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Title: The Verse-Book of a Homely Woman

Author: Fay Inchfawn

Release date: October 1, 2002 [EBook #3477]
Most recently updated: February 4, 2013

Language: English

Credits: Produced by: David Widger

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE VERSE-BOOK OF A HOMELY WOMAN ***

**THE VERSE-BOOK OF
A HOMELY WOMAN**

By Fay Inchfawn

[Elizabeth Rebecca Ward]

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Dedicated

TO

MY FIRST LOVE, MY MOTHER

PART I. INDOORS

The Long View

*Some day of days! Some dawning
yet to be
I shall be clothed with immortality!*

*And, in that day, I shall not greatly care
That Jane spilt candle grease upon the
stair.*

It will not grieve me then, as once it did,

*That careless hands have chipped my
teapot lid.*

*I groan, being burdened. But, in that
glad day,
I shall forget vexations of the way.*

*That needs were often great, when means
were small,
Will not perplex me any more at all
A few short years at most (it may be less),
I shall have done with earthly storm and
stress.*

*So, for this day, I lay me at Thy feet.
O, keep me sweet, my Master! Keep
me sweet!*

Within my House

*First, there's the entrance, narrow,
and so small,
The hat-stand seems to fill the tiny hall;
That staircase, too, has such an awkward
bend,
The carpet rucks, and rises up on end!
Then, all the rooms are cramped and close
together;
And there's a musty smell in rainy weather.
Yes, and it makes the daily work go hard
To have the only tap across a yard.
These creaking doors, these draughts, this
battered paint,
Would try, I think, the temper of a saint,*

*How often had I railed against these
things,
With envies, and with bitter murmurings
For spacious rooms, and sunny garden
plots!
Until one day,
Washing the breakfast dishes, so I think,
I paused a moment in my work to pray;
And then and there
All life seemed suddenly made new and
fair;
For, like the Psalmist's dove among the
pots
(Those endless pots, that filled the tiny
sink!),
My spirit found her wings.*

*"Lord" (thus I prayed), "it matters not
at all
That my poor home is ill-arranged and
small:
I, not the house, am straitened; Lord,
'tis I!
Enlarge my foolish heart, that by-and-by
I may look up with such a radiant face
Thou shalt have glory even in this place.
And when I trip, or stumble unawares
In carrying water up these awkward stairs,
Then keep me sweet, and teach me day
by day
To tread with patience Thy appointed
way.
As for the house . . . Lord, let it be
my part
To walk within it with a perfect heart."*

The Housewife

*See, I am cumbered, Lord,
With serving, and with small vexa-
tious things.
Upstairs, and down, my feet
Must hasten, sure and fleet.
So weary that I cannot heed Thy word;
So tired, I cannot now mount up with
wings.*

*I wrestle—how I wrestle!—through the
hours.
Nay, not with principalities, nor powers—
Dark spiritual foes of God's and man's—
But with antagonistic pots and pans:
With footmarks in the hall,
With smears upon the wall,
With doubtful ears, and small unwashed
hands,
And with a babe's innumerable demands.*

*I toil with feverish haste, while tear-drops
glisten,*

*(O, child of mine, be still. And listen—
listen!)*

*At last, I laid aside
Important work, no other hands could do
So well (I thought), no skill contrive so
true.
And with my heart's door open—open
wide—
With leisured feet, and idle hands, I sat.
I, foolish, fussy, blind as any bat,
Sat down to listen, and to learn. And lo,
My thousand tasks were done the better so.*

To Mother

*I would that you should know,
Dear mother, that I love you—love
you so!
That I remember other days and years;
Remember childish joys and childish fears.
And this, because my baby's little hand
Opened my own heart's door and made
me understand.*

*I wonder how you could
Be always kind and good!
So quick to hear; to tend
My smallest ills; to lend
Such sympathising ears
Swifter than ancient seer's.
I never yet knew hands so soft and kind,
Nor any cheek so smooth, nor any mind
So full of tender thoughts. . . . Dear
mother, now
I think that I can guess a little how
You must have looked for some response,
some sign,
That all my tiresome wayward heart was
thine.*

*And sure it was! You were my first dear
love!
You who first pointed me to God above;
You who seemed hearkening to my lightest
word,
And in the dark night seasons always
heard
When I came trembling, knocking at your
door.
Forgive me, mother, if my whims outwore
Your patient heart. Or if in later days
I sought out foolish unfamiliar ways;
If ever, mother dear, I loosed my hold
Of your loved hand; or, headstrong,
thought you cold,
Forgive me, mother! Oh, forgive me,
dear!
I am come back at last—you see me
here,
Your loving child. . . . And, mother,
on my knee
I pray that thus my child may think of
me!*

In Such an Hour

*Sometimes, when everything goes
wrong:
When days are short, and nights are long;
When wash-day brings so dull a sky
That not a single thing will dry.
And when the kitchen chimney smokes,
And when there's naught so "queer" as
folks!
When friends deplore my faded youth,
And when the baby cuts a tooth.
While John, the baby last but one,
Clings round my skirts till day is done;
When fat, good-tempered Jane is glum,
And butcher's man forgets to come.*

*Sometimes, I say, on days like these,
I get a sudden gleam of bliss.
"Not on some sunny day of ease,
He'll come . . . but on a day like this!"
And, in the twinkling of an eye,
These tiresome things will all go by!*

*And, 'tis a curious thing, but Jane
Is sure, just then, to smile again;
Or, out the truant sun will peep,
And both the babies fall asleep.
The fire burns up with roar sublime,
And butcher's man is just in time.
And oh! My feeble faith grows strong
Sometimes, when everything goes wrong!*

The Daily Interview

*Such a sensation Sunday's preacher
made.
"Christian!" he cried, "what is your stock-
in-trade?
Alas! Too often nil. No time to pray;
No interview with Christ from day to day,
A hurried prayer, maybe, just gabbled
through;
A random text—for any one will do."
Then gently, lovingly, with look intense,
He leaned towards us—
"Is this common sense?
No person in his rightful mind will try
To run his business so, lest by-and-by
The thing collapses, smirching his good
name,
And he, insolvent, face the world with
shame."*

