

SOLDIERS OF THE LIGHT

HELEN GRAY CONE



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*“Why of War, O thou that lovest rather
 Peace of roses in a rain-sweet garden,
 Peace of moonlit silver-heaving waters,
 All the lovely looks of little children?
 What strange mandate
 Bids thee sing of War, who lovest these things?
 “How of War, O faint-heart, thou that grieveest
 Over every gentle creature wounded,
 All soft eyes of pain and puzzled sorrow,
 All the lithe limbs marred, the wild wings broken?
 What black magic
 Makes thee brood on War, who darest these things?
 “Is it but the haunting of the bugles,
 Floating memories of the war-time bugles
 Blowing over those far fields of childhood,
 Pleasant in the foolish ear of childhood,
 When the sword-hilt
 Seemed but made to shine and hold a jewel?”
 Then the inward Voice that gave the mandate,—
 Bade me sing of battle,—bade me answer:
 Well I know the symbol of the sword-hilt,
 Know the Cross of sacrifice and service;
 See the heart’s-blood
 Burning where the child beheld the jewel.
 I have hated with the perfect hatred
 All the work of Hell in all the ages;
 Hated all the hate and all the horror;
 Yet the Vision of the Face of faces,
 God-in-Manhood,
 Shines through Hell, and I have seen the Vision.*

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*In this rubric, lo, the Past is lettered:
 Strike the red words out, we strike the glory.
 Leave the sacred color on the pages,
 Pages of the Past that teach the Future.
 On that scripture
 Yet shall young souls take the oath of service.
 God end War! but when brute War is ended,
 Yet there shall be many a noble soldier,
 Many a noble battle worth the winning,
 Many a hopeless battle worth the losing.
 Life is battle,
 Life is battle, even to the sunset.
 Soldiers of the Light shall strive forever,
 In the wards of pain, the ways of labor,
 In the stony deserts of the city,
 In the hives where greed has housed the helpless;*

*Patient, valiant,
Fighting with the powers of death and darkness.
Make us mingle in that heavenly warfare;
Call us through the throats of all brave bugles
Blown on fields foregone by lips forgotten;
Nerve us with the courage of lost comrades,
Gird us, lead us,
Thou, O Prince of Peace and God of Battles!*

THE THIRD DAY AT GETTYSBURG

I

Stand we awhile at gaze, in the Place of the Battle of Battles:
High on the hill at the south, where over the fair-lying farmland
Warren keeps watch in bronze, here under the sky of the summer
Stand we awhile at gaze, far-scanning the roads and the ridges,
Doubtful that such things were.
Oh, sweet with the wafts of the wildrose,
Sweet is the breath of the summer, the hushed spirit lapping and lulling!
Man feels near to the kind red earth; as her nursling she draws him
Close, ah close, to the fragrant warmth of her Indian bosom.
Deep he drinks of life; and death is a dream in the distance.
Rare is the sweet of the summer; the good world's bounty and beauty
Such as they saw and lost, who bought us our peace with their passion.
Such, on the great Three Days of the great Third Year of the war-time,
Lay this pleasant land, with the long South Mountain to westward;
Blue these billowing hills circled it, friendly enfolded,
Lucent in sun, or dark with the shadows of clouds floating over;
Silvered with ghostly gray of the rains, in their soft-footed marches
Melting away and passing, and leaving the blue in the sunlight.
So the farmland lay, with the yellow gleam of its wheatfields,
Green of the standing corn, a-glisten in beauteous battalions,
Pastures with dreaming cattle, and tawny streams where they loiter,
Dark-green orchard slopes, and the small white houses of farmers.
So lay the little town, with its brick-paved walks and its alleys,
Garden-glimpses fair, with the faint-blue hills for a background,
Over the whitewashed fences the rosy hollyhocks leaning;
Fate-shadowed, sleeping town, in its listless grasp as it slumbered
Holding the reins of power, the gathered reins of the roadways
Stretched to the north and south, to the northwest and northeast and southeast,
Roadways half a score, in the grasp of the fate-shadowed sleeper,—
Reins of power indeed, should a strong hand suddenly seize them!
What strong hand should seize? Swift-reaching, and sinewed with iron,
Masterful hand of Lee, great Captain, intrepid invader?
Far-away cities feared. Or, haply, hand new to the wielding
One huge host as a sword, untried in its strength or its weakness,
Unknown hand of Meade, at the southward uncertainly groping?
Stirred with a dream of dread was the little town as it slumbered;
Sudden it started and woke.
—Through the hush of the young, hot morning
One sharp shot, and another—and born was the Battle of Battles!
Long had the good land lain in the sun and the rain, with its ridges,
Rich broad fields for the farmer, and hills dark-fledged with the forests;
Yet was the end ordained of the old earth's writhing and travail

