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POEMS OF NATURE

POEMS SUBJECTIVE AND REMINISCENT

RELIGIOUS POEMS

BY JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

CONTENTS:

**POEMS SUBJECTIVE AND REMINISCENT: MEMORIES RAPHAEL EGO THE PUMPKIN
FORGIVENESS TO MY SISTER MY THANKS REMEMBRANCE MY NAMESAKE A MEMORY MY
DREAM THE BAREFOOT BOY MY PSALM THE WAITING**

POEMS SUBJECTIVE AND REMINISCENT MEMORIES

A beautiful and happy girl,
With step as light as summer air,
Eyes glad with smiles, and brow of pearl,
Shadowed by many a careless curl
Of unconfined and flowing hair;
A seeming child in everything,

Save thoughtful brow and ripening charms,
As Nature wears the smile of Spring
When sinking into Summer's arms.

A mind rejoicing in the light
Which melted through its graceful bower,
Leaf after leaf, dew-moist and bright,
And stainless in its holy white,
Unfolding like a morning flower
A heart, which, like a fine-toned lute,
With every breath of feeling woke,
And, even when the tongue was mute,
From eye and lip in music spoke.

How thrills once more the lengthening chain
Of memory, at the thought of thee!
Old hopes which long in dust have lain
Old dreams, come thronging back again,
And boyhood lives again in me;
I feel its glow upon my cheek,
Its fulness of the heart is mine,
As when I leaned to hear thee speak,
Or raised my doubtful eye to thine.

I hear again thy low replies,
I feel thy arm within my own,
And timidly again arise
The fringed lids of hazel eyes,
With soft brown tresses overblown.
Ah! memories of sweet summer eves,
Of moonlit wave and willowy way,
Of stars and flowers, and dewy leaves,
And smiles and tones more dear than they!

Ere this, thy quiet eye hath smiled
My picture of thy youth to see,
When, half a woman, half a child,
Thy very artlessness beguiled,
And folly's self seemed wise in thee;
I too can smile, when o'er that hour
The lights of memory backward stream,
Yet feel the while that manhood's power
Is vainer than my boyhood's dream.

Years have passed on, and left their trace,
Of graver care and deeper thought;
And unto me the calm, cold face
Of manhood, and to thee the grace
Of woman's pensive beauty brought.
More wide, perchance, for blame than praise,
The school-boy's humble name has flown;
Thine, in the green and quiet ways
Of unobtrusive goodness known.

And wider yet in thought and deed
Diverge our pathways, one in youth;
Thine the Genevan's sternest creed,
While answers to my spirit's need
The Derby dalesman's simple truth.
For thee, the priestly rite and prayer,
And holy day, and solemn psalm;
For me, the silent reverence where
My brethren gather, slow and calm.

Yet hath thy spirit left on me
An impress Time has worn not out,

And something of myself in thee,
A shadow from the past, I see,
Lingering, even yet, thy way about;
Not wholly can the heart unlearn
That lesson of its better hours,
Not yet has Time's dull footstep worn
To common dust that path of flowers.

Thus, while at times before our eyes
The shadows melt, and fall apart,
And, smiling through them, round us lies
The warm light of our morning skies,—
The Indian Summer of the heart!
In secret sympathies of mind,
In founts of feeling which retain
Their pure, fresh flow, we yet may find
Our early dreams not wholly vain
1841.

RAPHAEL.

Suggested by the portrait of Raphael, at the age of fifteen.

I shall not soon forget that sight
The glow of Autumn's westering day,
A hazy warmth, a dreamy light,
On Raphael's picture lay.

It was a simple print I saw,
The fair face of a musing boy;
Yet, while I gazed, a sense of awe
Seemed blending with my joy.

A simple print,—the graceful flow
Of boyhood's soft and wavy hair,
And fresh young lip and cheek, and brow
Unmarked and clear, were there.

Yet through its sweet and calm repose
I saw the inward spirit shine;
It was as if before me rose
The white veil of a shrine.

As if, as Gothland's sage has told,
The hidden life, the man within,
Dissevered from its frame and mould,
By mortal eye were seen.

Was it the lifting of that eye,
The waving of that pictured hand?
Loose as a cloud-wreath on the sky,
I saw the walls expand.

The narrow room had vanished,—space,
Broad, luminous, remained alone,
Through which all hues and shapes of grace
And beauty looked or shone.