*I heard it all; and something inly said
That all was true. The daily toil and press
Had crowded out my hopes of holiness.
Still, my old self rose, reasoning:
How can you,
With strenuous work to do—
Real slogging work—say, how can you
keep pace
With leisured folks? Why, you could
grow in grace
If you had time . . . the daily Interview
Was never meant for those who wash and
bake.*

*But yet a small Voice whispered:
"For My sake
Keep tryst with Me!
There are so many minutes in a day,
So spare Me ten.
It shall be proven, then,
Ten minutes set apart can well repay
You shall accomplish more
If you will shut your door
For ten short minutes just to watch and
pray."*

*"Lord, if I do
Set ten apart for You"
(I dared, yes dared, to reason thus with
Him)
"The baker's sure to come;
Or Jane will call
To say some visitor is in the hall;
Or I shall smell the porridge burning, yes,
And run to stop it in my hastiness.
There's not ten minutes, Lord, in all the*

day
I can be sure of peace in which to watch
and pray."

But all that night,
With calm insistent might,
That gentle Voice spake softly, lovingly—
"Keep tryst with Me!
You have devised a dozen different ways
Of getting easy meals on washing days;
You spend much anxious thought on
hopeless socks;
On moving ironmould from tiny frocks;
'Twas you who found
A way to make the sugar lumps go round;
You, who invented ways and means of
making
Nice spicy buns for tea, hot from the baking,
When margarine was short . . . and can-
not you
Who made the time to join the butter queue
Make time again for Me?
Yes, will you not, with all your daily
striving,
Use woman's wit in scheming and con-
triving
To keep that tryst with Me?"

Like ice long bound
On powdered frosty ground,
My erring will all suddenly gave way.
The kind soft wind of His sweet pleading
blew,
And swiftly, silently, before I knew,
The warm love loosed and ran.
Life-giving floods began,
And so most lovingly I answered Him:
"Lord, yes, I will, and can.
I will keep tryst with Thee, Lord, come
what may!"

ENVOY.

It is a wondrous and surprising thing
How that ten minutes takes the piercing
sting
From vexing circumstance and poison-
ous dart
Hurled by the enemy straight at my
heart.
So, to the woman tempest-tossed and
tried
By household cares, and hosts of things
beside,
With all my strength God bids me say
to you:
"Dear soul, do try the daily Interview!"

The Little House

One yestereve, in the waning light,
When the wind was still and the
gloaming bright,
There came a breath from a far countrie,
And the ghost of a Little House called
to me.

"Have you forgotten me?" "No!" I cried.
"Your hall was as narrow as this is wide,
Your roof was leaky, the rain came
through
Till a ceiling fell, on my new frock too!"

"In your parlour flooring a loose board hid,
And wore the carpet, you know it did!
Your kitchen was small, and the shelves
were few,
While the fireplace smoked—and you
know it's true!"

The little ghost sighed: "Do you quite
forget
My window boxes of mignonette?
And the sunny room where you used to
sew
When a great hope came to you, long ago?"

"Ah, me! How you used to watch the

door
Where a latch-key turned on the stroke
of four.
And you made the tea, and you poured
it out
From an old brown pot with a broken
spout

"Now, times have changed. And your
footman waits
With the silver urn, and the fluted plates.
But the little blind Love with the wings,
has flown,
Who used to sit by your warm hearth-
stone."

The little ghost paused. Then "Away!"
I said.
"Back to your place with the quiet dead.
Back to your place, lest my servants see,
That the ghost of a Little House calls
to me."

The House-Mother

Across the town the evening bell is
ringing;
Clear comes the call, through kitchen
windows winging!

Lord, knowing Thou art kind,
I heed Thy call to prayer.
I have a soul to save;
A heart which needs, I think, a double
share
Of sweetnesses which noble ladies crave.
Hope, faith and diligence, and patient
care,
With meekness, grace, and lowliness of
mind.

Lord, wilt Thou grant all these
To one who prays, but cannot sit at ease?

They do not know,
The passers-by, who go
Up to Thy house, with saintly faces set;
Who throng about Thy seat,
And sing Thy praises sweet,
Till vials full of odours cloud Thy feet;
They do not know . . .
And, if they knew, then would they greatly
care
That Thy tired handmaid washed the
children's hair;
Or, with red roughened hands, scoured
dishes well,
While through the window called the
evening bell?
And that her seeking soul looks upward
yet,
THEY do not know . . . but THOU wilt
not forget

A Woman in Hospital

I know it all . . . I know.
For I am God. I am Jehovah, He
Who made you what you are; and I can
see
The tears that wet your pillow night by
night,
When nurse has lowered that too-brilliant
light;
When the talk ceases, and the ward grows
still,
And you have doffed your will:
I know the anguish and the helplessness.
I know the fears that toss you to and fro.
And how you wrestle, weariful,
With hosts of little strings that pull
About your heart, and tear it so.

I know.

*Lord, do You know
I had no time to put clean curtains up;
No time to finish darning all the socks;
Nor sew clean frilling in the children's
frocks?
And do You know about my Baby's cold?
And how things are with my sweet three-
year-old?
Will Jane remember right
Their cough mixture at night?
And will she ever think
To brush the kitchen flues, or scrub the
sink?*

*And then, there's John! Poor tired
lonely John!
No one will run to put his slippers on.
And not a soul but me
Knows just exactly how he likes his tea.
It rends my heart to think I cannot go
And minister to him. . . .*

I know. I know.