Neither the breathing beauty of grainfields, nor wealth of the harvest,
Neither the brooding charm of the wood, nor the trees for the builder;
Not for these was the earth-pang; for Pain, for Pain sacrificial
Offered to God; for the altar whereon Man blindly or wisely
Laid, for the Faith that was in him, his body born of a woman,
Laid, in his passion of service, the life of his own blood-brother,—
Even for that Altar august had the ridges and hills from aforetime
Waited, elect. So of old, under Syrian azure, and burning
Stars of that ancient land, grew a great Tree, branched like another;
Soared to its height, and waited, elect for the Cross of all crosses.
Now was arrived the hour, and the stern supreme dedication,
Sealing the brow of the land for the Place of the Battle of Battles.

II

Twice had the sun gone down on the conflict as yet undetermined.
Two fierce days were done, and the marred earth cumbered with horror,
Horror of soulless pain of the beasts that perish unknowing,
Horror of human ruin, the shattered sheaths of the spirit,
Horror men pray to forget, and the tongue refuses to tell it.
Two proud days were done, that shall shine with the splendors of valor
Out of the night of the past, and live with the life of the nation:
Splendors that crowd like stars—how the names press faster and faster!
Splendors that melt like stars in the milkwhite highway of heaven,
Fame without name, and the deeds remembered of doers forgotten.
Two strange days were done; for Fate on the echoing anvil,
Clashing with blow upon blow, had fashioned a strength out of failure,
Craftily forging in fire and clangor the Line of the Union,
Battle-line hard to break. It was curved like the hook of the fisher,
Rough Culp's Hill the barb, and the Hill of the Graves was the curving;
Straight as a shaft it stretched to the tawny stream at the southward,—
Running then red,—and the rocks of the rude-piled Den of the Devil,
Round-Top the Less, and the flank of the Greater, fledged with the forest,
Fortresses fit for the Left. So the Line had been forged out of failure,
Battle-line hard to break.
Yet sick were the souls of the leaders,
Burdened with pity and loss; the field with unspeakable anguish
Groaned to the large clear moon; might the army abide such a morrow?
Cautious courageous Meade, not playing with lives as with counters,
Held his commanders in council, retracing, unweaving the war-web,
Shifting the fiery threads. At the last, it was brought to the question.
Was it retreat that slept in the brazen throats of the bugles?
Each after each answered No; Newton and Gibbon and Birney,
Williams and Sedgwick and Sykes, Slocum and Howard and Hancock,
Soul-sick with pity and loss, yet steadily acting the soldier,
Man after man answered No. They were all one will; and their Captain
Gripped the huge host as a sword, that was utterly his for the wielding.
—So the warm bright night drew on to the Day of decision.

III

Day crept wan on the world. 'Twas the hour when the birds in the branches
One after one awake, in the dewy cool and the dimness,
Small sweet voices of joy, praising the sunlight that shall be.
Silvery the hour, and a semblance of death in the birth of the morning;
Sacred the sunless hour; now rent, as the veil of the temple,
All that silver spell. In the dewy cool of the coverts
Sounded no voices of birds; but the whistling hiss of the bullet,
Ruffling volley on volley, and yell of the South, and the angry
Roar of the strong hurrah from the throats of the soldiers of Slocum,
There on the rough sheer steep, in the thick of the Culp's Hill woodlands,
There on the rock-strewn plain, till the sun stared hot on the struggle,
Jealously battling to wrest, from the grasp of a blindfold victor,
Vantage but half discerned, and a foothold found in the darkness:
Brave was the blindfold victor, and fiercely he clung to his foothold;
Almost he groped to the prize, to the gleam of the hard white highway
On to Baltimore sweeping, the one sure outlet of safety;
Almost he chanced with his hand on the close-hoarded power of the powder:
Brave and blind, or beholding too late, on the plain and the hillside,
Seven vain hours he fought; then reeling let go the advantage,
Fell back panting and foiled. Once again in its rugged intrenchments
Rested the Corps of the Star; on the field rested many forever.
So sped the morn on the Right.