Around the mighty master came
The marvels which his pencil wrought,
Those miracles of power whose fame
Is wide as human thought.

There drooped thy more than mortal face,
O Mother, beautiful and mild
Enfolding in one dear embrace

Thy Saviour and thy Child!

The rapt brow of the Desert John;
The awful glory of that day
When all the Father's brightness shone
Through manhood's veil of clay.

And, midst gray prophet forms, and wild
Dark visions of the days of old,
How sweetly woman's beauty smiled
Through locks of brown and gold!

There Fornarina's fair young face
Once more upon her lover shone,
Whose model of an angel's grace
He borrowed from her own.

Slow passed that vision from my view,
But not the lesson which it taught;
The soft, calm shadows which it threw
Still rested on my thought:

The truth, that painter, bard, and sage,
Even in Earth's cold and changeful clime,
Plant for their deathless heritage
The fruits and flowers of time.

We shape ourselves the joy or fear
Of which the coming life is made,
And fill our Future's atmosphere
With sunshine or with shade.

The tissue of the Life to be
We weave with colors all our own,
And in the field of Destiny
We reap as we have sown.

Still shall the soul around it call
The shadows which it gathered here,
And, painted on the eternal wall,
The Past shall reappear.

Think ye the notes of holy song
On Milton's tuneful ear have died?
Think ye that Raphael's angel throng
Has vanished from his side?

Oh no!—We live our life again;
Or warmly touched, or coldly dim,
The pictures of the Past remain,—
Man's works shall follow him!
1842.

EGO.

WRITTEN IN THE ALBUM OF A FRIEND.

On page of thine I cannot trace
The cold and heartless commonplace,
A statue's fixed and marble grace.

For ever as these lines I penned,
Still with the thought of thee will blend
That of some loved and common friend,

Who in life's desert track has made

His pilgrim tent with mine, or strayed
Beneath the same remembered shade.

And hence my pen unfettered moves
In freedom which the heart approves,
The negligence which friendship loves.

And wilt thou prize my poor gift less
For simple air and rustic dress,
And sign of haste and carelessness?

Oh, more than specious counterfeit
Of sentiment or studied wit,
A heart like thine should value it.

Yet half I fear my gift will be
Unto thy book, if not to thee,
Of more than doubtful courtesy.

A banished name from Fashion's sphere,
A lay unheard of Beauty's ear,
Forbid, disowned,—what do they here?

Upon my ear not all in vain
Came the sad captive's clanking chain,
The groaning from his bed of pain.

And sadder still, I saw the woe
Which only wounded spirits know
When Pride's strong footsteps o'er them go.

Spurned not alone in walks abroad,
But from the temples of the Lord
Thrust out apart, like things abhorred.

Deep as I felt, and stern and strong,
In words which Prudence smothered long,
My soul spoke out against the wrong;

Not mine alone the task to speak
Of comfort to the poor and weak,
And dry the tear on Sorrow's cheek;

But, mingled in the conflict warm,
To pour the fiery breath of storm
Through the harsh trumpet of Reform;

To brave Opinion's settled frown,
From ermined robe and saintly gown,
While wrestling revered Error down.

Founts gushed beside my pilgrim way,
Cool shadows on the greensward lay,
Flowers swung upon the bending spray.

And, broad and bright, on either hand,
Stretched the green slopes of Fairy-land,
With Hope's eternal sunbow spanned;

Whence voices called me like the flow,
Which on the listener's ear will grow,
Of forest streamlets soft and low.

And gentle eyes, which still retain
Their picture on the heart and brain,
Smiled, beckoning from that path of pain.

In vain! nor dream, nor rest, nor pause
Remain for him who round him draws

The battered mail of Freedom's cause.

From youthful hopes, from each green spot
Of young Romance, and gentle Thought,
Where storm and tumult enter not;

From each fair altar, where belong
The offerings Love requires of Song
In homage to her bright-eyed throng;

With soul and strength, with heart and hand,
I turned to Freedom's struggling band,
To the sad Helots of our land.

What marvel then that Fame should turn
Her notes of praise to those of scorn;
Her gifts reclaimed, her smiles withdrawn?

What matters it? a few years more,
Life's surge so restless heretofore
Shall break upon the unknown shore!

In that far land shall disappear
The shadows which we follow here,
The mist-wreaths of our atmosphere!