*Then, there are other things,
Dear Lord . . . more little strings
That pull my heart. Now Baby feels her
feet
She loves to run outside into the street
And Jane's hands are so full, she'll never
see. . . .
And I'm quite sure the clean clothes won't
be aired-
At least, not properly.
And, oh, I can't, I really can't be spared-
My little house calls so!*

*I know.
And I am waiting here to help and bless.
Lay down your head. Lay down your hope-
lessness
And let Me speak.
You are so weary, child, you are so weak.
But let us reason out
The darkness and the doubt;
This torturing fear that tosses you about.*

*I hold the universe. I count the stars.
And out of shortened lives I build the
ages. . . .*

*But, Lord, while such high things Thy
thought engages,
I fear-forgive me-lest
Amid those limitless eternal spaces
Thou shouldst, in the high and heavenly
places,
Pass over my affairs as things of nought.
There are so many houses just like mine.
And I so earth-bound, and Thyself Divine.
It seems impossible that Thou shouldst
care
Just what my babies wear;
And what John gets to eat; . . . and
can it be
A circumstance of great concern to Thee
Whether I live or die?*

*Have you forgotten then, My child, that I,
The Infinite, the Limitless, laid down
The method of existence that I knew,
And took on Me a nature just like you?
I laboured day by day
In the same dogged way
That you have tackled household tasks.
And then,
Remember, child, remember once again
Your own beloveds . . . did you really
think-
(Those days you toiled to get their meat
and drink,
And made their clothes, and tried to under-
stand
Their little ailments)-did you think your
hand,
Your feeble hand, was keeping them from ill?
I gave them life, and life is more than meat;
Those little limbs, so comely and so sweet.
You can make raiment for them, and are glad,
But can you add
One cubit to their stature? Yet they grow!
Oh, child, hands off! Hands off! And
leave them so.*

I guarded hitherto, I guard them still.

*I have let go at last. I have let go.
And, oh, the rest it is, dear God, to know
My dear ones are so safe, for Thou wilt
 keep.
Hands off, at last! Now, I can go to
 sleep.*

In Convalescence

*Not long ago, I prayed for dying
 grace,
For then I thought to see Thee face to
 face.*

*And now I ask (Lord, 'tis a weakling's
 cry)
That Thou wilt give me grace to live, not
 die.*

*Such foolish prayers! I know. Yet
 pray I must.
Lord help me—help me not to see the
 dust!*

*And not to nag, nor fret because the blind
Hangs crooked, and the curtain sags be-
 hind.*

*But, oh! The kitchen cupboards! What a
 sight!
'T'will take at least a month to get them
 right.*

*And that last cocoa had a smoky taste,
And all the milk has boiled away to waste!*

*And—no, I resolutely will not think
About the saucepans, nor about the sink.*

*These light afflictions are but temporal
 things—
To rise above them, wilt Thou lend me
 wings?*

*Then I shall smile when Jane, with towzled
 hair
(And lumpy gruel!), clatters up the stair.*

Homesick

*I shut my eyes to rest 'em, just a bit
 ago it seems,
An' back among the Cotswolds I were
 wanderin' in me dreams.
I saw the old grey homestead, with the
 rickyard set around,
An' caught the lowin' of the herd, a
 pleasant, homelike sound.
Then on I went a-singin', through the
 pastures where the sheep
Was lyin' underneath the elms, a-tryin' for
 to sleep.*

*An' where the stream was tricklin' by, half
 stifled by the grass,
Heaped over thick with buttercups, I saw
 the corncrake pass.
For 'twas Summer, Summer, SUMMER!
 An' the blue forget-me-nots
Wiped out this dusty city and the smoky
 chimbley pots.*

*I clean forgot My Lady's gown, the
 dazzlin' sights I've seen;
I was back among the Cotswolds, where
 me heart has always been.*

*Then through the sixteen-acre on I went,
 a stiffish climb,
Right to the bridge, where all our sheep*

comes up at shearin' time.
There was the wild briar roses hangin'
down so pink an' sweet,
A-droppin' o' their fragrance on the clover
at my feet
An' here me heart stopped beatin', for
down by Gatcombe's Wood
My lad was workin' with his team, as only
my lad could!

"COME BACK!" was what the tricklin' brook
an' breezes seemed to say.
" 'TIS LONESOME ON THE COTSWOLDS NOW THAT
MARY DREW'S AWAY."

An' back again I'm goin' (for me wages
has been paid,
An' they're lookin' through the papers for
another kitchen maid).
Back to the old grey homestead, an' the
uplands cool an' green,
To my lad among the Cotswolds, where
me heart has always been!

On Washing Day

"I'm going to gran'ma's for a bit
My mother's got the copper lit;
An' piles of clothes are on the floor,
An' steam comes out the wash-house door;
An' Mrs. Griggs has come, an' she
Is just as cross as she can be.
She's had her lunch, and ate a lot;
I saw her squeeze the coffee-pot.
An' when I helped her make the starch,
She said: 'Now, Miss, you just quick
march!
What? Touch them soap-suds if you
durst;
I'll see you in the blue-bag first!'
An' mother dried my frock, an' said:
'Come back in time to go to bed.'
I'm off to gran'ma's, for, you see,
At home, they can't put up with me.

"But down at gran'ma's 'tis so nice.
If gran'ma's making currant-cake,
She'll let me put the ginger spice,
An' grease the tin, an' watch it bake;
An' then she says she thinks it fun
To taste the edges when it's done.

"That's gran'ma's house. Why, hip,
hooray!
My gran'ma's got a washing day;
For gran'pa's shirts are on the line,
An' stockings, too—six, seven, eight, nine!
She'll let me help her. Yes, she'll tie
Her apron round to keep me dry;
An' on her little stool I'll stand
Up to the wash-tub. 'Twill be grand!
There's no cross Mrs. Griggs to say,
'Young Miss is always in the way.'
An' me and gran'ma will have tea
At dinner-time—just her an' me—
An' eggs, I 'spect, an' treacle rice.
My goodness! Won't it all be nice?

"Gran'ma, I'm come to spend the day,
'Cause mother finds me in the way.
Gran'ma, I'll peg the hankies out;
Gran'ma, I'll stir the starch about;
Gran'ma, I'm come, because, you see,
At home, they can't put up with me."

When Baby Strayed

When Baby strayed, it seemed to
me,
Sun, moon and stars waned suddenly.

