

Unspoken Thoughts

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Kegan Paul, Trench

1887

UNSPOKEN THOUGHTS.

The Shadow.

1.

A VISION haunts me, love, when thou art near,
Chilling my heart as frost nips April flowers;
A covering cloud, when all is fair and clear,
That takes the sweetness from our happiest hours.

2.

It steals the colour from our brightest sky;
It mars my soul's content when all seems well;
It quenches laughter in a shuddering sigh —
In thoughts that thrill me like a tolling bell.

3.

It numbs my passion when I love thee most;
It dims my eyes — it veils thy face; it slips,
An unseen shadow, like a creeping ghost,
Betwixt thy kisses and my hungering lips.

4.

What, amid richest plenty, starves me thus?
What is it draws my trustful hand from thine?
That sits a guest at marriage feast with us,
And mixes poison with the food and wine?

5.

In broad noonday — in dark hours long and lone —
A small green mound, a lettered name, I see.
There love is symbolled in a graven stone —
There I lie dead, worth nothing more to thee.

6.

There weep the dews, and winds of winter blow;
The soft breeze rustles in the bending grass;
The cold rain falls there, and the drifting snow —
But tears fall not, nor lovers' footsteps pass.

7.

Bees hum all day amid the young spring leaves;
The rooks caw loud from every elm- tree bough;
The sparrows twitter in the old church eaves —
But no voice cries for me or calls me now.

8.

Bright beams of morn encompass me about;
The stars shine o'er me, and the pale moonlight;
But I, that lit and warmed thee, am gone out,
Like a burnt candle, in eternal night.

9.

Earth to the earth upon this churchyard slope.
We made no tryst for happier time and place;
And in thy sky gleams no immortal hope,
No distant radiance from my vanished face.

10.

And still the sands between thy fingers run —
Desires, delights, ambitions — days and years,
Rich hours of life for thee, though mine are done —
Too full for vain regrets, too brief for tears.

11.

I have lost all, but thou dost hold and save,
Adding new treasure to thy rifled store,
While weeds grow long on the neglected grave

Where sleeps thy mate who may be thine no more.

12.

This is the fate I feel, the ghost I see,
The dream I dream at night, the thought I dread —
That thus 'twill be some day with thee and me,
Thou fain to live while I am doubly dead.

13.

Thou still defiant of our common foe;
I vanquished quite — the once- resplendent crown
Of all thy joys become a dragging woe,
To be lopped off, lest it should weigh thee down.

14.

I, once thy sap of life, a wasteful drain
On thy green vigour, like a rotten branch;
I, once thy health, a paralyzing pain,
A bleeding wound that thou must haste to stanch.

15.

Because the dead are dead — the past is gone;
Because dear life is sweet and time is brief,
And some must fall, and some must still press on,
Nor waste scant strength in unavailing grief.

16.

I blame thee not. I know what must be must.
Nor shall I suffer when apart from thee.
I shall not care, when I am mouldering dust,
That once quick love is in the grave with me.

17.

Cast me away — thou knowest I shall not fret;
Take thy due joys — I shall not bear the cost.
I, that am thus forgotten, shall forget,
Nor shed one tear for all that I have lost.

18.

Not then, not then shall sting of death and dole,
The penal curse of life and love, befall;
'Tis now I wear the sackcloth on my soul,
Bereaved and lonely, while possessed of all.

19.

O, wert *thou* dead, should *I*, beloved, turn
Deaf heart to memory when of thee she spake?
Should *I*, when this pure fire had ceased to burn,
Seek other hearths, for sordid comfort's sake?

20.

No — no! Yet I am mortal — I am weak —
In need of warmth when wintry winds are cold;
And fateful years and circumstance will wreak
Their own stern will on mine, when all is told.

21.

How can I keep thee? Day and night I grope
In Nature's book, and in all books beside,
For but one touch of a substantial hope.
But all is vague and void on every side.

22.

Whence did we come? And is it there we go?
We look behind — night hides our place of birth;
The blank before hides heaven, for aught we know.
But what is heaven to us, whose home is earth?

23.

Flesh may be gross — the husk that holds the seed —
And gold and gems worth more than common bread;
But flesh is *us*, and bread is what we need,
And, changed and glorious, we should still be dead.

24.

What is the infinite universe to him
Who has no home? Eternal Future seems,
Like the Eternal Past, unreal and dim —
The airy region of a poet's dreams.

25.

What spirit essence, howsoe'er divine,
Can our lost selves restore from dusty grave?
Thy mortal mind and body — thine and mine —
Make all the joys I know, and all I crave.

26.

No fair romance of transcendental bliss,
No tale of palms and crowns my dull heart stirs,
That only hungers for a woman's kiss,
And asks no life that is not one with hers.

27.

Not such Hereafter can I wish to see;
Not this pale hope my sinking soul exalts;
I want no sexless angel — only thee,
My human love, with all thy human faults.

28.

Just as thou art — not beautiful or wise,

But prone to simple sins and sad unrest;
With thy warm lips and arms, and thy sweet eyes —
Sweeter for tears they weep upon my breast.

29.

Just as thou art — with thy soft household ways,
Thy noble failures and thy poor success,
Thy love that fits me for my strenuous days —
A mortal woman — neither more nor less.

30.

And thou must pass with these too rapid hours
To that great deep from whence we both were brought;
Thy sentient flesh must turn to grass and flowers,
To birds and beasts, to dust — to air — to naught.

31.

I know the parable. The great oaks grow
To their vast stature from an acorn grain,
And mightiest man was once an embryo.
But how can *nothing* bring thee forth again?

32.

And is the new oak tree the old oak tree?
And is the son the father? And wouldst thou,
If thou couldst rise from nothing, be to me
Thy present self, that satisfies me now?

33.

Words — words! A dream that fades in Faith's embrace,
And melts in Reason's all-refining fires;
The cherished hope of every age and race;
Born of man's fancy and his own desires.

34.

Here in our little island- home we bide
Our few brief years — 'tis all that we possess.
The Infinite lies around on every side,
But what it holds no mortal mind may guess.

35.

Say we remain — a lasting miracle —
As well we may; for this small world is rife
With mystic wonders that no tongue may tell,
And all things teem and travail with new life.

36.

Say we awake — ineffably alive,
Divinely perfect — in some higher sphere!
'Twill not be *we* — the *we* who strain and strive,
And love and learn, and joy and suffer, here.

37.

What is our hope, if any hope there be?
'Tis for some bliss uncared for and unknown,
That some strange beings, yet unborn, shall see.
Alas! And all we cry for is our own!

38.

Only to be ourselves — not cast abroad
In space and time, for either bliss or woe —
Only to keep the treasures we have stored!
And they must pass away. And we must go.

39.

How can we bear it? How can we submit?
Like a wild beast imprisoned, in our pain
We rave and rage for some way out of it,

But bruise and bleed against the bars in vain.

40.

All — all is dark. Beyond our birth and death —
At either end — the same unyielding door.
We live, we love, while we draw human breath.
This much we know — but we can know no more.

41.

The stars shine down upon the minster spires,
Silent, and pale, and still, like watching eyes.
Think of the tumult of those spinning fires —
Think of the vastness of those midnight skies!

42.

Think of our world in the immense unknown —
Only a grain of stellar dust; and man,
Wanting a God, a Saviour, all his own —
Wanting to break the universal plan!

43.

He but a phase of planetary change,
That once was not, and will give place anon
To other forms, more beautiful and strange —
To pass in turn — till earth herself is gone.

44.

Earth, that is next to nothing in the sum
Of things created — a brief mote in space,
With all her aeons past and yet to come.
Ah, think of it! How we forget our place!

45.

Casual atoms in the mighty scheme
That needs us not, we dimly wax and wane,
Dissolving ever like a passing dream —
A breath breathed forth and then drawn back again.

46.