IV

But the Left lay still, as enchanted:
Two huge armies outstretched, and between them the undulant valley
Basking broad, as asleep; only now and again through the quiet
Ripped the skirmishers' rifles, a crackle increasing, then ceasing;
Now and again from the Right came the rolling rumors of battle
Echoing far, but disturbed not the dream of the armies enchanted:
Ceased at the last all sound, and the magical slumber was deepened.
So the bright hot day drew on to the noontide, and passed it.
Scarce had the old-fashioned clocks, in the farmhouses hushed, apprehensive,—
Equally telling the tale of the fire-wingèd minutes that fled
Bearing the death of men, as in days of peace, when the minutes
Bore but the blessing of toil, and a sleep with its face to the morrow,
—Scarce had the clocks struck One, when the deep-toned boom of the cannon,—
Hark, it was twice!—on the ridge that was held by the Southron, gave signal:
Boom, boom, boom after boom to the right, to the left, in the centre;
Cloud, cloud, cloud after cloud, white smoke-clouds that sprang out and hung there,
Massing, concealing, yet severed again and again by the flame-gush.
Now from the heights of the Union the batteries thundered their answer,
Boom, boom, boom after boom, from the right and the left and the centre,
Surf on a winter-bound coast, a tempestuous roaring incessant.
Piercingly rose as a cry, on that ground of vast sound elemental,
Scream of the travailing shells as they burst o'er the cloud-covered valley.
Trembled the solid earth, as she thrills in the throes of the earthquake;
Prickled the sulphurous air with the demon-breath of the powder;
Fainted the hearts of men at the endless unbearable clamor;
Filled were the heaven and the earth with the clang of that duel of iron:
Such they beheld not before, and heard not,—a combat of giants!
What did it mean on the earth? Stark terror and blood and confusion;
Shriek of the battery-horses, and hell-blaze of caissons exploding;
Reel of the torn cannoneer as he suddenly drops by his cannon,
Spring of the quick volunteer to snatch from his dead hand the rammer;
Orderlies galloping past, and a rumor of somewhat a-brewing:
Crouching of soldiers in gray, at the rear, in the underwoods' flicker,—
Charge? we shall charge by and by? then a pipe of Virginia tobacco!
Over their heads as they lie, by the trunks of the fallen trees pillowed,
Jesting and resting an hour, come showering the boughs of the saplings.
Crouching of soldiers in blue, at the front, by the walls and the fences,
Waiting a charge—will they charge? and the brown fingers lock on the musket;
Sharply a rifle-gun bolt rips up the ground underneath him.
There in the field on the slope is a bellow of suffering cattle,
Out by the farmgate yonder, a tangle and mangle of horses;
Shells through the farmhouse roof, where the green moss grew on the shingles;
Shattered the apple-tree now, where the robin would sing at the sunset;
Shall there be song again, in a world given over to devils?

Shattered the stones of the dead, and about them the shapes of the dying;
Boom, boom, boom after boom to the right, to the left, in the centre,
Endless—will it be endless? and how shall the spirit endure it?
What did it mean in the heaven? Ah surely, black lips of the cannon,
Surely you spake in your wrath, and the soul of the world understood you!
Else it were horror indeed, and the blind brute rage of the jungle,
Earth returning to slime, and the hissing and tearing of dragons!
Guns of the Gettysburg heights, ye spake, in your awful contending,
Words ye spake through the cloud, with august oracular voices,
Mighty reverberant watchwords of Titan-forces in conflict:
Crying, “The feuds of States!” and replying, “The peace of a Nation!”
Crying, “The sundered stars!” and replying, “The heavens in their clusters
Led in the lines of law, and linked in their differing glory
Star unto star to the end, until God folds them up as a vesture!”
Crying, “The old-time pride, and the chivalrous grace and the splendor,
Feudal rule of the Few, and a serfdom meet for the Many!”
Thundering out of the cloud, as the Voice on the summit of Sinai,
“Nay! But the larger Hope, and the limitless future of Manhood!”
These were the words that ye uttered, O hot black lips of the cannon,
Catching them up from the lips of the orators fallen on silence,
Voices of lion-like men, in senates no longer resounding;
Now the debate was yours: and above it, the Arbiter waited!