Before no work of mortal hand,
Of human will or strength expand
The pearl gates of the Better Land;

Alone in that great love which gave
Life to the sleeper of the grave,
Resteth the power to seek and save.

Yet, if the spirit gazing through
The vista of the past can view
One deed to Heaven and virtue true;

If through the wreck of wasted powers,
Of garlands wreathed from Folly's bowers,
Of idle aims and misspent hours,

The eye can note one sacred spot
By Pride and Self profaned not,
A green place in the waste of thought,

Where deed or word hath rendered less
The sum of human wretchedness,
And Gratitude looks forth to bless;

The simple burst of tenderest feeling
From sad hearts worn by evil-dealing,
For blessing on the hand of healing;

Better than Glory's pomp will be
That green and blessed spot to me,
A palm-shade in Eternity!

Something of Time which may invite
The purified and spiritual sight
To rest on with a calm delight.

And when the summer winds shall sweep
With their light wings my place of sleep,
And mosses round my headstone creep;

If still, as Freedom's rallying sign,
Upon the young heart's altars shine
The very fires they caught from mine;

If words my lips once uttered still,
In the calm faith and steadfast will
Of other hearts, their work fulfil;

Perchance with joy the soul may learn
These tokens, and its eye discern
The fires which on those altars burn;

A marvellous joy that even then,
The spirit hath its life again,
In the strong hearts of mortal men.

Take, lady, then, the gift I bring,
No gay and graceful offering,
No flower-smile of the laughing spring.

Midst the green buds of Youth's fresh May,
With Fancy's leaf-enwoven bay,
My sad and sombre gift I lay.

And if it deepens in thy mind
A sense of suffering human-kind,—
The outcast and the spirit-blind;

Oppressed and spoiled on every side,
By Prejudice, and Scorn, and Pride,
Life's common courtesies denied;

Sad mothers mourning o'er their trust,
Children by want and misery nursed,
Tasting life's bitter cup at first;

If to their strong appeals which come
From fireless hearth, and crowded room,
And the close alley's noisome gloom,—

Though dark the hands upraised to thee
In mute beseeching agony,
Thou lend'st thy woman's sympathy;

Not vainly on thy gentle shrine,
Where Love, and Mirth, and Friendship twine
Their varied gifts, I offer mine.
1843.

THE PUMPKIN.

Oh, greenly and fair in the lands of the sun,
The vines of the gourd and the rich melon run,
And the rock and the tree and the cottage enfold,
With broad leaves all greenness and blossoms all gold,
Like that which o'er Nineveh's prophet once grew,
While he waited to know that his warning was true,
And longed for the storm-cloud, and listened in vain
For the rush of the whirlwind and red fire-rain.

On the banks of the Xenil the dark Spanish maiden
Comes up with the fruit of the tangled vine laden;
And the Creole of Cuba laughs out to behold
Through orange-leaves shining the broad spheres of gold;
Yet with dearer delight from his home in the North,
On the fields of his harvest the Yankee looks forth,
Where crook-necks are coiling and yellow fruit shines,
And the sun of September melts down on his vines.

Ah! on Thanksgiving day, when from East and from West,

From North and from South come the pilgrim and guest,
When the gray-haired New-Englander sees round his board
The old broken links of affection restored,
When the care-wearied man seeks his mother once more,
And the worn matron smiles where the girl smiled before,
What moistens the lip and what brightens the eye?
What calls back the past, like the rich Pumpkin pie?

Oh, fruit loved of boyhood! the old days recalling,
When wood-grapes were purpling and brown nuts were falling!
When wild, ugly faces we carved in its skin,
Glaring out through the dark with a candle within!
When we laughed round the corn-heap, with hearts all in tune,
Our chair a broad pumpkin,—our lantern the moon,
Telling tales of the fairy who travelled like steam,
In a pumpkin-shell coach, with two rats for her team
Then thanks for thy present! none sweeter or better
E'er smoked from an oven or circled a platter!
Fairer hands never wrought at a pastry more fine,
Brighter eyes never watched o'er its baking, than thine!
And the prayer, which my mouth is too full to express,
Swells my heart that thy shadow may never be less,
That the days of thy lot may be lengthened below,
And the fame of thy worth like a pumpkin-vine grow,
And thy life be as sweet, and its last sunset sky
Golden-tinted and fair as thy own Pumpkin pie!
1844.