Lone in these infinite realms, perchance unseen —
Unheard. And yet not lost. And not so small,
So feebly futile, pitifully mean,
As our poor creeds would make us, after all.

47.

Still are we details of the great design,
Set to our course, like circling sun and star;
Mortal, infinitesimal — yet divine,
Like Him — or It — that made us what we are.

48.

Let manhood, God- begotten, have its due.
'Tis God — whate'er He be — hath made us thus,
Ourselves as gods to know the right and true.
Shall He not, then, be justified in us?

49.

The warm sap runs; the tender leaves unfold;
Ant helps his brother ant; birds build in spring;
The patient earthworm sifts the crumbled mould; —
A sacred instinct guides each living thing.

50.

Shall we, its born interpreters, not heed?
Shall we confess us failures, whom He lifts
So high above these creatures that succeed?
Or prove us worthy of our nobler gifts?

51.

Shall we not prove us worthy? Ay, we will
Because we can, we must — through peace and strife,
Bright hope and black despair, come good, come ill.
'Tis man's sole title to his place in life.

52.

To stand upright in all the winds that blow,
Unbeaten as a tree in driving rain;
In all our doubts, to do the best we know,
From no base fear of loss or hope of gain.

53.

To still the cry of self — give listening ears
To stern Truth's message, whatsoe'er it be;
To share our brother's toil and dry his tears —
This is the task set forth for thee and me.

54.

This is the lesson that we live to learn,
And, by brave thought, by word and deed, to teach;
These are the heights our lifted eyes discern
Through cloud and darkness, that our souls must reach.

55.

Not less am I in wisdom and in will
Than ants and worms. I am full- furnished too
My arduous errand hither to fulfil.
I know my work, and what a man can do.

56.

My God, I ask Thee nothing. Thou hast given

This conscious mind, this brain without a flaw;
And I will strive, as I have humbly striven,
To make them serve their purpose and Thy law.

57.

But thee, my soul's companion — thee I seek
For daily courage to support my lot.
In thee hath Nature made me strong or weak.
My human comforter, forsake me not!

58.

My nobler self, in whom I live my best,
Strengthen me! Raise me! Help me to the last!
Lay thy dear head upon my throbbing breast —
Give me thy hands, that I may hold thee fast!

59.

Come close — come closer! Let me feel thy heart,
Thy pulsing heart, thy breathing lips, on mine.
O love, let *only* death and graveyard part —
If they must part — my flesh and soul from thine!

60.

Let no mistrust, no doubt, no poor caprice
Darken for me in thy transparent gaze;
Let no self- wrought estrangement wreck our peace,
Nor vain dissension waste our precious days.

61.

Be thou my purer eyes, my keener ears,
My finer conscience, steadfast, unafraid —
Till these few, swift, inexorable years
Have borne us both beyond the reach of aid.

62.

Be thou my staff upon this lonely way.
Be thou my lamp till need of light is past —
Till the dark shadow, lengthening day by day,
Spreads over all and quenches us at last.

63.

Keep me from falling! Keep me from despair!
Keep me true man, if only man I be,
Faithful and brave to bear what I must bear.
For what else have I, if I have not thee?

Influence.

As in the mists of embryonic night,
 Out of the deep and dark obscurities
 Of Nature's womb, the little life- germs rise,
Pushing by instinct upward to the light;
As, when the first ray dawns on waking sight,
 They leap to liberty, and recognize
 The golden sunshine and the morning skies
Their own inheritance by inborn right; —

So do our brooding thoughts and deep desires
 Grow in our souls, we know not how or why;
 Grope for we know not what, all blind and dumb.
So, when the time is ripe, and one aspires
 To free his thought in speech, ours hear the cry,
 And to full birth and instant knowledge come.

Nightfall In The Fens.

1.

One hour ago the red- hot sun below the bright horizon sank.
The long midsummer day is done. Our boat is moored beneath the bank.
The glory of the crimson west dies slowly on the river's breast.

2.

The water- violet shuts its eye; the water- lily petals close;
So in the evening light we lie and dream in undisturbed repose.
How far all petty cares have flown! How calm the fretful world has grown!

3.

We only hear the gentle breeze, in soft, delicious whispers, pass
Through osier beds and alder trees, and rustling flags and bending grass;
The song of blackbird in the hedge, the quack of wild duck in the sedge.

4.

The distant bark of farmhouse dogs, the piping of a clear- voiced thrush;
The murmurous babble of the frogs, of rippling stream in reed and rush;
The splash of hungry trout that rise to passing gnats and dragon- flies.

5.

Sounds that make silence eloquent, but cannot break it, nor dispel
The tranquil sense of still content that holds us like enchanter's spell —
At rest and free, in this lone fen, from noise of streets and striving men.

6.

What perfume in these dewy hours the rich earth to the soft air yields!
Sweetbriar and bean and clover flowers breathe incense from the quiet fields;

And every whiff that comes this way brings fragrant scent of new- mown hay.

7.

A long- legged heron stalks about that marshy meadow, seeking food;
A little water- hen creeps out close by us, with her paddling brood;
A water- rat, in blank surprise, stares at us with his beady eyes.

8.

The swallow lingers, and the swift, like arrow from a bow, darts by;
Light clouds of little midges drift between us and the tender sky;
Cockchafers hum as they whirl past. But the hushed twilight gathers fast.

9.

All Nature takes her happy ease, and we no more can fume and fret.
No inward questions taunt and tease. All life's disasters we forget —
All life's injustice we forgive. To- night it is enough to live.

10.

No time is this to talk of books — no time vexed problems to discuss
Through all the upward spirit looks, and sees that Good is meant for us —
Sees more in these transparent skies than in all wise philosophies.

* * * * *

11.

The western glories fade and pass. The twilight deepens more and more.
A thin mist, like a breath on glass, veils shining stream and distant shore;
And night is falling, still and cool, on each broad marsh and silent pool.

12.

The moor- hen paddles in the weeds no longer, for her chicks are fed;
The heron, rising from the reeds, goes slowly sailing home to bed;

Just now, from off that mossy bank, the little brown rat slipped and sank.

13.

Night comes at length. The last pale gleam of lingering day has disappeared.
On silent fields and quiet stream a few stars shine; the mist has cleared;
The willows of the further shore stand outlined on the sky once more.

14.

No hum of gnat or bee is heard; no pipe of thrush on hawthorn bough;
No cry of any beast or bird to stir the solemn stillness now,
Though all the soundless air is rife with latent energies of life

15.

Only a vagrant bat we see on silken pinion flitting by;
Only a white owl, roaming free, with downy wings and steadfast eye;
Two ghostly visions in their flight — two noiseless shadows of the night.

16.

How clear the darkness, and how fine the plumes upon those bulbous stumps!
A luminous greyness seems to shine behind those serried osier clumps;
And sharper in the pallid glow the stems of flag and bulrush grow.

17.

A faint dawn breaks on yonder sedge, and broadens in that bed of weeds;
A bright disc shows its radiant edge, the round moon rises from the reeds;
Its level rays of silver glide across the steel- dark river tide.

18.

They burnish steel to silver bright — a mirror for an angel meet;
They bridge it with a bridge of light — fit pathway for an angel's feet;
If angel feet and angel face haunt mortal creatures' dwelling place.

19.

The widening track of glory streams to this low margin where we sit;
My sight swims in its dazzling beams, and heart and brain are steeped in it —
Are washed from all the dust and grime, the smears and tears, of working time.

20.

Like waves when stormy winds are past, my toils and turmoils sink and cease;
Like long- bound captive free at last, I bask in ecstasies of peace;
Like tired child I lie at rest upon my unknown parent's breast.

21.

There may be happier worlds than this — a heavenly country, vast and fair,
Where saints and seraphs dwell in bliss — but I pray not for entrance there.
While in my human flesh I live I ask no more than earth can give.

22.

Ethereal essences may roam Elysian fields beyond the grave,
But I, a man, am in my home, with all I love and all I crave.
How is it, faithful friend, with thee? This sweet world is enough for me.