*At once, with frenzied haste, my feet
Ran up and down the busy street.*

*If ever in my life I prayed,
It was the evening Baby strayed.*

*And yet my great concern was this
(Not dread of losing Baby's kiss,*

*And Baby's soft small hand in mine,
And Baby's comradeship divine),*

*'Twas BABY'S terror, BABY'S fears!
Whose hand but mine could dry her
tears?*

*I without Baby? In my need
I were a piteous soul indeed.*

*But piteous far, beyond all other,
A little child without a mother.*

*And God, in mercy, graciously
Gave my lost darling back to me.*

*O high and lofty One!
THOU couldst have lived to all eternity
Apart from ME!
In majesty, upon that emerald throne.
Thou, with Thy morning stars,
Thy dawns, with golden bars,
And all the music of the heavenly train.
Possessing all things, what hadst Thou to
gain
By seeking me?
What was I? . . . and, what am I? . . .
less than nought.
And yet Thy mercy sought.
Yea, Thou hast set my feet
Upon the way of holiness, and sweet
It is, to seek Thee daily, unafraid . . .*

*But (this I learnt the night that Baby
strayed)
Here was Thy chief, Thy great concern
for me:
My desolate estate, apart from Thee!*

If Only ---

*If only dinner cooked itself,
And groceries grew upon the shelf;
If children did as they were told,
And never had a cough or cold;
And washed their hands, and wiped their
boots,
And never tore their Sunday suits,
But always tidied up the floor,
Nor once forgot to shut the door.*

*If John remembered not to throw
His papers on the ground. And oh!
If he would put his pipes away,
And shake the ashes on the tray
Instead of on the floor close by;
And always spread his towel to dry,
And hung his hat upon the peg,
And never had bones in his leg.*

*Then, there's another thing. If Jane
Would put the matches back again
Just where she found them, it would be
A save of time to her and me.
And if she never did forget
To put the dustbin out; nor yet
Contrive to gossip with the baker,
Nor need ten thunderbolts to wake her.*

*Ahem! If wishes all came true,
I don't know what I'd find to do,
Because if no one made a mess
There'd be no need of cleanliness.
And things might work so blissfully,
In time—who knows?—they'd not need
me!*

*And this being so, I fancy whether
I'll go on keeping things together.*

Listening

*His step? Ah, no; 'tis but the rain
That hurtles on the window pane.
Let's draw the curtains close and sit
Beside the fire awhile and knit.
Two purl—two plain. A well-shaped
sock,
And warm. (I thought I heard a knock,
But 'twas the slam of Jones's door.)
Yes, good Scotch yarn is far before
The fleecy wools—a different thing,
And best for wear. (Was that his ring?)
No. 'Tis the muffin man I see;
We'll have threepennyworth for tea.
Two plain—two purl; that heel is neat.
(I hear his step far down the street.)
Two purl—two plain. The sock can
wait;
I'll make the tea. (He's at the gate!)*

The Dear Folks in Devon

*Back in the dear old country 'tis Christ-
mas, and to-night
I'm thinking of the mistletoe and holly
berries bright.
The smoke above our chimbley pots I'd
dearly love to see,
And those dear folks down in Devon,
how they'll talk and think of me.*

*Owd Ben'll bring the letters, Christmas
morn, and if there's one
As comes across from Canada straight
from their absent son,
My Mother's hands'll tremble, and my
Dad'll likely say:
"Don't seem like Christmas time no more,
with our dear lad away."*

*I can see 'em carve the Christmas beef,
and Brother Jimmy's wife
Will say her never tasted such, no, not in
all her life.
And Sister Martha's Christmas pies melt
in your mouth, 'tis true,
But 'twas Mother made the puddin', as
mothers always do!*

*Ah me! If I could just have wings, and
in the dimsey light
Go stealing up the cobbled path this
lonesome Christmas night,
Lift up the latch with gentle hand—My!
What a shout there'd be!
From those dear folks down in Devon!
What a welcomin' for me!*

The Reason

*"Why shouldest Thou be as a wayfaring man, that
turneth aside to tarry for a night?"—Jer. xiv. 8.*

*Nay, do not get the venison pasty
out;
I shall not greatly put myself about
Hungry, he may be; yes, and we shall
spare
Some bread and cheese, 'tis truly whole-
some fare.
We have to-morrow's dinner still to find;
It's well for you I have a frugal mind.*

*Not the best bed! No, no. Whatever
next?
Why with such questionings should I be
vext?
The man is naught to us; why should
we care?*

*The little attic room will do; 'tis bare,
But he'll be gone before to-morrow's light;
He has but come to tarry for a night.*

*I shall not speak with him. Oh, no, not I,
Lest I should pity overmuch, or buy
Some paltry ware of his. Nay, I'll to
bed,
And he can sup alone, well warmed and
fed;
'Tis much to take him in a night like this.
Why should I fret me with concerns of
his?*

*Grey morning came, and at the break of
day
The Man rose up and went upon his way*

Two Women

*"I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they
be of the same mind in the Lord"—Phil. iv. 2,*

EUODIAS.

*But if Paul heard her tattlings, I am
sure
He never would expect me to endure.
There is a something in her very face
Antagonistic to the work of grace.
And even when I would speak graciously
Somehow, Syntyche's manner ruffles me.*

SYNTYCHE.

*No, not for worlds! Euodias has no
mind;
So slow she is, so spiritually blind.
Her tongue is quite unbridled, yet she
says
She grieves to see my aggravating ways
Ah, no one but myself knows perfectly
How odious Euodias can be!*

EUODIAS.

*Yet, "in the Lord." Ah, that's another
thing!*

SYNTYCHE.

*Yet, "in the Lord." That alters it in-
deed.*

EUODIAS.

For His sake I'll endure her whispering

SYNTYCHE.

For His sake I'll consent to let her lead.

EUODIAS.

*Lord, teach me to forbear; yes, day by
day.*

SYNTYCHE.