FORGIVENESS.

My heart was heavy, for its trust had been
Abused, its kindness answered with foul wrong;
So, turning gloomily from my fellow-men,
One summer Sabbath day I strolled among
The green mounds of the village burial-place;
Where, pondering how all human love and hate
Find one sad level; and how, soon or late,
Wronged and wrongdoer, each with meekened face,
And cold hands folded over a still heart,
Pass the green threshold of our common grave,
Whither all footsteps tend, whence none depart,
Awed for myself, and pitying my race,
Our common sorrow, like a mighty wave,
Swept all my pride away, and trembling I forgave!
1846.

TO MY SISTER,

WITH A COPY OF "THE SUPERNATURALISM OF NEW ENGLAND."

The work referred to was a series of papers under this title, contributed to the Democratic Review and afterward collected into a volume, in which I noted some of the superstitions and folklore prevalent in New England. The volume has not been kept in print, but most of its contents are distributed in my Literary Recreations and Miscellanies.

Dear Sister! while the wise and sage
Turn coldly from my playful page,
And count it strange that ripened age
Should stoop to boyhood's folly;
I know that thou wilt judge aright
Of all which makes the heart more light,
Or lends one star-gleam to the night

Of clouded Melancholy.

Away with weary cares and themes!
Swing wide the moonlit gate of dreams!
Leave free once more the land which teems
With wonders and romances
Where thou, with clear discerning eyes,
Shalt rightly read the truth which lies
Beneath the quaintly masking guise
Of wild and wizard fancies.

Lo! once again our feet we set
On still green wood-paths, twilight wet,
By lonely brooks, whose waters fret
The roots of spectral beeches;
Again the hearth-fire glimmers o'er
Home's whitewashed wall and painted floor,
And young eyes widening to the lore
Of faery-folks and witches.

Dear heart! the legend is not vain
Which lights that holy hearth again,
And calling back from care and pain,
And death's funereal sadness,
Draws round its old familiar blaze
The clustering groups of happier days,
And lends to sober manhood's gaze
A glimpse of childish gladness.

And, knowing how my life hath been
A weary work of tongue and pen,
A long, harsh strife with strong-willed men,
Thou wilt not chide my turning
To con, at times, an idle rhyme,
To pluck a flower from childhood's clime,
Or listen, at Life's noonday chime,
For the sweet bells of Morning!
1847.

MY THANKS,

ACCOMPANYING MANUSCRIPTS PRESENTED TO A FRIEND.

'T is said that in the Holy Land
The angels of the place have blessed
The pilgrim's bed of desert sand,
Like Jacob's stone of rest.

That down the hush of Syrian skies
Some sweet-voiced saint at twilight sings
The song whose holy symphonies
Are beat by unseen wings;

Till starting from his sandy bed,
The wayworn wanderer looks to see
The halo of an angel's head
Shine through the tamarisk-tree.

So through the shadows of my way
Thy smile hath fallen soft and clear,
So at the weary close of day
Hath seemed thy voice of cheer.

That pilgrim pressing to his goal
May pause not for the vision's sake,

Yet all fair things within his soul
The thought of it shall wake:

The graceful palm-tree by the well,
Seen on the far horizon's rim;
The dark eyes of the fleet gazelle,
Bent timidly on him;

Each pictured saint, whose golden hair
Streams sunlike through the convent's gloom;
Pale shrines of martyrs young and fair,
And loving Mary's tomb;

And thus each tint or shade which falls,
From sunset cloud or waving tree,
Along my pilgrim path, recalls
The pleasant thought of thee.

Of one in sun and shade the same,
In weal and woe my steady friend,
Whatever by that holy name
The angels comprehend.

Not blind to faults and follies, thou
Hast never failed the good to see,
Nor judged by one unseemly bough
The upward-struggling tree.

These light leaves at thy feet I lay,—
Poor common thoughts on common things,
Which time is shaking, day by day,
Like feathers from his wings;

Chance shootings from a frail life-tree,
To nurturing care but little known,
Their good was partly learned of thee,
Their folly is my own.

That tree still clasps the kindly mould,
Its leaves still drink the twilight dew,
And weaving its pale green with gold,
Still shines the sunlight through.

There still the morning zephyrs play,
And there at times the spring bird sings,
And mossy trunk and fading spray
Are flowered with glossy wings.