Honour.

ME let the world disparage and despise —
 This virtuous world that loves its gilded chains,
 Its mean successes and its sordid gains,
Its pleasant vice and profitable lies;
Let its strong hand my rebel deeds chastise,
 The rebel blood that surges in my veins,
 And deal me all due penalties and pains,
And make me hideous in my neighbours' eyes.

But let me fall not in mine own esteem,
 My poor deceit or selfish greed debased.
 Let me be clean from secret stain and shame,
Know myself true, though only false I seem —
 Know myself worthy, howsoe'er disgraced —
 Know myself right, though all the world should blame.

Midnight.

1.

THE night is clear and still. The moon rides high.
The green leaves whisper where the soft winds blow.
Above, the stars shine in a sapphire sky —
The city sleeps below.

2.

Sleeps? Nay. The million- fibred heart is wrung
With wild desire and ceaseless pain and fear.
Could its dumb anguish find a fitting tongue,
The very dead would hear.

3.

Under these quiet roofs, this silvery haze,
How many a captive spirit wakes and weeps!
How many a sorrow, hid from human gaze,
Each shadowy dwelling keeps!

4.

The struggling men, the lonely maids unwed,
The desolate mothers and the martyred wives,
The starving little ones that cry for bread,
Still live their suffering lives.

5.

Though moon shines fair and winds are breathing low —
Though the great dream-like city lies in light —
The smoke of all that seething human woe
Darkens my mind to- night.

6.

Brothers, for whom the world can find no place —
 Brothers and sisters, born to want and wrong —
Born weak and maimed, to run a hopeless race
 Against the hale and strong —

7.

How can I rest while they are racked with pain?
 While they toil on with toil that cannot cease?
While hungry children wail for bread in vain,
 How can I sleep in peace?

8.

Ah, hapless fate! To hope, to fail, to spend,
 From chilling dawn till midnight shadows fall;
Perchance to gain no haven at the end —
 No new world — after all!

9.

When poor, brief hopes and joys have passed away —
 When the long toil is done and pain is past —
To reach the limit of life's little day,
 And find naught else, at last

10.

When strength is spent, when soul and spirit sink —
 With helpless hands outstretched and nerveless brain —
To stand alone upon that dreadful brink
 And cry for light in vain!

11.

Poor mortal wanderers in immortal realms,
 For whom no staff avails, no beacons shine!
My kindred soul their burden overwhelms —

My brothers' woes are mine.

12.

For *me* the night has come — the day is done —
A wall of darkness hides both sea and shore;
My little lamps have failed me, one by one —
I grope and crawl no more.

13.

Where am I? — oh, where am I? I can feel —
To feel my pain — but neither hear nor see;
My heart is faint, my brain begins to reel —
O God, speak Thou to me!

14.

Help me! Or, in Thy pity, take me hence
While feeling heart and thinking brain are whole —
Or give me any rag of carnal sense
To wrap my naked soul.

15.

Some common cloak of vulgar hopes and fears,
Some earth- spun veil, that shall be warm and stout
To keep this infinite Silence from mine ears —
To shut this Darkness out!

16.

The mocking moon shines on. The flowers are sweet.
The night is still. The winds are breathing balm.
The silver city clustered at my feet
Seems bathed in light and calm.

17.

But I? — I choke in this grief- laden air.
I turn and weep — I close my window now.
One voice breaks forth from my profound despair —
Beloved, where art thou?

18.

She sleeps. She stirs. She hears the lightest fall
Of my hushed footsteps on her chamber floor.
Her spirit answers to my spirit's call,
And I take heart once more.

19.

She draws me down upon that faithful breast;
I clasp her close — those sweetest lips I kiss —
And soul and body, in her arms at rest,
Swim in deep seas of bliss.

20.

She makes me strong with stronger Fate to cope —
Fresh fire to mine her beating pulses give.
O my true mate, in thee alone I hope!
In thee alone I live!

21.

O love, till blood is cold and brain is dust,
I can fight on — if thou wilt fight with me —
If I can shelter in thy truth and trust,
And bear life's woes with thee!

Despair.

ALONE! Alone! No beacon, far or near!
The old sweet hopes and faiths all pass away,
Like melting fog and mirage, day by day,
And leave the infinite, empty darkness clear.
We spread our hands in vain — in vain we peer
With aching eyes — in vain for light we pray;
Beyond these limits not the faintest ray
Shows distant coast whereto our bark may steer.

O what is life, if we must hold it thus,
As wind-blown sparks hold momentary fire?
What are these gifts without the larger boon?
O what is art, or wealth, or fame, to us
Who scarce have time to know what we desire?
O what is love, if we must part so soon?

At Liberty.

1.

NO sight to me like sight of ships.
No wine to me like salt- spray thrown
By morning breezes on my lips;
No music sweeter than the moan
Of solemn surges landward blown.
O world unconquered! O great sea,
Tamed by celestial winds alone!
My spirit is at home with thee,
Panting with thy wild waves for space and liberty.

2.

The land is captive, sold, and bought;
The streets are filled with traffic base;
And I am choked with narrow thought —
The dusty customs that disgrace
Mart, chamber, church, and judgment- place.
But when, upon this lonely shore,
I hear thy voice and see thy face,
I seem to pass a prison door,
And breathe, a free- born man, my native air once more.

3.

The urgent tyrannies of life
Relax their grasp when I am here;
I rise above the fretful strife,
The timid doubt, the trembling fear,
The petty woes that crowd so near;
And, with brain cleansed and pulses stilled,
Stand in the spacious atmosphere,
My inmost being rapt and thrilled,
With unimagined peace and wordless worship filled.

4.

O mystery that no thought can reach!
O language that no tongue can tell!
The whispering surf upon the beach —
The murmuring of the mid- sea swell —
The long boom, like a tolling bell,
That shakes the earth beneath my feet —
The solitude ineffable!
O what new strength, divine and sweet,
Breathes in the mighty gales that round these headlands beat!

5.

Thou, friend, in those wild arms caressed,
My comrade, that hast house and home
On that illimitable breast,
Thy spirit in the wind and foam
Meets mine beneath this starlit dome.
I have no compass and no chart;
I know not where thy bark may roam;
I know not, brother, where thou art;
But I can feel thy courage lifting up my heart.

6.

The shadow of the splendid night
Blots out sea- blue and sunset red.
The glimmering canvas, wide and white,
By sweeping rush of trade- wind spread,
Like sea- birds wings above thy head —
Tall mast, slim spar and cobweb shroud,
And slant deck echoing to thy tread —
The great ship, stately, strong, and proud,
Fades on the darkening deep like some dispersing cloud.

7.

But thou art there, amid the stars
That watch me with those steadfast eyes.
Thy soul, escaped from bolts and bars,
Conventioned fetters and disguise,
As open as these arching skies,
Untrammelled as this boundless sea,

Calm in the awful darkness lies,
Like babe upon its mother's knee,
Humble, but unafraid, as honest soul should be.

8.

Thinking of thee — so small a speck
Amid these myriad worlds around,
But king upon thy quarter- deck —
More king than monarch throned and crowned
That e'er on subject smiled or frowned —
Of what depends upon thy skill,
And thee, by conscience only bound —
I think how nobly we may fill
Our part that looks so hard and hopeless, if we will.

9.

Poor, puny mortals that we are,
Clinging to reeds, and ropes of sand,
'Twere better done, 'twere braver far,
Unsheltered and upright to stand,
The free soul at its own command;
In Him- whate'er He be — to trust
Who holds us in His mighty hand,
And guides each star and grain of dust —
Or to renounce all hope and comfort, if we must.

10.

When mercury sinks and winds are foul,
When mists are thick and skies are black,
And hurricanes that shriek and howl,
And wild seas, leaping like a pack
Of hungry wolves upon thy track,
Smother the deck with spume and spray —
Thou, quiet in the dreadful wrack,
Keeping thy watch, dost stand at bay,
Unshaken by one thought of danger or dismay.