*Lord, keep me gentle now, and all the
way.*

The Prize Fight

*"I am a boxer, who does not inflict blows on the air,
but I hit hard and straight at my own body."—1 Cor.
ix. 26 (WEYMOUTH'S Translation).*

*'T'was breakfast time, and outside in
the street
The factory men went by with hurrying*

feet.
And on the bridge, in dim December light,
The newsboys shouted of the great prize
fight.
Then, as I dished the bacon, and served
out
The porridge, all our youngsters gave
a shout.
The letter-box had clicked, and through
the din
The Picture News was suddenly pushed in.

John showed the lads the pictures, and
explained
Just how the fight took place, and what
was gained
By that slim winner. Then, he looked at me
As I sat, busy, pouring out the tea:
"Your mother is a boxer, rightly styled.
She hits the air sometimes, though," and
John smiled.
"Yet she fights on." Young Jack, with
widened eyes
Said: "Dad, how soon will mother get a
prize?"

We laughed. And yet it set me thinking,
how
I beat the air, because a neighbour's cow
Munched at our early cabbages, and ate
The lettuce up, and tramped my mignon-
ette!
And many a time I kicked against the
pricks
Because the little dog at number six
Disturbed my rest. And then, how cross
I got
When Jane seemed discontented with her
lot.
Until poor John in desperation said
He wearied of the theme—and went to
bed!

And how I vexed myself that day, when he
Brought people unexpectedly for tea,
Because the table-cloth was old and
stained,
And not a single piece of cake remained.
And how my poor head ached! Because,
well there!
It uses lots of strength to beat the air!

"I am a boxer!" Here and now I pray
For grace to hit the self-life every day.
And when the old annoyance comes once
more
And the old temper rises sharp and sore,
I shall hit hard and straight, O Tender-
Wise,
And read approval in Thy loving eyes.

The Home Lights

"In my father's house!" The words
Bring sweet cadence to my ears.
Wandering thoughts, like homing birds,
Fly all swiftly down the years,
To that wide casement, where I always see
Bright love-lamps leaning out to welcome
me.

Sweet it was, how sweet to go
To the worn, familiar door.
No need to stand a while, and wait,
Outside the well-remembered gate;
No need to knock;
The easy lock
Turned almost of itself, and so
My spirit was "at home" once more.
And then, within, how good to find
The same cool atmosphere of peace,
Where I, a tired child, might cease
To grieve, or dread,
Or toil for bread.
I could forget
The dreary fret.
The strivings after hopes too high,
I let them every one go by.

*The ills of life, the blows unkind,
These fearsome things were left behind.*

ENVOY.

*O trembling soul of mine,
See how God's mercies shine!
When thou shalt rise,
And, stripped of earth, shall stand
Within an Unknown Land;
Alone, where no familiar thing
May bring familiar comforting;
Look up! 'Tis but thy Father's
House! And, see
His love-lamps leaning out to welcome
thee!*

To an Old Teapot

*Now from the dust of half-forgotten
things,
You rise to haunt me at the year's Spring-
cleaning,
And bring to memory dim imaginings
Of mystic meaning.*

*No old-time potter handled you, I ween,
Nor yet were you of gold or silver molten;
No Derby stamp, nor Worcester, can be
seen,
Nor Royal Doulton.*

*You never stood to grace the princely
board
Of monarchs in some Oriental palace.
Your lid is chipped, your chubby side is
scored
As if in malice.*

*I hesitate to say it, but your spout
Is with unhandsome rivets held together—
Mute witnesses of treatment meted out
In regions nether.*

*O patient sufferer of many bumps!
I ask it gently—shall the dustbin hold
you?
And will the dust-heap, with its cabbage
stumps,
At last enfold you?*

*It ought. And yet with gentle hands I
place
You with my priceless Delft and Dresden
china,
For sake of one who loved your homely
face
In days diviner.*

*To a Rebellious
Daughter*

*You call authority "a grievous thing."
With careless hands you snap the
leading string,
And, for a frolic (so it seems to you),
Put off the old love, and put on the new.*

*For "What does Mother know of love?"
you say.
"Did her soul ever thrill?
Did little tendernesses ever creep
Into her dreams, and over-ride her will?
Did her eyes shine, or her heart ever leap
As my heart leaps to-day?
I, who am young; who long to try my
wings!*

*How should she understand,
She, with her calm cool hand?
She never felt such yearnings? And,
beside,
It's clear I can't be tied
For ever to my mother's apron strings."*

*There are Infinities of Knowledge, dear.
And there are mysteries, not yet made
clear*

To you, the Uninitiate. . . . Life's book
Is open, yes; but you may only look
At its first section. Youth
Is part, not all, the truth.
It is impossible that you should see
The end from the beginning perfectly.

You answer: "Even so.
But how can Mother know,
Who meditates upon the price of bacon?
On 'liberties' the charwoman has taken,
And on the laundry's last atrocities?
She knows her cookery book,
And how a joint of English meat should
look.
But all such things as these
Make up her life. She dwells in tents,
but I
In a vast temple open to the sky."

Yet, time was, when that Mother stooped
to learn
The language written in your infant face.
For years she walked your pace,
And none but she interpreted your chatter.
Who else felt interest in such pitter-patter?
Or, weary, joined in all your games with
zest,
And managed with a minimum of rest?
Now, is it not your turn
To bridge the gulf, to span the gap be-
tween you?
To-day, before Death's angel over-lean
you,
Before your chance is gone?
This is worth thinking on.

"Are mothers blameless, then?" Nay,
dearie, nay.
Nor even tactful, always. Yet there may
Come some grey dawning in the by
and by,
When, no more brave, nor sure, nor strong,
you'll cry
Aloud to God, for that despised thing,
The old dear comfort—Mother's apron
string.

For Mothering!

Up to the Hall, my lady there'll wear
her satin gown,
For little Miss and Master'll be coming
down from town.
Oh ay, the children's coming! The
CHILDREN did I say?
Of course, they're man and woman grown,
this many and many a day.
But still, my lady's mouth do smile, and
squire looks fit to sing,
As Master John and Miss Elaine is coming
Mothering.