Yet, even in genial sun and rain,
Root, branch, and leaflet fail and fade;
The wanderer on its lonely plain
Erelong shall miss its shade.

O friend beloved, whose curious skill
Keeps bright the last year's leaves and flowers,
With warm, glad, summer thoughts to fill
The cold, dark, winter hours

Pressed on thy heart, the leaves I bring
May well defy the wintry cold,
Until, in Heaven's eternal spring,
Life's fairer ones unfold.
1847.

REMEMBRANCE

WITH COPIES OF THE AUTHOR'S WRITINGS.

Friend of mine! whose lot was cast
With me in the distant past;
Where, like shadows flitting fast,

Fact and fancy, thought and theme,
Word and work, begin to seem
Like a half-remembered dream!

Touched by change have all things been,
Yet I think of thee as when
We had speech of lip and pen.

For the calm thy kindness lent
To a path of discontent,
Rough with trial and dissent;

Gentle words where such were few,
Softening blame where blame was true,
Praising where small praise was due;

For a waking dream made good,
For an ideal understood,
For thy Christian womanhood;

For thy marvellous gift to cull
From our common life and dull
Whatsoe'er is beautiful;

Thoughts and fancies, Hybla's bees
Dropping sweetness; true heart's-ease
Of congenial sympathies;—

Still for these I own my debt;
Memory, with her eyelids wet,
Fain would thank thee even yet!

And as one who scatters flowers
Where the Queen of May's sweet hours
Sits, o'ertwined with blossomed bowers,

In superfluous zeal bestowing
Gifts where gifts are overflowing,
So I pay the debt I'm owing.

To thy full thoughts, gay or sad,
Sunny-hued or sober clad,
Something of my own I add;

Well assured that thou wilt take
Even the offering which I make
Kindly for the giver's sake.
1851.

MY NAMESAKE.

Addressed to Francis Greenleaf Allison of Burlington, New Jersey.

You scarcely need my tardy thanks,
Who, self-rewarded, nurse and tend—
A green leaf on your own Green Banks—
The memory of your friend.

For me, no wreath, bloom-woven, hides
The sobered brow and lessening hair
For aught I know, the myrtled sides

Of Helicon are bare.

Their scallop-shells so many bring
The fabled founts of song to try,
They've drained, for aught I know, the spring
Of Aganippe dry.

Ah well!—The wreath the Muses braid
Proves often Folly's cap and bell;
Methinks, my ample beaver's shade
May serve my turn as well.

Let Love's and Friendship's tender debt
Be paid by those I love in life.
Why should the unborn critic whet
For me his scalping-knife?

Why should the stranger peer and pry
One's vacant house of life about,
And drag for curious ear and eye
His faults and follies out?—

Why stuff, for fools to gaze upon,
With chaff of words, the garb he wore,
As corn-husks when the ear is gone
Are rustled all the more?

Let kindly Silence close again,
The picture vanish from the eye,
And on the dim and misty main
Let the small ripple die.

Yet not the less I own your claim
To grateful thanks, dear friends of mine.
Hang, if it please you so, my name
Upon your household line.

Let Fame from brazen lips blow wide
Her chosen names, I envy none
A mother's love, a father's pride,
Shall keep alive my own!

Still shall that name as now recall
The young leaf wet with morning dew,
The glory where the sunbeams fall
The breezy woodlands through.

That name shall be a household word,
A spell to waken smile or sigh;
In many an evening prayer be heard
And cradle lullaby.

And thou, dear child, in riper days
When asked the reason of thy name,
Shalt answer: One 't were vain to praise
Or censure bore the same.

"Some blamed him, some believed him good,
The truth lay doubtless 'twixt the two;
He reconciled as best he could
Old faith and fancies new.

"In him the grave and playful mixed,
And wisdom held with folly truce,
And Nature compromised betwixt
Good fellow and recluse.

"He loved his friends, forgave his foes;

And, if his words were harsh at times,
He spared his fellow-men,—his blows
Fell only on their crimes.

"He loved the good and wise, but found
His human heart to all akin
Who met him on the common ground
Of suffering and of sin.

"Whate'er his neighbors might endure
Of pain or grief his own became;
For all the ills he could not cure
He held himself to blame.

"His good was mainly an intent,
His evil not of forethought done;
The work he wrought was rarely meant
Or finished as begun.