V

Slowly the men of the South, outstretched in the underwoods' flicker,
Jesting and resting an hour,—the close-coupled, war-welded comrades,
Hollow-cheeked veteran boys, unsubduable gaunt gray elders,
Garbed in gray or in butternut-brown, the old rustical earth-hue,—
Slowly, half-stunned, they arose, made aware of a lull in the tumult.
Then through the ranks as they closed, like a thrill through a tense-drawn bowstring,
Passed a wild whisper of joy. Is it true? are the batteries crippled
There on the Hill of the Graves, and the long ridge held by the Union?
Silenced at last and spent? and the Gray Chief raises his field-glass,
He of the ardent eyes and the beard with its gracious silver,
Leader beloved, Lee, in designing and daring a master.
Gone from the Hill of the Graves are the guns with their merciless menace;
Now from the smoke-reeking ridge the voices gigantic respond not:
This is the moment indeed; it is big with the fate of the battle!
Well are they skilled what to do, his war-seasoned faithful commanders,
Longstreet, and Ambrose Hill, and Pickett the soldier intrepid
Leading invincible veterans, chosen, the flower of the army.
(Yet, O that Jackson were here, with his blue eyes wild and exalted,
Soldier-saint of the South, to be sharer of all that is coming,
As in the past he shared triumph and council and crisis,
Bivouac-fire in the pines, and the sleep on the brown pine-needles—
O that he too were here, who has crossed the River, and sweetly
Rests in no earthly shade, and returns not to conflict or council!)
This is the moment indeed: it is big with the fate of the battle
That is big with the fate of the world!
Drawing rein at the station of Longstreet,
Eagerly springs from the saddle George Pickett the soldier intrepid,
Face fire-red with his hope and his haste, and the lion-shaggy
Mane of his cavalier locks tossed with the rush of his riding.
“Charge? do we charge?” So he stands.
—As over the slope of a mountain
Glooms a shadow broad, and the birds in the forest stop singing,
Darkens with secret foreboding the visage of Longstreet the leader;
Shadow hangs on his soul, and his lips are locked; yet reluctant
Bows he his beard on his breast.
It is done; and the moment returns not.

VI

Crouching meanwhile at the front, by the low stone walls and the fences
There on the opposite ridge, the soldiers of Hays and of Gibbon,—
Every man soldierly-proud of the Trefoil he wore on his cap-crown,
Were it of white or of blue, the Trefoil that told he was Hancock's,—
Crouching expectant and grim, in the roar of that great cannonading,
Broke into cheer after cheer: with the flag of the Trefoil behind him,
Rode the corps-commander, reviewing the line of his legions,
Knowing men's need of a man. In the fury of sound, and the frantic
Shriek of the battery horses, and hell-blaze of caissons exploding,
Reared the black charger he rode; yet persisted the resolute rider,
Masterful, mounted afresh; and along the line ran the murmur,
Flame on a dry field's edge, "Hancock, it's Hancock!" and freshly
Kindled the cheer as he passed.
So they lay in the line, with the muskets
Clutched in the hard hands, ready; the men of New York and New Jersey,
Delaware's sons, and Maine's, and the close-coupled, war-welded comrades,
Stalwart Michigan men and the soldiers of old Massachusetts.
There were the very sons of the well-loved soil they defended,
Stretched by the low stone wall and the dark little cluster of oak-trees.
There were the lads of Vermont, fresh to the field, with equipments
Glittering,—gallant to see as the folds of a clear-colored ensign
Newly upreared on the staff, floating out stainless and splendid;
There too, knit in its place, was the shred of the First Minnesota,
Left from the Second Day's charge when it flung itself in as a stop-gap,
Stirring to see as the shred of the battle-burnt colors left clinging
Blackened and rent, to the staff, and advanced in the forefront of danger.
Nay, nor alone the shoots of the rooted stock of the fathers
Stood in that hedge of war; but the aliens, the sons of adoption,
Loyal to death to the land of their love, as a mystical Mother,
Virgin, glorious, mild, immortal, a presence to die for!
There in the line of defence was the flag Garibaldi once planted
Proud on the ramparts of Rome; and the bright-green beautiful banner,
Banner of glory and grief, that has blown in the breezes of battle
Over all fields of the world, to beckon high hearts to the onset;
Yet was uplifted supreme the Flag of the hope of the future,
Set with the splendors of stars, and striped with the heart's-blood of heroes.
So they lay in the line, with the hard hands clutching the muskets:
Men of the farm and the forge and the carpenter's bench and the engine;
Men from the counter and desk; and the teacher was there with his pupils;
There the bold-eyed firemen, the turbulent lads of the cities;
There the men of the shore,—they had left the broad nets and the fishing;
There the men of the axe,—they had left the tall trees in the forest.
What was it drew them away from their labor and love and contentment,
Buying and selling and scheming, and building, and yoking the oxen?