Then down to Farmer Westacott's, there's
doings fine and grand,
Because young Jake is coming home from
sea, you understand.
Put into port but yesternight, and when
he steps ashore,
'Tis coming home the laddie is, to Somer-
set once more.
And so her's baking spicy cakes, and stir-
ring raisins in,
To welcome of her only chick, who's
coming Mothering.

And what of we? And ain't we got no
children for to come?
Well, yes! There's Sam and Henery,
and they'll be coming home.
And Ned is very nigh six foot, and Joe is
six foot three!
But children still to my good man, and
children still to me!
And all the vi'lets seem to know, and all
the thrushes sing,
As how our Kate, and Bess and Flo is
coming Mothering.

Little Fan

When little Fanny came to town, I
felt as I could sing!
She were the sprackest little maid, the
sharpest, pertest thing.
Her mother were as proud as punch, and
as for I-well, there!
I never see sich gert blue eyes, I never
see sich hair!
"If all the weans in Somerset," says I,
"was standin' here,
Not one could hold a candle light, 'long-
side our little dear."

Now FANNY'S little Fan have come! She's
clingin' round my knees,
She's asking me for sups of tea, and bites
of bread and cheese.
She's climbing into grandma's bed, she's
stroking grandma's face.
She's tore my paper into bits and strawed
it round the place.
"If all the weans in all the world," says
I, "was standin' here,
Not one could hold a farthin' dip to
Fanny's little dear!"
For Fanny's little Fanny-oh, she's took
the heart of me!
'Tis childern's childern is the CROWN of
humble folk like we!

The Naughty Day

I've had a naughty day to-day.
I scrunched a biscuit in my hair,
And dipped my feeder in the milk,
And spread my rusk upon a chair.

When mother put me in my bath,
I tossed the water all about,
And popped the soap upon my head,
And threw the sponge and flannel out.

I wouldn't let her put my hand
Inside the arm-hole of my vest;
I held the sleeve until she said
I really never SHOULD be dressed.

And while she made the beds, I found
Her tidy, and took out the hairs;
And then I got the water-can
And tipped it headlong down the stairs.

I crawled along the kitchen floor,
And got some coal out of the box,
And drew black pictures on the walls,
And wiped my fingers on my socks.

Oh, this HAS been a naughty day!
That's why they've put me off to bed.
"He CAN'T get into mischief there,
Perhaps we'll have some peace," they
said.

They put the net across my cot,
Or else downstairs again I'd creep.
But, see, I'll suck the counterpane
To PULP before I go to sleep!

To a Little White Bird

Into the world you came, and I was
dumb,

Because "God did it," so the wise ones
said;
I wonder sometimes "Did you really
come?"
And "Are you truly . . . DEAD?"

Thus you went out—alone and uncaressed;
O sweet, soft thing, in all your infant
grace,
I never held you in my arms, nor pressed
Warm kisses on your face!

But, in the Garden of the Unfiled,
My soul will claim you . . . you, and
not another;
I shall hold out my arms, and say "MY
CHILD!"
And you will call me "MOTHER!"

Because

(PSALM CXVI.)

Because He heard my voice, and
answered me,
Because He listened, ah, so patiently,
In those dark days, when sorrowful, alone,
I knelt with tears, and prayed Him for a
stone;
Because He said me "Nay," and then in-
stead,
Oh, wonderful sweet truth! He gave me
bread,
Set my heart singing all in sweet accord;
Because of this, I love—I love the Lord!

When He Comes

"When He comes!
My sweetest 'When'!"

C. ROSSETTI.

Thus may it be (I thought) at some
day's close,
Some lilac-haunted eve, when every rose
Breathes forth its incense. May He find
me there,
In holy leisure, lifting hands of prayer,
In some sweet garden place,
To catch the first dear wonder of His Face!

Or, in my room above,
In silent meditation of His love,
My soul illumined with a rapture rare.
It would be sweet, if even then, these eyes
Might glimpse Him coming in the East-
ern skies,
And be caught up to meet Him in the
air.

But now! Ah, now, the days
Rush by their hurrying ways!
No longer know I vague imaginings,
For every hour has wings.
Yet my heart watches . . . as I work I
say,
All simply, to Him: "Come! And if to-day,
Then wilt Thou find me thus: just as I
am—
Tending my household; stirring goose-
berry jam;
Or swiftly rinsing tiny vests and hose,
With puzzled forehead patching some one's
clothes;
Guiding small footsteps, swift to hear, and
run,
From early dawn till setting of the sun."

And whensoever He comes, I'll rise and go,
Yes, all the gladlier that He found me so.

PART II. OUT OF DOORS

Early Spring

*Quick through the gates of Fairyland
The South Wind forced his way.
'Twas his to make the Earth forget
Her grief of yesterday.
" 'Tis mine," cried he, "to bring her joy!"
And on his lightsome feet
In haste he slung the snowdrop bells,
Pushed past the Fairy sentinels,
And out with laughter sweet.*

*Clear flames of Crocus glimmered on
The shining way he went.
He whispered to the trees strange tales
Of wondrous sweet intent,
When, suddenly, his witching voice
With timbre rich and rare,
Rang through the woodlands till it cleft
Earth's silent solitudes, and left
A Dream of Roses there!*

The Witness

*The Master of the Garden said;
"Who, now the Earth seems cold
and dead,
Will by his fearless witnessing
Hold men's hearts for the tardy spring?"*

*"Not yet. I am but half awake,"
All drowsily the Primrose spake.
And fast the sleeping Daffodils
Had folded up their golden frills.*

*"Indeed," the frail Anemone
Said softly, "'tis too cold for me."
Wood Hyacinths, all deeply set,
Replied: "No ice has melted yet."*

*When suddenly, with smile so bright,
Up sprang a Winter Aconite,
And to the Master joyfully
She cried: "I will the witness be."*