"Ill served his tides of feeling strong
To turn the common mills of use;
And, over restless wings of song,
His birthright garb hung loose!

"His eye was beauty's powerless slave,
And his the ear which discord pains;
Few guessed beneath his aspect grave
What passions strove in chains.

"He had his share of care and pain,
No holiday was life to him;
Still in the heirloom cup we drain
The bitter drop will swim.

"Yet Heaven was kind, and here a bird
And there a flower beguiled his way;
And, cool, in summer noons, he heard
The fountains splash and play.

"On all his sad or restless moods
The patient peace of Nature stole;
The quiet of the fields and woods
Sank deep into his soul.

"He worshipped as his fathers did,
And kept the faith of childish days,
And, howsoe'er he strayed or slid,
He loved the good old ways.

"The simple tastes, the kindly traits,
The tranquil air, and gentle speech,
The silence of the soul that waits
For more than man to teach.

"The cant of party, school, and sect,
Provoked at times his honest scorn,
And Folly, in its gray respect,
He tossed on satire's horn.

"But still his heart was full of awe
And reverence for all sacred things;
And, brooding over form and law,
He saw the Spirit's wings!

"Life's mystery wrapt him like a cloud;
He heard far voices mock his own,
The sweep of wings unseen, the loud,
Long roll of waves unknown.

"The arrows of his straining sight
Fell quenched in darkness; priest and sage,
Like lost guides calling left and right,
Perplexed his doubtful age.

"Like childhood, listening for the sound
Of its dropped pebbles in the well,
All vainly down the dark profound
His brief-lined plummet fell.

"So, scattering flowers with pious pains
On old beliefs, of later creeds,
Which claimed a place in Truth's domains,
He asked the title-deeds.

"He saw the old-time's groves and shrines
In the long distance fair and dim;
And heard, like sound of far-off pines,
The century-mellowed hymn!

"He dared not mock the Dervish whirl,
The Brahmin's rite, the Lama's spell;
God knew the heart; Devotion's pearl
Might sanctify the shell.

"While others trod the altar stairs
He faltered like the publican;
And, while they praised as saints, his prayers
Were those of sinful man.

"For, awed by Sinai's Mount of Law,
The trembling faith alone sufficed,
That, through its cloud and flame, he saw
The sweet, sad face of Christ!

"And listening, with his forehead bowed,
Heard the Divine compassion fill
The pauses of the trump and cloud
With whispers small and still.

"The words he spake, the thoughts he penned,
Are mortal as his hand and brain,
But, if they served the Master's end,
He has not lived in vain!"

Heaven make thee better than thy name,
Child of my friends!—For thee I crave
What riches never bought, nor fame
To mortal longing gave.

I pray the prayer of Plato old:
God make thee beautiful within,
And let thine eyes the good behold
In everything save sin!

Imagination held in check
To serve, not rule, thy poised mind;
Thy Reason, at the frown or beck
Of Conscience, loose or bind.

No dreamer thou, but real all,—
Strong manhood crowning vigorous youth;
Life made by duty epical
And rhythmic with the truth.

So shall that life the fruitage yield
Which trees of healing only give,
And green-leafed in the Eternal field

Of God, forever live!
1853.

A MEMORY

Here, while the loom of Winter weaves
The shroud of flowers and fountains,
I think of thee and summer eves
Among the Northern mountains.

When thunder tolled the twilight's close,
And winds the lake were rude on,
And thou wert singing, *Ca' the Yowes*,
The bonny yowes of Cluden!

When, close and closer, hushing breath,
Our circle narrowed round thee,
And smiles and tears made up the wreath
Wherewith our silence crowned thee;

And, strangers all, we felt the ties
Of sisters and of brothers;
Ah! whose of all those kindly eyes
Now smile upon another's?

The sport of Time, who still apart
The waifs of life is flinging;
Oh, nevermore shall heart to heart
Draw nearer for that singing!

Yet when the panes are frosty-starred,
And twilight's fire is gleaming,
I hear the songs of Scotland's bard
Sound softly through my dreaming!

A song that lends to winter snows
The glow of summer weather,—
Again I hear thee *ca' the yowes*
To Cluden's hills of heather
1854.

MY DREAM.

In my dream, methought I trod,
Yesternight, a mountain road;
Narrow as Al Sirat's span,
High as eagle's flight, it ran.

