I vowed a quenchless fire
Burned low and died, and all my path was strewn
With ashes of reproach.—So I did change,
But thou dost keep thy faithfulness entire,
And blameless through the world dost walk, alone.

To A Friend

THOU art the Sun, dear Friend, and I the Earth,
In thy sweet influence my life revolves,
The fulness of thy light doth hide my dearth,
And thy perfection my defect absolves;
Yet oft the Sun expends his light in vain,
And shrouded deeply in tempestuous gloom,
The Earth, an alien in his bright domain,
Sweeps darkly on as to a hopeless doom.
But O, dear Friend, should e'er affection's face
By stormy vapours thus be hid from mine,
And I from day to day be doomed to trace
A lonely orbit, blame could not be thine:
From Earth itself it is that clouds are bred,
'Tis light alone that from the Sun is shed.

In Hell

HE took me from some fair forgotten place
And set me down bewildered on the Earth,
He caged me with the bars of Time and Space,
Who ne'er before of scope divine had dearth;
He gave me hunger, yet not gave me food,
A faithful friend, whom soon He reft away,
An evil heart, yet bade me seek the good,
Nor heard my prayers, Who taught me how to pray;
He mocked the eager soul with blind desires,
And tore the heart with uncontented love,
He bade me walk through unavailing fires,
And sank to Hell who sought to rise above;
Yet in the Place of Anguish, faithful still,
I bless the pangs that work His righteous will.

TO A. E. L.

“Sweet are the uses of adversity.”

I LOOKED, complaining, on the fall of night,
I watched the ebbing of the sunset fires,
And grieving saw the rosy mountain spires
Each after each from my bereavèd sight
In gloom withdraw; and for the cheerful light,
And for the music of the woodland choirs,
And all the joy that with the sun retires,
I mourned, and fain from western height to height
Was I to follow in the golden wake
Of day; and so my heart with heaviness
Was overcome, till sudden there did break
The solace of the stars on my distress:
So, like a star, thy soul, methought, doth make
A light the clearer as the day grows less.

Australia

1894

SHE sits a queen whom none shall dare despoil,
Her crown the sun, her guard the vigilant sea,
And round her throne are gathered, stalwart, free,
A people proud, yet stooping to the soil,
Patient to swell her greatness with their toil,
And swift to leave, should dire occasion be,
The mine, the flock, the desk,¹ the furrowed lea,
And force the invader to a dark recoil.—
Yet as she gazes o'er the plains that lie
Fruitful about her throne, she sighs full sore
To see the barriers Greed has builded high,
Dividing them who brothers were before,
When still they dwelt beneath a sterner sky
And heard the thunders of a wilder shore.

1 Some copies have “store” instead of “desk.” “Desk” is the reading finally preferred.

Vestigia Nulla Retrorsum

O STEEP and rugged Life, whose harsh ascent
Slopes blindly upward through the bitter night!
They say that on thy summit, high in light,
Sweet rest awaits the climber, travel-spent;
But I, alas, with dusty garments rent,
With fainting heart and failing limbs and sight,
Can see no glimmer of the shining height,
And vainly list, with body forward bent,
To catch athwart the gloom one wandering note
Of those glad anthems which (they say) are sung
When one emerges from the mists below:
But though, O Life, thy summit be remote
And all thy stony path with darkness hung,
Yet ever upward through the night I go.

Death

AS when with gladness at the hour of rest
The weary labourer quits the arduous field,
And soon with night his soul to sleep doth yield
To wake at morn with well-recruited zest;
So give, sweet Death, to me thy slumber blest,
With thy cool hand let my hot lids be sealed,
For now the clock the vesper hour has pealed,
The tardy sun has left the fading West,
And I am worn with hunger and with care;
And when, sweet Death, I've been for one short night
A dreamless guest in thy secluded halls,
With joy awaking will I greet the light
That from no earthly dawn about me falls,
And to my tasks with cheerful haste repair.

To Laurence Oliphant

TRAVELLER AND MYSTIC

O HAPPY Voyager over all the seas
That cling about this fiery-hearted sphere
With cool embrace, who never knewest fear,
Even though the masts before the strenuous breeze
Did crack! O Traveller through climes that freeze
The headlong torrent to a mirror clear,
And climes where Summer loiters all the year
Amid the shade of undespoiled trees!
O thou, for whom the beauty nor the fame
Of Earth sufficed, whose eager spirit pined
To scale the Western battlements of flame
The kingdoms of unfading day to find
And the dread password of the skies to claim,
On thee at last the Eternal Light hath shined!

Milford Sound In Winter

DARK ocean walls, majestically steep,
That dare the skies, that guard a solitude
Of straitened sea from every tempest rude
That uncontrolled molests the outer deep!
White pinnacles, where Summer suns will reap
A silent store of clouds, unloose the flood
That captive long in Winter's hold hath stood,
And wake the mountain mosses from their sleep!
Dark walls! white peaks! unravished silences!
Grey sinuous lane of solitary sea!
Wild cataracts plunging fearless from the height!
And glaciers patient through the centuries!
O would that my revering soul might be
Among your lonely shrines an eremite!