11.

Then why, in life's disastrous hours,
Shall we not face the storm and stress
Of those dark destinies and powers,
Those strong fates, that so hardly press
Upon our lonely littleness?
With timbers sound and thou to guide,
Thy ship will live through her distress.
Shall we not also safely ride,
If hearts be stout and true, whatever may betide?

12.

Or if, indeed, we have to meet
The worst that e'er stout heart befell —
If we must suffer sore defeat,
O'erwhelming, irresistible —
Shall we not bear that test as well?
Shall we not die without disgrace?
No force of anguish can compel
Brave men to turn to mean and base,
And all that fate can bring brave men should dare to face.

13.

If, suddenly, some dire mischance —
Collision, cyclone, fire — should mock
Thy keen and sleepless vigilance;
If there should come, unwarned, the shock
Of shattering hull on sunken rock —
If death, in fog, or flood, or flame,
Upon thy cabin door should knock —
Thy native righteousness would shame
The men who boast most loudly of the Christian name.

14.

“The women first!” thy voice would cry
Above the roar of wind and wave;
And thou, the last, would'st calmly die,
Intrepid, resolute, and brave,
All them that trusted thee to save.
If thou could'st see rewards in store —

A martyr's crown beyond the grave —
If all heaven beckoned thee before,
Or fear of hell-fire drove thee — thou could'st do no more.

15.

Art thou, in thy lone- handed fight,
That fails to serve thee, but succeeds
In victory for the true and right,
Beneath the soul that only heeds
The cry of its own lower needs? —
That shelters, trembling, from the fray
In privilege of pleasant creeds,
That are but systems of a day,
From age to age new- made, outworn, and cast away?

16.

Are we not strong enough to take
The course by conscience marked so plain? —
Faithful till death, for manhood's sake,
Unspurred by coward fear of pain,
Unbribed by hope of selfish gain.
Must soaring progress sink and fall?
And is all history writ in vain?
Is life a thing so poor and small?
And is the great design a muddle after all?

17.

Standing in this tremendous space
Of starlit sky and whispering sea,
With my great Maker face to face,
His countless worlds surrounding me,
Eternity — Infinity —
Humble, but confident, I dare
To let these bitter questions be.
We, too, are creatures of His care.
The voice that called us forth forbids us to despair.

Vows.

WHAT worth are promises? We can pretend
To constant passion and a life- long trust,
As to all decorous virtues, if we must;
But you and I will speak the truth, my friend.
And can we say what fickle fate will send
To lift us up or grind us into dust? —
What bloom of growth or waste of moth and rust
Shall be our portion ere the final end?

No laws, no oaths can free- born souls confine.
When vows have force, the treasured thing whereon
They stamped their pledge is neither yours nor mine;
Wishing to go, it is already gone.
When faith and love need bolts upon the door,
Then faith is faith and love is love no more.

Sic Vos Non Vobis.

1.

FOR Truth — not selfish souls to save;
For Right, and not for rest —
Are *we* to judge ye, that can brave
All terrors of that quest?
And scorn that cross, obscurely borne,
That wins no crown save crown of thorn,
And call that work unblest
Of steadfast hearts that blindly grope
For God in faith if not in hope?

2.

Ye learn how little is the sum
That Truth herself can teach,
And where the mystic boundaries come
That bar your utmost reach;
For ye no sage nor saint can find
A clue to aught that lies behind;
For ye the preachers preach,
And leave ye lonely at the door
That opens to your knock no more.

3.

Ye touch, 'twixt vision and the light,
So dark and blank a wall,
And listen in a soundless night
And hear no voices call;
Ye stand upon an inch of ground,
And feel infinities around,
Yet — dare to face it all!
And keep the life ye hold in trust
A treasure safe from moth and rust.

4.

A life so sweet, so sad, and strange,
So futile and so brief,
So bright with gladness, that can change
So soon to gloom and grief —
So much that ye can gain or lose!
So little left for ye to choose!
Like thistle- down and leaf
That in soft airs of autumn dance,
The helpless sport of Fate and Chance.

5.

An atom in this orb, that runs
So strong and vast a race —
Itself a mote amid the suns
That fill eternal space,
A grain of sand upon the shore,
Cast up a moment, and no more —
Yet, oh, so rich in grace!
So pregnant with divine desires!
So quickened with immortal fires!

6.

Ye feel the breathing of the morn
While night is grey and grim,
The pulse of ages yet unborn
Stirs eager brain and limb;
The day when Truth may yet be freed
From mist and smoke and cloud of creed
Dawns distantly and dim —
The day when bonds that bind them fast
May loose men's aching souls at last.

7.

Ye thrill with noble lust of strife,
And yearnings deep and high,
The inspiration of a life
That cannot mean to die —
That makes a gospel of the tale
Whereof one page, so blurred and pale,

Is writ for human eye,
The story that will still go on
When our vexed earth and we are gone.

8.

And ye can bear, in hopeless trust,
To strive — and fail! And then,
Meekly, as specks of wandering dust,
To pass from mortal ken;
To feel quenched out in endless night,
Your graves but stepping- stones to light
That shines for other men —
Your gain that, maybe, some rough street
Is smoother for your children's feet.

9.

No gleam upon the pathway shed
Where ye have walked amiss;
No forecast on your dying bed
Of compensating bliss;
No goal and guerdon for your quest —
Not e'en to lie on houri's breast;
No martyr's crown but this —
That ye were not afraid to take
A lonely way for Conscience' sake.

The Physical Conscience.

The moral conscience — court of last appeal —
Our word of God — our Heaven- sent light and guide —
From what high aims it lures our steps aside!
To what immoral deeds it sets its seal!
That beacon lamp has lost its sacred fire;
That pilot- guide, compelling wind and wave,
By slow, blind process, has become the slave
Of all- compelling custom and desire.

Not so the conscience of the body. This,
Untamed and true, still speaks in voice and face,
In cold lips stiffened to the loveless kiss,
In shamed limbs shrinking from unloved embrace,
In love- born passion, that no laws compel,
Nor gold can purchase, nor ambition sell.

Listening.

1.

WHEN earth's winter bareness
Feels the April rain,
All her summer fairness
Comes to life again.
So my spirit quickens to that magic strain.

2.

Fancy, warmed and brightened,
Spreads her folded wings —
Passion, stirred, enlightened,
From its slumber springs —
When that bow is laid upon those trembling strings.

3.

Visions, past all telling,
Sweet and strange, I see;
Mystic voices, swelling —
Melting — cry to me
From celestial realms of hope and memory.

4.

Tender thoughts caress me,
Like a summer's day;
Stern moods possess me,
As the rough winds play
With an autumn leaf untimely cast away.

5.

Fierce desires come creeping
From their secret lair;

Wild regrets, upheaving,
At my heartstrings tear —
Wildest aspirations, more than I can bear.

6.

Like a leaf I quiver
With responsive thrills —
Ache, and burn, and shiver,
As the Master wills
Whose mysterious message all my being fills.

7.

Dreams of grace and glory,
Always out of reach —
Truths untold in story,
That no book can teach,
Past all human language, find their native speech.

8.

O what wailing sadness
That no tongue may tell,
What enraptured gladness,
In those wild notes swell —
Bliss and anguish both — divine, ineffable!

9.

Joys and woes unspoken,
Whereof earth is rife,
Dear hopes blest and broken,
Futile pain and strife,
Birth and death and love, the tragedy of life.

10.

And my soul, attending,
Through my listening ears

In those strains heartrending
Its own history hears —
All too sweet for words, too terrible for tears.

Responsibility.

The history of success is the history of minorities. JOHN MORLEY, On Compromise.

WHY are our ideals hid from hostile eyes

As boys in school hide toys from master's view?