Overhead, a roof of cloud
With its weight of thunder bowed;
Underneath, to left and right,
Blankness and abysmal night.

Here and there a wild-flower blushed,
Now and then a bird-song gushed;
Now and then, through rifts of shade,
Stars shone out, and sunbeams played.

But the goodly company,
Walking in that path with me,
One by one the brink o'erslid,
One by one the darkness hid.

Some with wailing and lament,

Some with cheerful courage went;
But, of all who smiled or mourned,
Never one to us returned.

Anxiously, with eye and ear,
Questioning that shadow drear,
Never hand in token stirred,
Never answering voice I heard!

Steeper, darker!—lo! I felt
From my feet the pathway melt.
Swallowed by the black despair,
And the hungry jaws of air,

Past the stony-throated caves,
Strangled by the wash of waves,
Past the splintered crags, I sank
On a green and flowery bank,—

Soft as fall of thistle-down,
Lightly as a cloud is blown,
Soothingly as childhood pressed
To the bosom of its rest.

Of the sharp-horned rocks instead,
Green the grassy meadows spread,
Bright with waters singing by
Trees that propped a golden sky.

Painless, trustful, sorrow-free,
Old lost faces welcomed me,
With whose sweetness of content
Still expectant hope was blent.

Waking while the dawning gray
Slowly brightened into day,
Pondering that vision fled,
Thus unto myself I said:—

"Steep and hung with clouds of strife
Is our narrow path of life;
And our death the dreaded fall
Through the dark, awaiting all.

"So, with painful steps we climb
Up the dizzy ways of time,
Ever in the shadow shed
By the forecast of our dread.

"Dread of mystery solved alone,
Of the untried and unknown;
Yet the end thereof may seem
Like the falling of my dream.

"And this heart-consuming care,
All our fears of here or there,
Change and absence, loss and death,
Prove but simple lack of faith."

Thou, O Most Compassionate!
Who didst stoop to our estate,
Drinking of the cup we drain,
Treading in our path of pain,—

Through the doubt and mystery,
Grant to us thy steps to see,
And the grace to draw from thence
Larger hope and confidence.

Show thy vacant tomb, and let,
As of old, the angels sit,
Whispering, by its open door
"Fear not! He hath gone before!"
1855.

THE BAREFOOT BOY.

Blessings on thee, little man,
Barefoot boy, with cheek of tan
With thy turned-up pantaloons,
And thy merry whistled tunes;
With thy red lip, redder still
Kissed by strawberries on the hill;
With the sunshine on thy face,
Through thy torn brim's jaunty grace;
From my heart I give thee joy,—
I was once a barefoot boy!

Prince thou art,—the grown-up man
Only is republican.
Let the million-dollared ride!
Barefoot, trudging at his side,
Thou hast more than he can buy
In the reach of ear and eye,—
Outward sunshine, inward joy
Blessings on thee, barefoot boy!

Oh for boyhood's painless play,
Sleep that wakes in laughing day,
Health that mocks the doctor's rules,
Knowledge never learned of schools,
Of the wild bee's morning chase,
Of the wild-flower's time and place,
Flight of fowl and habitude
Of the tenants of the wood;
How the tortoise bears his shell,
How the woodchuck digs his cell,
And the ground-mole sinks his well;
How the robin feeds her young,
How the oriole's nest is hung;
Where the whitest lilies blow,
Where the freshest berries grow,
Where the ground-nut trails its vine,
Where the wood-grape's clusters shine;
Of the black wasp's cunning way,
Mason of his walls of clay,
And the architectural plans
Of gray hornet artisans!
For, eschewing books and tasks,
Nature answers all he asks,
Hand in hand with her he walks,
Face to face with her he talks,
Part and parcel of her joy,—
Blessings on the barefoot boy!

Oh for boyhood's time of June,
Crowding years in one brief moon,
When all things I heard or saw,
Me, their master, waited for.
I was rich in flowers and trees,
Humming-birds and honey-bees;
For my sport the squirrel played,
Plied the snouted mole his spade;

For my taste the blackberry cone
Purpled over hedge and stone;
Laughed the brook for my delight
Through the day and through the night,
Whispering at the garden wall,
Talked with me from fall to fall;
Mine the sand-rimmed pickerel pond,
Mine the walnut slopes beyond,
Mine, on bending orchard trees,
Apples of Hesperides!
Still as my horizon grew,
Larger grew my riches too;
All the world I saw or knew
Seemed a complex Chinese toy,
Fashioned for a barefoot boy!