In Somerset

*In Somerset they guide the plough
From early dawn till twilight now.
The good red earth smells sweeter yet,
Behind the plough, in Somerset.
The celandines round last year's mow
Blaze out . . . and with his old-time vow
The South Wind woos the Violet,
In Somerset.*

*Then, every brimming dyke and trough
Is laughing wide with ripples now,
And oh, 'tis easy to forget*

*That wintry winds can sigh and sough,
When thrushes chant on every bough
In Somerset!*

*Song of a Woodland
Stream*

*Silent was I, and so still,
As day followed day.
Imprisoned until
King Frost worked his will.
Held fast like a vice,
In his cold hand of ice,
For fear kept me silent, and lo
He had wrapped me around and about
with a mantle of snow.*

*But sudden there spake
One greater than he.
Then my heart was awake,
And my spirit ran free.*

*At His bidding my bands fell apart, He
had burst them asunder.
I can feel the swift wind rushing by me,
once more the old wonder
Of quickening sap stirs my pulses—I
shout in my gladness,
Forgetting the sadness,
For the Voice of the Lord fills the air!*

*And forth through the hollow I go, where
in glad April weather,
The trees of the forest break out into
singing together.
And here the frail windflowers will cluster,
with young ferns uncurling,
Where broader and deeper my waters go
eddying, whirling,
To meet the sweet Spring on her journey
—His servant to be,
Whose word set me free!*

Luggage in Advance

*"The Fairies must have come," I
said,
"For through the moist leaves, brown and
dead,
The Primroses are pushing up,
And here's a scarlet Fairy-cup.
They must have come, because I see
A single Wood Anemone,
The flower that everybody knows
The Fairies use to scent their clothes.
And hark! The South Wind blowing, fills
The trumpets of the Daffodils.
They MUST have come!"*

*Then loud to me
Sang from a budding cherry tree,
A cheerful Thrush . . . "I say! I say!
The Fairy Folk are on their way.
Look out! Look out! Beneath your feet,
Are all their treasures: Sweet! Sweet!
Sweet!
They could not carry them, you see,
Those caskets crammed with witchery,
So ready for the first Spring dance,
They sent their Luggage in Advance!"*

At the Cross Roads

*There I halted. Further down the
hollow
Stood the township, where my errand lay.
Firm my purpose, till a voice cried
(Follow!
Come this way—I tell you—come this
way!)*

*Silence, Thrush! You know I think of
buying
A Spring-tide hat; my frock is worn and
old.
So to the shops I go. What's that you're
crying?
(Here! Come here! And gather primrose*

gold.)
Well, yes. Some day I will; but time is
going.
I haste to purchase silks and satins fair.
I'm all in rags. (The Lady's Smock is
showing
Up yonder, in the little coppice there.)

And wood anemones spread out their
laces;
Each celandine has donned a silken gown;
The violets are lifting shy sweet faces.
(And there's a chiff-chaff, soft, and slim, and
brown.)

But what about my hat? (The bees are
humming.)
And my new frock? (The hawthorn's
budding free!
Sweet! Oh, so sweet!) Well, have your
way. I'm coming!
And who's to blame for that? (Why, me!
Me! Me!)

Summer met Me

Summer met me in the glade,
With a host of fair princesses,
Golden iris, foxgloves staid,
Sunbeams flecked their gorgeous dresses.
Roses followed in her train,
Creamy elder-flowers beset me,
Singing, down the scented lane,
Summer met me!

Summer met me! Harebells rang,
Honeysuckle clustered near,
As the royal pageant sang
Songs enchanting to the ear.
Rainy days may come apace,
Nevermore to grieve or fret me,
Since, in all her radiant grace,
Summer met me!

The Carrier

"Owd John's got past his work," said
they,
Last week as ever was—"don't pay
To send by him. He's stoopid, too,
And brings things what won't never do.
We'll send by post, he is that slow.
And that owd hoss of his can't go."

But 'smornin', well, 'twas fun to see
The gentlefolks run after we.
Squire's lady stopped I in the lane,
"Oh," says she, "goin' to town again?
You'll not mind calling into Bings
To fetch my cakes and buns and things?
I've got a party comin' on,
And nought to eat . . . so, DO 'ee, John."

Then, up the street, who should I see,
But old Mam Bessant hail'n' me.
And Doctor's wife, and Mrs. Higgs
Was wantin' vittles for their pigs,
And would I bring some? (Well, what
nex'?)
And Granny Dunn has broke her specs,
And wants 'em mended up in town,
So would John call and bring 'em down
To-night . . . ? and so the tale goes on,
'Tis, "Sure you will, now DO 'ee, John."

Well, 'tis a hevil wind that blows
Nobody any good; it shows
As owd John haves his uses yet,
Though now and then he do forget.
Gee up, owd gal. When strikes is on,
They're glad of pore owd stoopid John.

*The Lad's Love by the
Gate*

*Down in the dear West Country,
there's a garden where I know
The Spring is rioting this hour, though
I am far away—
Where all the glad flower-faces are old
loves of long ago,
And each in its accustomed place is
blossoming to-day.*

*The lilac drops her amethysts upon the
mossy wall,
While in her boughs a cheerful thrush
is calling to his mate.
Dear breath of mignonette and stocks!
I love you, know you all.
And, oh, the fragrant spices from the
lad's love by the gate!*

*Kind wind from the West Country, wet
wind, but scented so,
That straight from my dear garden
you seem but lately come,
Just tell me of the yellow broom, the
guelder rose's snow,
And of the tangled clematis where
myriad insects hum.*

*Oh, is there any heartsease left, or any
rosemary?
And in their own green solitudes, say,
do the lilies wait?
I knew it! Gentle wind, but once—
speak low and tenderly—
How fares it—tell me truly—with the
lad's love by the gate?*

The Thrush

*Across the land came a magic word
When the earth was bare and
lonely,
And I sit and sing of the joyous spring,
For 'twas I who heard, I only!
Then dreams came by, of the gladsome
days,
Of many a wayside posy;
For a crocus peeps where the wild rose
sleeps,
And the willow wands are rosy!*