Let them be real as we believe them true —

Real as our chartered laws and liberties.

All precious rights that we possess and prize

Were ideals once, unshaped, unripe, and new,

The wild delusions of the crack-brained few,

The trifles mocked at by the worldly-wise.

Some must be first; and every coward blights

His brother's hope, and spreading Truth arrests;

While every brave man helps the world, and lights

The flame of courage in a thousand breasts.

So let us bear our meed of vulgar scorn,

And wait the judgment of the years unborn.

Cui Bono.

1.

WHY should we care for storms that rave and rend,
Safe at our household hearth?
Unknowing whence we came, or where we wend,
Why should we ache and toil, and waste and spend,
Treading from no beginning to no end,
An uncrowned martyr's path?

2.

Is it worth while to suffer, when we might,
Like happier men, be blest
With that dull blindness that desires no light,
That peaceful soul that feels no need to fight,
Nor thirsts for liberty, and truth, and right,
But lives its life at rest?

3.

Is it worth while to work, and strive, and learn —
To sow where none may reap?
Is it worth while to rage, and fret, and yearn
For nameless treasure that we cannot earn?
Is it worth while in fever- fires to burn,
While wise men eat and sleep?

4.

Is it worth while to care for praise or blame,
This little time we live,
When purest deeds are oftenest put to shame?
To pant for noble strife and lofty fame,
When gold seems better than a stainless name,
Or all the world can give?

5.

Is it worth while for friendship's gift to sue,
For friendship's joys to crave?
When sordid tests, that bring us ruth and rue,
And sorrowful years, alone discern the clue
That tells us what is false and what is true,
And what we lose or save?

6.

To open wide our sanctuary door
Some welcome guest to greet,
To find, perchance, when we have shown our store,
The sacred places rudely trampled o'er,
Bereaved, profaned, and soiled for evermore
With tread of vulgar feet?

7.

Is it worth while to love — though love find grace
In our beloved's sight?
To bear a restless heart from place to place,
Hungry for sight of one transcendent face,
That shines our central sun in azure space,
Or leaves our world in night:

8.

And, after all, to gain no more than this
At such a life- long cost —
A taste, a glimpse, the memory of a kiss,
A speechless sense of what diviner bliss,
That might have been, we have contrived to miss —
To know what love has lost?

9.

Is it worth while — O sadder fate! — to heed
The solemn chime that knells
The death hour of an immemorial creed —

A staff of strength become a broken reed —
And never friendlier help in time of need,
Nor surer guide, foretells?

10.

To heed the spirit- voice that bids us take
A strange new road alone;
From gentle slumber and sweet dreams to wake,
And hear the mighty billows boom and break —
The thunder of immortal seas that shake
The earth's foundation- stone?

11.

Is it worth while, so far away as we,
To long, in hope and dread,
For the great unborn Age that is to be —
To pine for light that we shall never see —
To care what course man's life and destiny
May take when we are dead?

12.

Is it worth while to toil in doubt and fear,
Through thorny ways like these,
When they who turn blind eye and heedless ear
To change and portent, and who see nor hear
The pregnant storm that gathers far and near,
Dwell all their days at ease?

13.

To leave the Good whereof we are possest,
To search, in gloom and grief,
Through pathless trouble, for some unknown Best,
And see no goal, and find no place of rest —
Is it worth while, on such a fruitless quest
To waste a life so brief?

14.

Is it worth while to wear out heart and brain?

Ah me, what must be must!

The maddening Mystery cannot be made plain,

And they who seek to solve it seek in vain,

Yet can but seek, in sleepless hope and pain,

Till heart and brain are dust.

Profit And Loss.

EACH day a new sword flashes in the van;
Another leader, brave to do or die,
Comes forth, full- furnished for the strife whereby
He gains his growth and stature as a man.
Each day our world, that under the black ban
Of ignorant custom for so long did lie,
Grows bright and brighter, like a clearing sky,
More good and lovely in its wondrous plan.

Yet oh! how few the saved, how small the gain,
How poor the profit as against the cost —
The waste of life, divinely vast and fair,
Potential in starved soul and unfed brain —
The powers that might have been and *might be* — lost
Only for want of common food and air!

Good- Bye.

1.

GOOD-BYE! — 'tis like a churchyard bell — good- bye!
Poor weeping eyes! Poor head, bowed down with woe!
Kiss me again, dear love, before you go.
Ah me, how fast the precious moments fly!
Good- bye! Good- bye!

2.

I feel like mourners when they stand and cry
At open grave in wintry wind and rain.
Yes, it is death. But you shall rise again —
Your sun return to this benighted sky.
Good- bye! Good- bye!

3.

Be patient, dear, and time shall pacify
This parting anguish with another friend.
Your heart is broken now, but it will mend.
Though it is death, yet still you will not die.
Good- bye! Good- bye!

4.

Dear heart! dear eyes! dear tongue, that cannot lie!
Your love is true, your grief is deep and sore.
But love will pass — then you will grieve no more.
New love will come. Your tears will soon be dry.
Good- bye! Good- bye!

What Of The Night?

1.

TO you, who look so low,
Where little candles glow —
Who listen in a narrow street,
Confused with noise of passing feet —

2.

To you 'tis wild and dark;
No light, no guide, no ark,
For wanderers lost on moor and lea,
And shipwrecked mariners at sea.

3.

But I — who stand apart,
With hushed but wakeful heart —
I hear the lulling of the gale,
And see the dawnrise faint and pale.

4.

A dawn whereto I grope
In trembling faith and hope,
If haply, brightening, it may cast
A gleam on path and goal at last.

Afar Off.

1.

IS it a will o' the wisp, or is dawn breaking,
That our horizon wears so strange a hue?
Is it but one more dream, or are we waking
To find at last that dreams are coming true?

2.

Far off and faint, a golden line is streaking
The cloudy night that shrouds the life of man;
It is the sun that dim eyes have been seeking,
Through all blind pathways, since the world began.

3.

The sign to weary heart and waiting nation
That day will come to bring them their release
That, late or soon, through storm and tribulation,
Or with slow change, the earth shall rest in peace.

4.

That One, invoked, with half- despairing passion.
Through years and years of wrong, will right us then;
Will take away, in rude or gentle fashion,
The curse that man has laid on brother- men.

5.

Ah, blessed One! our souls go out to meet thee,
At whose feet Hope will fold her tired wing;
And yet we know not how we ought to greet thee,
And take the gifts thy bounteous arms will bring.

6.

Come not, O friend! with vengeful weapons, borrowed
Of them that warred against thee — sword and flame;
For all alike have suffered and have sorrowed,
And all alike have sinned against thy name.

7.

Come thou to men who groan in sore affliction
A breathing spirit of new life and grace;
Come in thy robes of light and benediction,
That all may recognize thy perfect face.

8.

Yet, as thou must, come soon, for them than need thee —
And thou wilt come — Deliverer great and strong!
Brighten, O tender dawn, though few may heed thee,
And bring the day that we have sought so long!

9.

No class strife then, each man against his neighbour,
No waste, no want, to breed the plague of crime;
No insolent pomp, no hard and sordid labour,
No wars, no famines, in that happier time!

10.

But pleasant homes, and good days growing better;
Contented hearts throughout the tranquil land,
That keep the law, in spirit and in letter,
Which we have been so dull to understand.

11.

And fruitful work, instead of barren duty,
With fruitful rest and leisure interweaved;
And life made bright with plenty and with beauty,

And souls made strong with noble aims achieved.

12.

Great Art, no more the plaything of the idle,
But nurse and handmaid to all human needs;
Great Nature, curbed no more with bit and bridle,
Nor men's religion crushed in bitter creeds.

13.

Nor sacred Love a crime, a jest, an error,
To keep or lose, to give or to suppress,
A secret shame, an anguish and a terror,
A curse to them that it was meant to bless.

14.