Oh for festal dainties spread,
Like my bowl of milk and bread;
Pewter spoon and bowl of wood,
On the door-stone, gray and rude!
O'er me, like a regal tent,
Cloudy-ribbed, the sunset bent,
Purple-curtained, fringed with gold,
Looped in many a wind-swung fold;
While for music came the play
Of the pied frogs' orchestra;
And, to light the noisy choir,
Lit the fly his lamp of fire.
I was monarch: pomp and joy
Waited on the barefoot boy!

Cheerily, then, my little man,
Live and laugh, as boyhood can
Though the flinty slopes be hard,
Stubble-speared the new-mown sward,
Every morn shall lead thee through
Fresh baptisms of the dew;
Every evening from thy feet
Shall the cool wind kiss the heat
All too soon these feet must hide
In the prison cells of pride,
Lose the freedom of the sod,
Like a colt's for work be shod,
Made to tread the mills of toil,
Up and down in ceaseless moil
Happy if their track be found
Never on forbidden ground;
Happy if they sink not in
Quick and treacherous sands of sin.
Ah! that thou couldst know thy joy,
Ere it passes, barefoot boy!
1855.

MY PSALM.

I mourn no more my vanished years
Beneath a tender rain,
An April rain of smiles and tears,
My heart is young again.

The west-winds blow, and, singing low,
I hear the glad streams run;
The windows of my soul I throw
Wide open to the sun.

No longer forward nor behind
I look in hope or fear;
But, grateful, take the good I find,
The best of now and here.

I plough no more a desert land,
To harvest weed and tare;
The manna dropping from God's hand
Rebukes my painful care.

I break my pilgrim staff, I lay
Aside the toiling oar;
The angel sought so far away
I welcome at my door.

The airs of spring may never play
Among the ripening corn,
Nor freshness of the flowers of May
Blow through the autumn morn.

Yet shall the blue-eyed gentian look
Through fringed lids to heaven,
And the pale aster in the brook
Shall see its image given;—

The woods shall wear their robes of praise,
The south-wind softly sigh,
And sweet, calm days in golden haze
Melt down the amber sky.

Not less shall manly deed and word
Rebuke an age of wrong;
The graven flowers that wreath the sword
Make not the blade less strong.

But smiting hands shall learn to heal,—
To build as to destroy;
Nor less my heart for others feel
That I the more enjoy.

All as God wills, who wisely heeds
To give or to withhold,
And knoweth more of all my needs
Than all my prayers have told.

Enough that blessings undeserved
Have marked my erring track;
That wheresoe'er my feet have swerved,
His chastening turned me back;

That more and more a Providence
Of love is understood,
Making the springs of time and sense
Sweet with eternal good;—

That death seems but a covered way
Which opens into light,
Wherein no blinded child can stray
Beyond the Father's sight;

That care and trial seem at last,
Through Memory's sunset air,
Like mountain-ranges overpast,
In purple distance fair;

That all the jarring notes of life
Seem blending in a psalm,
And all the angles of its strife

Slow rounding into calm.

And so the shadows fall apart,
And so the west-winds play;
And all the windows of my heart
I open to the day.
1859.

THE WAITING.

I wait and watch: before my eyes
Methinks the night grows thin and gray;
I wait and watch the eastern skies
To see the golden spears arise
Beneath the oriflamme of day!

Like one whose limbs are bound in trance
I hear the day-sounds swell and grow,
And see across the twilight glance,
Troop after troop, in swift advance,
The shining ones with plumes of snow!

I know the errand of their feet,
I know what mighty work is theirs;
I can but lift up hands unmeet,
The threshing-floors of God to beat,
And speed them with unworthy prayers.

I will not dream in vain despair
The steps of progress wait for me
The puny leverage of a hair
The planet's impulse well may spare,
A drop of dew the tided sea.

The loss, if loss there be, is mine,
And yet not mine if understood;
For one shall grasp and one resign,
One drink life's rue, and one its wine,
And God shall make the balance good.

Oh power to do! Oh baffled will!
Oh prayer and action! ye are one.
Who may not strive, may yet fulfil
The harder task of standing still,
And good but wished with God is done!
1862.

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