*Oh! the time to be! When the paths
are green,
When the primrose-gold is lying
'Neath the hazel spray, where the catkins
sway,
And the dear south wind comes sigh-
ing.*

*My mate and I, we shall build a nest,
So snug and warm and cosy,
When the kingcups gleam on the meadow
stream,
Where the willow wands are rosy!*

In Dorset Dear

*In Dorset Dear they're making hay
In just the old West Country way.
With fork and rake and old-time gear
They make the hay in Dorset Dear.
From early morn till twilight grey
They toss and turn and shake the hay.
And all the countryside is gay
With roses on the fallen may,
For 'tis the hay-time of the year
In Dorset Dear.*

The loaded waggons wend their way

*Across the pasture-lands, and stay
Beside the hedge where foxgloves peer;
And ricks that shall be fashioned here
Will be the sweetest stuff, they say,
In Dorset Dear!*

The Flight of the Fairies

*There's a rustle in the woodlands,
and a sighing in the breeze,
For the Little Folk are busy in the bushes
and the trees;
They are packing up their treasures, every
one with nimble hand,
Ready for the coming journey back to
sunny Fairyland.*

*They have gathered up the jewels from
their beds of mossy green,
With all the dewy diamonds that summer
morns have seen;
The silver from the lichen and the
powdered gold dust, too,
Where the buttercups have flourished and
the dandelions grew.*

*They packed away the birdies' songs,
then, lest we should be sad,
They left the Robin's carol out, to make
the winter glad;
They packed the fragrance of the flowers,
then, lest we should forget,
Out of the pearly scented box they
dropped a Violet.*

*Then o'er a leafy carpet, by the silent
woods they came,
Where the golden bracken lingered and
the maples were aflame.
On the stream the starlight shimmered, o'er
their wings the moonbeams shone,
Music filtered through the forest—and the
Little Folk were gone!*

The Street Player

*The shopping had been tedious, and
the rain
Came pelting down as she turned home
again.*

*The motor-bus swirled past with rush and
whirr,
Nought but its fumes of petrol left for
her.*

*The bloaters in her basket, and the cheese
Malodourously mixed themselves with
these.*

*And all seemed wrong. The world was
drab and grey
As the slow minutes wept themselves
away.*

*And then, athwart the noises of the street,
A violin flung out an Irish air.*

*"I'll take you home again, Kathleen."
Ah, sweet,
How tender-sweet those lilting phrases
were!*

*They soothed away the weariness, and
brought
Such peace to one worn woman, over-
wrought,*

*That she forgot the things which vexed
her so:
The too outrageous price of calico,*

*The shop-girl's look of pitying insolence
Because she paused to count the dwindling
pence.*

*The player stopped. But the rapt vision
stayed.
That woman faced life's worries unafraid.*

*The sugar shortage now had ceased to be
An insurmountable calamity.*

*Her kingdom was not bacon, no, nor
butter,
But things more costly still, too rare to
utter.*

*And, over chimney-pots, so bare and tall,
The sun set gloriously, after all.*

On All Souls' Eve

*Oh, the garden ways are lonely!
Winds that bluster, winds that
shout,
Battle with the strong laburnum,
Toss the sad brown leaves about.
In the gay herbaceous border,
Now a scene of wild disorder,
The last dear hollyhock has flamed his
crimson glory out.*

*Yet, upon this night of longing,
Souls are all abroad, they say.
Will they come, the dazzling blossoms,
That were here but yesterday?
Will the ghosts of radiant roses
And my sheltered lily-closes
Hold once more their shattered fragrance
now November's on her way?*

*Wallflowers, surely you'll remember,
Pinks, recall it, will you not?
How I loved and watched and tended,
Made this ground a hallowed spot:
Pansies, with the soft meek faces,
Harebells, with a thousand graces:
Dear dead loves, I wait and listen. Tell
me, have you quite forgot?*

*HUSH! THEY COME! For down the path-
way
Steals a fragrance honey-sweet.
Larkspurs, lilies, stocks, and roses,
Hasten now my heart to greet.
Stay, oh, stay! My hands would hold
you . . .
But the arms that would enfold you
Crush the bush of lad's love growing in
the dusk beside my feet.*

The Log Fire

*In her last hour of life the tree
Gave up her glorious memories,
Wild scent of wood anemone,
The sapphire blue of April skies.*

*With faint but ever-strength'ning flame,
The dew-drenched hyacinthine spires
Were lost, as red-gold bracken came,
With maple bathed in living fires.*

*Grey smoke of ancient clematis
Towards the silver birch inclined,
And deep in thorny fastnesses
The coral bryony entwined.*

*Then softly through the dusky room
They strayed, fair ghosts of other days,
With breath like early cherry bloom,*

With tender eyes and gentle ways.

*They glimmered on the sombre walls,
They danced upon the oaken floor,
Till through the loudly silent halls
Joy reigned majestic once more.*

*Up blazed the fire, and, dazzling clear,
One rapturous Spirit radiant stood.
'Twas you at last! Yes, YOU, my dear.
We two were back in Gatcombe Wood!*

God save the King

*GOD SAVE OUR GRACIOUS KING. (It
seems
The Church is full of bygone dreams.)*

*LONG LIVE OUR NOBLE KING. (My own,
'Tis hard to stand here all alone.)*

*GOD SAVE THE KING. (But, sweetheart, you
Were always brave to dare and do.)*

*SEND HIM VICTORIOUS. (For then,
My darling will come home again!)*

*HAPPY AND GLORIOUS ('Twill be
Like Heaven to him—and what to me?)*

*LONG TO REIGN OVER US. (My dear!
And we'd been wedded one short year!)*

*GOD SAVE OUR KING. (And Lord, I pray
Keep MY King safe this very day.)*

*Forgive us, thou—great England's kingly
King
That thus do women National Anthems
sing.*

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE VERSE-BOOK OF A HOMELY WOMAN ***

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