All round our narrow lives the tide encroaches,
Distant and dim, but spreading far and fast.
O Liberty, thy longed- for reign approaches
That is to give man's birthright back at last!

vasts;

15.

And must *we* go, who see the new age dawning,
While yet we suffer in the pangs of birth,
Nor breathe one breath of the divinest morning
That yet has come to bless our waiting earth?

16.

Oh, must we go, just when the day is growing?
Oh, must we waste with vast and vain desires,
Like sparks put out when viewless winds are blowing,
We, lit and quickened with supernal fires?

17.

Are we to read no more the wondrous pages
Of this great tale that evermore goes on?
Will suns and stars light up eternal ages
With happier worlds — and we alone be gone?

18.

Never to learn the moral of the story —
Why we have toiled for what we must not keep,
Why we have fought to win no crown of glory,
Why we have sown what unborn hands will reap.

19.

Never to learn wherefore our Maker sent us
With these immortal passions in our breast.
Ah me! Ah me! Wherewith can we content us
To know so much, and not to know the rest!

Shadow And Substance.

What have we lost with our lost Heaven and Hell?
Have sacred faith and worship come to naught?
Is life no more with noble meaning fraught?
Is it not still a thing ineffable,
Beyond what mind can grasp or tongue may tell —
Beyond all mystery by sages taught,
All greatest wonders by Messiah wrought —
The one first, last, divinest miracle!

Let selfish hopes, with old myths, pass away.
Though creeds must go, the God of all remains,
And more and more His might upholds and awes.
Revealed in Nature's universal laws;
And more and more true love its crown attains,
And our good world grows better day by day.

A Lesson.

1.

I KNOW now why the world was sad,
With so much good to make it glad;
 Why all things loveliest and best
 Have stirred vague sorrows in my breast,
And sweetest days that life has had
 Have vexed me with such vast unrest.

2.

I know why I have pined and toiled,
And found all aspirations foiled;
 I know why I have gained and spent,
 And never learned what riches meant;
I know what lack and loss have spoiled
 The treasure of my soul's content.

3.

Like day- dawn on the darkened earth,
Like sun and rain in drought and dearth,
 Like spring, that wakens flowers so fast
 When barren winter- time is past,
Love, long- deferred, has come to birth —
 And I am satisfied at last.

4.

My heart is singing; tears are shed;
I, that was starved, am warmed, and fed —
 For love is fire and food and wine,
 All comfort earthly and divine.
Now I am living that was dead,
 And all that life can give is mine.

Fallen.

FOR want of bread to eat and clothes to wear —
Because work failed and streets were deep in snow,
And this meant food and fire — she fell so low,
Sinning for dear life's sake, in sheer despair.
Or, because life was else so bald and bare,
The natural woman in her craved to know
The warmth of passion — as pale buds to blow
And feel the noonday sun and fertile air.

And who condemns? She who, for vulgar gain
And in cold blood, and not for love or need,
Has sold her body to more vile disgrace —
The prosperous matron, with her comely face —
Wife by the law, but prostitute in deed,
In whose gross wedlock womanhood is slain.

A Wife's Protest.

1.

LIKE a white snowdrop in the spring
From child to girl I grew,
And thought no thought, and heard no word
That was not pure and true.

2.

And when I came to seventeen,
And life was fair and free,
A suitor, by my father's leave,
Was brought one day to me.

3.

“Make me the happiest man on earth,”
He whispered soft and low.
My mother told me it was right
I was too young to know.

4.

And then they twined my bridal wreath
And placed it on my brow.
It seems like fifty years ago —
And I am twenty now.

5.

My star, that barely rose, is set;
My day of hope is done —
My woman's life of love and joy —
Ere it has scarce begun.

6.

Hourly I die — I do not live —
 Though still so young and strong.
No dumb brute from his brother brutes
 Endures such wanton wrong.

7.

A smouldering shame consumes me now —
 It poisons all my peace;
An inward torment of reproach
 That never more will cease.

8.

O how my spirit shrinks and sinks
 Ere yet the light is gone!
What creeping terrors chill my blood
 As each black night draws on!

9.

I lay me down upon my bed,
 A prisoner on the rack,
And suffer dumbly, as I must,
 Till the kind day comes back.

10.

Listening from heavy hour to hour
 To hear the church- clock toll —
A guiltless prostitute in flesh,
 A murderess in soul.

11.

Those church- bells chimed the marriage chimes
 When he was wed to me,
And they must knell a funeral knell

Ere I again am free.

12.

I did not hate him then; in faith
I vowed the vow "I will;"
Were I his mate, and not his slave,
I could perform it still.

13.

But, crushed in these relentless bonds
I blindly helped to tie,
With one way only for escape,
I pray that he may die.

14.

O to possess myself once more,
Myself so stained and maimed!
O to make pure these shuddering limbs
That loveless lust has shamed!

15.

But beauty cannot be restored
Where such a blight has been,
And all the rivers in the world
Can never wash me clean.

16.

I go to church; I go to court;
No breath of scandal flaws
The lustre of my fair repute;
For I obey the laws.

17.

My ragged sister of the street,
Marked for the world's disgrace,
Scarce dares to lift her sinful eyes
To the great lady's face.

18.

She hides in shadows as I pass —
On me the sunbeams shine;
Yet, in the sight of God, her stain
May be less black than mine.

19.

Maybe she gave her all for love,
And did not count the cost;
If so, her crown of womanhood
Was not ignobly lost.

20.

Maybe she wears those wretched rags,
And starves from door to door,
To keep her body for her own
Since it may love no more.

21.

If so, in spite of church and law,
She is more pure than I;
The latchet of those broken shoes
I am not fit to tie.

22.

That hungry baby at her breast —
Sign of her fallen state —
Nature, who would but mock at mine,
Has made legitimate.

23.

Poor little “love- child” — spurned and scorned,
Whom church and law disown,
Thou hadst thy birthright when the seed
Of thy small life was sown.

24.

O Nature, give no child to me,
Whom Love must ne'er embrace!
Thou knowest I could not bear to look
On its reproachful face.

An Old Maid's Lament.

1.

EVERY wild she- bird has nest and mate in the warm April weather,
But a captive woman, made for love — nor nest, nor mate has she.
In the spring of young desire, young men and maids are wed together,
And the happy mothers flaunt their bliss for all the world to see.
Life's great sacramental feast for them — an empty board for me.

2.

I, a young maid once, an old maid now, deposed, despised, forgotten —
I, like them, have thrilled with passion and have dreamed of nuptial rest,
Of the trembling life within me of my baby unbegotten,
Of the breathing new- born body to my yearning bosom prest —
Of the rapture of its little soft mouth drinking at my breast.

3.

Time, that heals so many sorrows, keeps mine ever freshly aching,
Though my face is growing furrowed and my brown hair turning white.
Still I mourn my irremediable loss, asleep or waking —
Still I hear my child's voice calling “Mother” in the dead of night,
And am haunted by those sweet eyes that will never see the light.

4.

O my baby that I might have had! My darling, lost for ever!
O the goodly years that might have been — now desolate and bare!
O malignant God or Fate, what have I done that I should never
Take my birthright like the others, take the crown that women wear,
And possess the common heritage to which all flesh is heir?

London.

The gorgeous stream of England's wealth goes by,
Mixed with the mud and refuse, as of old —
The hungry, homeless, naked, sick and cold;
Want mocked by waste and greedy luxury.
There, in their downy carriage- cushions, lie
Proud women whose fair bodies have been sold
And bought for coronet or merchant gold —
For whose base splendours envious maidens sigh.

Some day the social ban will fall on them —
On wanton rich who taunt their starving kin;
Some day the social judgment will condemn
These “wedded harlots” in their shame and sin.
A juster world shall separate them then
From all pure women and all honoured men.

Good Night.

1.

LOVE, thou hast wandered far and wide,
But here thy wanderings cease;
Thy long- sought mate is by thy side,
And thou canst sleep in peace.

2.