Merlie

SHE cares but for the truth told simple-wise,
Nor understands why truth should be more true
Arrayed in finer than the common guise,
With pulses as of life reiterant through
The rangèd syllables; but though she feels
No truth of truth within the throbbing line,
Nor knows the fire along the blood that steals
Of them who worship at the Muses' shrine,
Yet on a page eternal doth she write,
With steadfast labour of her hands and brain,
A Poem with all heavenly grace bedight
And far excelling every poet's strain,
Whose words are deeds of happy sacrifice
Which angels read with joy in Paradise.

Love And Death

ATTIRED with heavenly light the vestal Moon
Doth traverse her dominion of the sky,
Advancing with a sweeter majesty
Than his, who is the fiery Lord of noon;
And round his shores the Sea doth fret and swoon,
And heaves his surge with many a dolorous sigh,
That he, so lowly, loved of her, so high,
Can ne'er but from the Earth with her commune;
Yet ever from her far supernal place
Through all his depths to him she doth approve
Her influence tender, her affection sure.—
And though, dear Love, awhile from my embrace
To radiant heights great Death should thee remove,
Yet would thy power to draw me still endure.

To A Nurse

AS dropping moisture on December flowers,
As sunlight breaking o'er the August plain,
As shines the Virgin on the midnight hours,
So is thy presence at the bed of pain;
And as the flowers revive to bloom more fair,
And o'er the plain the wattles burst in fire,
And midnight hours to morn at last repair,
So hope and life thy minist'rings inspire;
And though for me there's but the life and hope
That lie abundant past the gates of Death,
Yet thither as with feeble steps I grope
Thy friendly arm assists my failing breath;
Nor will I deem of Providence the worse
Who sent me pain to send me thee for nurse.

A Birthday Sonnet

(To M. E. S.)

ON this new World when thou first oped thine eyes
The bees and birds were busy on the wing,
The trees were robing in their summer guise,
And Earth was glorious with the full-blown Spring;
And that elixir which renews the year
And brings more radiant skies and sprightlier strains,
That scents the rose and fills the harvest ear,
The exhilarant Spring transfused through all thy veins;
But soon, alas, the Spring of birds and flowers
With langour sickens in the year's hot noon,
And bears the ordeal of the fiery hours
To shrink and shiver in the frosts of June:
But though of Spring's delight the year is shorn,
With thee 'tis ever Spring, and Youth, and Morn.

Success

HIGH in the city's hot and pestilent¹ air
 A little room, bare walls, a battered door,
 A low, cracked ceiling hung with cobwebs o'er,
A window small, with panes that here and there
Were choked with unclean rags, a wooden chair
 That held of drugs and food a meagre store,
 And on a mattress on the dusty floor
A corpse with open mouth and empty stare.—
On these I looked by day's expiring light,
 While round me hung a heavy atmosphere
 Of charnel odours; yet I knew that here
The Eye that truly sees beheld a sight
 Of such high glory Earth has not its peer,
For in this place was won the Soul's great fight.

1 Some copies read “stagnant,” but “pestilent” is the reading finally chosen.—*W.G.*

On The Death Of An Infant

O ANGEL babe from some more radiant star
That nearer shines to Heaven! Thou camest not
Unto this lowly Earth from Light afar
To seek the things that here by us are sought,
Who con Earth's task through every painful line,
Who win immortal peace from wounds and strife,
From human weakness gain a strength divine,
And, dying daily, find Eternal Life:
A spirit pure, for nought that Earth could teach
Didst thou with earthly dust thyself indue,
And now on heights that we but strive to reach
Thou dost thy former glory all renew;
O moved alone by high unselfishness,
Thou camest, thou hast left us, but to bless.

The Quest Of Love

MY heart, insatiate, bade me seek for love,
And in my search I girt the flying world;
I passed where rose the awful rocks above,
I stood from where the avalanche is hurled;
I faced the tiger in his reedy lair,
And fought with Death upon the middle sea,
And seeking long through ocean, earth, and air,
Found love in every place, yet none for me;
But when, exhausted, on this distant shore,
With hope for ever from the soul outcast,
I laid me down to rise again no more,
Thy lips I felt upon my face at last,
And heard thee murmur in my ear with sighs,
Hast thou but come that I may close thine eyes?

A Sonnet Of Battle

RELUCTANT Morn, whose meagre radiance lies
 With doubtful glimmer on the farthest hills,
 How long shall men, reiterant of their ills,
With peevish invocation bid thee rise
To burn to noontide glory in the skies
 That now a gloom perplexed and starless fills,
 And seek from thee and not their own strong wills
That perfect good which is not bought with sighs?
Why weep and wait for thee, thou laggard Morn,
 With all thy joys of love and peace and light?
For us the mightier joy that rives the soul,
When, slaves no longer to a day unborn,
Our flag of war along the dark we unroll
 For fell encounter with the hosts of Night.

Divine Justice

IF I could think that e'er by Heaven's sure will
One sole injustice had on Earth been done,
Then, cursing God and hiding from the sun,
Both soul and body would I seek to kill;
Or could I such a purpose ne'er fulfil
(Since all my veins of inmost being run With blood immortal), then would I be one
Whom age on age would find a rebel still.—
Yet well I know that ere the first-born day,
Divinely one with my co-equals, I,
Serene within the Godhead, chose, as they,
Freely my after lot, for ends most high
Agreed with them to walk Time's dolorous way,
Prescribed each sorrow, and foreknew each sigh.

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