Night moans outside our window- pane,
And weeps from dripping eaves;
The air is thick with falling rain
Upon dead autumn leaves.

3.

The winds of winter rave and chafe
Around thy tranquil nest,
But I am here, and thou art safe —
Thy very soul may rest.

4.

The wild surf- thunder swells and falls
Upon the seething beach —
Thy world within thy chamber- walls
Nor winds nor waves can reach.

5.

Sleep, tired eyes! Sleep well, dear heart,
That ached so long for me!
No sudden hand shall tear apart
These arms that shelter thee

6.

Sleep well, though late- found joys be brief,
And bought with tears and pain;
Shut out the memory of thy grief —
Thou didst not grieve in vain.

7.

Think of our treasure, kept in store,
And not the price it cost —
Those precious years, that come no more,
Which thou and I have lost.

8.

O, wasted years, that lie behind
Hush — what is past is past.
Enough that we have lived to find
What life is worth at last.

9.

Though Fate has robbed us of so much,
We know not what we miss;
All ills are recompensed in such
A priceless good as this.

10.

Sleep, dear! The hours are passing on —
The midnight bells have tolled;
Think not how much of life is gone,
But how much more we hold.

11.

Yes, more — as wise men reckon life —
Though no wise man can tell
How soon, for husband and for wife,

The stroke of doom will knell.

12.

No echo of that solemn chime
Break through thy perfect peace!
No forecast of that awful time
When time for us will cease:

13.

When happier worlds shall shine in space,
For other eyes to see,
And none have any more a place
For thy true love and thee.

14.

Be blind to all, and deaf, and dumb,
In thy quick heart's despite!
Content thee — though the end must come,
It will not come to- night.

15.

This night let never thought of ill
Disturb thy slumber deep;
To- morrow I shall have thee still,
So thou canst safely sleep:

16.

Relieved from that appalling fear,
As from thy long regret —
Be our last parting far or near,
We have not reached it yet.

17.

Thy head lies pillowed on my breast —
My cheek upon thy brow —
Dear love, good night! Thou art at rest
From Past and Future now.

A Promise.

1.

SHOULD'ST thou, in grip of dread disease,
Foresee the day when thou must die,
With no more hope of life or ease,
But only, lingering, to lie
While torturing hours go slowly by;
Thy brain awake, thy nerves alive
To thine extremest agony,
And all in vain to rave or strive: —
O my beloved, if this should be,
Call me — and I will set thee free.

2.

Murder! And thou to judgment hurled —
Cut off from some few days of grace —
Thus will it be to that hard world
Which fits one law to every case,
And dooms all rebels to disgrace.
But to us twain, who stand above
Conventioned rules, unbound, unclassed,
A solemn sacrament of love,
More true than kisses in the past —
Love's costliest tribute, and the last.

3.

Thy grateful hand, unclenched, shall seek
The hand that gave thee thy release;
Thy darkening eyes shall dumbly speak
Of scorching pangs that sink and cease —
Of anguish drowned in rest and peace.
And I that terrible farewell,
Despairing but content, shall take,
Knowing that I have served thee well —
I, that would dare the rack and stake,
The flames of hell, for thy dear sake.

4.

The law may hang me for my crime,
Just or unjust, I'll not complain.
'Twere better than to live my time
Bereaved and broken, and to wane,
Slow inch by inch, in useless pain;
Alone, unhelped, uncomforted,
In mine own last extremity;
No faithful lover by my bed
To do what thou would'st do for me.
And I shall *want* to die with thee.

A Street Riot.

POOR, hapless souls! at whom we stand aghast,
As at invading armies sweeping by —
As strange to haggard face and desperate cry —
Did we not know the worm must turn at last?
Poor, hungry men, with hungry children cast
Upon the wintry streets to thief or die —
Suffering your wants and woes so silently -
Patient so long — is all your patience past?

Are there no ears to hear this warning call?
Are there no eyes to see this portent dread?
Must brute force rise and social order fall,
Ere these starved millions can be clothed and fed?
Justice be judge. Let future history say
Which are the greatest criminals to- day.

Drunk And Disorderly.

POOR, staggering brute, whom one and all disdain!

Maybe 'twas outraged Nature bade him slake

His thirst like this — to still the gnawing ache

Of weary bones that else would ache in vain.

Maybe crushed spirit and stagnating brain

Only in this delirious fever wake

To transient joys of fancy that can take

The sting from want, the bitterness from pain.

Punish the drunkard! Confiscate the bowl!

But give fair wage for work, give health and hope

To check the waste that calls for such repair;

Give food to toil- worn body and starved soul,

And give the pinched imagination scope

For sensuous pleasure in a purer air.

Individuality.

To be original is to brave disgrace.

The many reign — the various few are naught.

All in one favoured pattern must be wrought,

Lopped, squeezed, repressed, the noble with the base —

The whole smoothed down to one unfeatured face;

Religion, genius, instinct, fancy, thought,

All to one narrow mould and fashion brought,

One middle level of dull commonplace.

Break out, my honest brother, brave and strong,

Thou that dost keep a living conscience still!

Give thy true thought to unconditioned speech!

Sink not dear Self in the one-liveried throng,

But sprout and spread like growing tree at will,

And thine own individual stature reach.

“I Dare Not.”

1.

I HEAR strange voices in the air.
My pulses leap, I tear my hair
In rage, rebellion, and despair;
 Yet dare not speak.

2.

I am for right, my foes for wrong,
But they are legion, they are strong,
And I am one amid the throng,
 Alone and weak.

3.

What ear would hear me if I cried?
What comrades rally to my side?
What force have I to stem the tide?
 What right have I?

4.

Though I should plunge in flood and flame,
Though I should suffer shame and blame,
The world would triumph all the same —
 And I should die.

5.

Why should I join the hopeless fray?
Why should I waste my little day?
Oh, why should *I* be called to pay
 So vast a price?

* * * * *

6.

Have courage, craven soul of mine!
The light within thee is divine,
And others need to see it shine,
 Let that suffice.

7.

Others beside thee quake and quail
Before the terrors that prevail;
Thy captive kindred faint and fail
 As well as thou.

8.

But when thy lifted front they see,
They will take heart and soar with thee;
It is thy help to set them free
 They wait for now.

9.

Give to those silent sufferers each
What inspiration he can reach;
Give righteous treason honest speech,
 That all may hear.

10.

This god of custom that we dread,
This social code that weighs like lead,
What is it worth, when all is said?
 What is't to fear?

11.

When with a faithful eye one sees

That they whose will we live to please,
Crush right with might for love of ease,
And selfish greed.

12.

When infinite night and silence lower
O'er such brief span of human power,
These poor conventions of an hour
Seem poor indeed.

13.

Be brave, my soul! The world may frown,
And its brute fashions bear thee down,
But Truth will swim, whate'er may drown,
And Truth will live.

14.

Be bold to speak at Truth's behest,
And, though thou suffer without rest,
Yet still thy gain shall be the best
That life can give.

Possibilities.

THERE are who fear the loosing of the knot
That ties our labouring brother to the oar.
Release him, say they, and he will not soar;
Full-fed and idle, he will fall and rot.
Give him his share — let sharp need scourge him not —
Let cruel spur of hunger prick no more,
But all have bounty of the rich world's store —
And wreck and ruin is our certain lot!

But ease the toil-worn arm, the anxious brain,
And Reason, set more firmly on her throne,
Should guide more truly the enfranchised will.
Though want depart, divine desires remain;
Man, born of God, lives not by bread alone,
And realms of Knowledge are to conquer still.

Ordained.

1.

THROUGH jewelled windows in the walls
The tempered daylight smiles,
And solemn music swells and falls
Adown these stately aisles;
Beneath that carven chancel- rood
Low murmurs, hushed to silence, brood;
One voice in prayer appeals
For Holy Spirit's quickening grace
To light his now anointed face
Who at the altar kneels.

2.

One hour ago, like us, he trod
Along these cloisters dim —
Now we are bid to reverence God
Made manifest in him;
To mock at our enlightened sense
And dearly won experience,
So far beyond his own;
To take him for our heaven- sent guide
Upon these seas, so wild and wide,
To him as yet unknown.

3.

Unconscious of the coming strife,
Unformed in mind and thought,
Without one ripe idea of life
Save what his school books taught,
An ignorant boy, he vows a vow
To think and feel as he does now
Till his gold locks are grey;
Pledges his word to learn no more —
To add no wisdom to the store
His young mind holds to- day.

4.

How shall he keep this senseless oath
 When once a full- grown man?
How shall he check his upward growth
 To fit this meagre plan?
Only by ruthless pinching out
Of all the fairest shoots that sprout,
 As on a healthy tree,
From his expanding brain and heart —
Defrauding his diviner part
 Of its virility.

5.

And thus shall youthful passion pale
 In native force and fire;
And thus shall soaring pinions fail,
 Bedraggled in the mire;
This tender conscience, now so bright,
Lose its fine sense of wrong and right —
 Dulled with a moral rust;
This ardent intellect be damped,
This eager spirit starved and cramped -
 Choked in mediaeval dust.

6.

Thus shall the fettered arm grow numb,
 And blind the bandaged eye;
Thus shall the silenced voice grow dumb,
 As year by year goes by;
Until at last, from long abuse
And lack of free and wholesome use,
 All manhood's powers decline;
And, like a lamp unfed, untrimmed,
Intelligence, once bright, is dimmed,
 No more to burn and shine.

7.

Then may we see this sanguine youth —
Born for a nobler lot —
Turn traitor to the highest truth
Because he knows it not;
Serving for Mammon, veiled as God,
Cringing for high- born patron's nod,
For social place and gain,
While he mechanically yields
The produce of his fallow fields —
Husks of long- garnered grain.

8.

No more a brave and honest man,
Whose conscience is his own,
But worse than thief and courtesan
To degradation grown;
A cheat and hypocrite, content,
In shelter of base precedent,
The downward path to tread,
Lest he should lose his Esau's bowl,
That bought the birthright of his soul,
And have to earn his bread.

9.

Or, if remorsefully aware
Of his ignoble case,
Owning himself too weak to dare
A brother's hostile face,
Too weak to stand alone and fight
Against the strong world's might with right —
A leader's part to take;
Dying a daily death in life,
At outward peace and inward strife,
For poor convention's sake.

10.

Let organ music swell and peal,
And priests and people pray,
Let those who can at altar kneel —

I have no heart to stay.
I cannot bear to see it done —
This fresh young life, scarce yet begun,
 Closed by that iron door;
A free- born spirit gagged and bound,
Tethered to one small plot of ground,
While all the great world spreads around,
 And doomed to fly no more.

Reaction.

LET us, dear friend, in mutual strength arise
 Against our tyrant Custom, and demand
 Free souls and bodies at our own command.
Let us defy the vulgar world's surprise,
Scorn brute convention and soft compromise,
 And, bold in proud revolt, and hand in hand,
 Cast in our lot and take our fearless stand
With the unsafe, improper, and unwise.

Let us abjure the comfortable creeds
 Approved by prudent minds, and revel free
In foolish thoughts and inexpedient deeds; —
 For thus alone can life for you and me
Out of this suffocating sloth revive,
And our small spark of good be kept alive.

Contentment.

CONTENTMENT! 'Tis a virtue, sages say —
The “trivial round and common task” to ply,
Nor for a wider walk of life to sigh
Than we were born to; humbly, day by day,
The proper meed of reverence to pay
Our high-placed “betters” — not to kick and cry
Against injustice, but to do or die
As custom rules. Shall *we* that rule obey?

Not till our day is done and we lie dead,
With no more power to wield a pen or sword
For rights denied, against the might of wrong;
Not while our starving brothers are unfed,
And rampant tyranny still stalks abroad,
And we can help the weak against the strong.

Too Late.

Too late the prize is drawn, the goal attained.
Too late, too late, our heart's desire is gained.
Wealth's use is past; Fame's crown of laurel mocks
The downward drooping head and grizzled locks.
The end is reached — the end of toil and strife —
The end of life.

Love flowers and fades like grass, and flowers again,
And strong young hearts spend all their strength in vain.
The fiery passions burn out, one by one,
And then, too late, when our best days are done,
Spirit and body find their perfect mate —
Too late, too late!

Long sought, long seeking, through the lonely years,
We meet at last to weep our useless tears
For time and chance irrevocably flown,
For dreams outlived and fervent hopes outgrown,
For babes unborn, for myriad joys unseen,
That might have been.

Too late, too late! And yet the priceless boon
Might ne'er have come to bless us, late or soon;
And only comes, like Holy Grail, to those
Made wise and pure by bitter needs and woes.
We learn the worth of life when life is o'er,
And not before.

Not for the spring and morning time of youth
The perfect flower of slow- unfolding truth —
The perfect love, deep, passionate, and strong,
That comes of wanting much and waiting long.
This glorious fire is of the setting sun
When day is done.

This harvest wealth, this crowning gift of fate,
This fruit of suffering years, must aye come late;
And only seeking spirit and ripe mind —
Only a few — the matchless treasure find,
And find, despite all time and chances lost,
'Twas worth the cost.

Ah me! To stand upon this height at last,
Ere eyes are dim or daylight overpast;
To see one aim achieved, one dream fulfilled,
Ere striving brain and hoping heart are stilled;

To know that we have borne a lifelong pain
Not all in vain!

O, not too late, if once we reach the goal —
If once we satisfy this hungry soul —
If only for a year, a day, an hour,
We drink our fill of life's true bliss and power.
If we but touch that point, we conquer fate
Not quite too late!

Seeking.

BRIGHT eyes, sweet lips, with sudden fevers fill

My strong blood, running wildly, as it must;

But lips and eyes too soon beget distrust.

A soft touch sends a momentary thrill

Through sense unsubservient to the will;

But warm caresses leave a dim disgust;

Like Dead- Sea apples, kisses turn to dust.

I kiss; I feast; but I am hungry still.

O, where is She — that straight and upright soul —

True friend, true mate, true woman — where is She?

True heart — as true as needle to the pole —

True to the truth, not only true to me —

Worth all I have to give — the best — the whole.

When shall these eyes Her unknown beauty see?

The Future Verdict.

How will our unborn children scoff at us
In the good years to come —
The happier years to come —
For that, like driven sheep, we yielded thus,
Before the shearers dumb!

I know the words their wiser lips will say; —
“These men had gained the light,
These women knew the right;
They had their chance and let it slip away.
They *did not* when they *might*.”

“They were the first to hear the gospel preached,
And to believe therein —
Yet they remained in sin;
They saw the Promised Land they might have reached,
And dared not enter in.

“They might have won their freedom, had they tried;
No savage laws forbade —
For them the way was made.

“They might have had the joys for which they cried;
And yet they shrank, afraid.

“Afraid to face an honourable shame,
The most they had to pay —
Of what the world would say —
Not of the martyr's portion, rack and flame.
Great God! what fools were they!”

And oh! could *we* look backward from those years
When we have ceased to be,
This wasted chance to see,
Should we not also cry, with bitter tears,
“Alas! what fools were we!”

An Answer.

THY love I am. Thy wife I cannot be,
To wear the yoke of servitude — to take
Strange, unknown fetters that I cannot break
On soul and flesh that should be mine, and free.
Better the woman's old disgrace for me
Than this old sin — this deep and dire mistake;
Better for truth and honour and thy sake —
For the pure faith I give and take from thee.

I know thy love, and love thee all I can —
I fain would love thee only till I die;
But I may some day love a better man,
And thou may'st find a fitter mate than I;
Some want, some chill, may steal 'twixt heart and heart.
And then we must be free to kiss and part.