Made them willing to fling down Life, the mysterious jewel,
All the lovely and strange thing that it is, with the pleasant
Light of the kindly sun, and the sweet of the grass in the summer,
Salt of the large sea-breeze, and the mild stars shining in heaven,
Joy of the free whole body, and wonderful wafts of the spirit?
All a man hath will he give for his life,—but his life for his duty!
This is the touchstone of manhood, the swift and the final election,
Test of the heart that is true to some lofty and ultimate brightness
Secretly set above self; at its blindest, shall God not accept it?
Ah, but how blessed are they,—not summoned by voices misleading,
Lured of the marsh-light, and tricked to the true defence of a falsehood,—
Who with their measure of power, conscious, half-conscious, unconscious,
Work the Eternal Will, in the chaos a force of salvation,
Motes of the dust as it streams, yet touched with the light of God's purpose!

VII

So they lay in the line, as the discord diminished, and almost
Seemed as a silence, to sense that was drowned with the sound of the cannon.
Hung on the spirits of all men a prescience of something impending
Great and strange, as at times when thick darkness possesses the noonday;
Yet was the sky most bright with its burning azure; and strangely
Shifted the wind, and lifted the lingering smoke as a curtain;
Reek of the powder drew off, and the valley was bare and apparent,
Dip of the hollowing plain, and the trampled green of the cornfields.
Suddenly out of the wood, with a swift and resolute movement,
Over the long slow slope of the hollowing plain to the eastward,
Swept the tried Virginians, the war-seasoned soldiers of Pickett.
Swinging with springing step, in the distance a rhythmic pulsation,
Blithely they marched as those who march in a holiday pageant;
Lightly they marched, and afar the foemen that looked on them loved them.
Rode at the head of the column Pickett the soldier intrepid,
Proudly, with cap a-slant, and cavalier locks free-floating;
Rode with their brave brigades Armistead, Kemper, and Garnett.
Joined the advance on the left, Pettigrew leading and Trimble,
Regiments grim and seared with the scorch of the two days' battle,
Bleeding and torn with loss, but prompt to the fiery renewal:
Mississippians fierce, and the undismayed Tennesseans,
Valorous Alabamans, and soldiers of North Carolina.
Onward the long wave rolled, steadily, steadily onward,
Gray wave glinting with steel, and the battle-flags floating above it.
So have you seen on the shore the line of the billow advancing,
Fateful, unhasting, sure, to the charge uprearing exultant
Threaten the land with its strength; from its crest, for an exquisite instant,
Foam-bows backward stream,—in the next, it has vanished forever!
Onward the long wave rolled, steadily, steadily onward,
Over the hollowing plain, and the trampled green of the cornfields.
Stood the two armies at gaze; until, from the stronghold of Howard,
Hill of the Graves, and the ridge, and the shoulder of Round-Top the Lesser,
Burst the leashed lightnings anew, and the roars of the thunder ironic!
Forth from their hot black dens in the gorge of the cavernous cannon,—
Guns new-thrust into place,—freed for the service appointed,
Tigerish, Death and Fire leaped on the open arena.
One low sound was heard through the tumult, and deeply remembered,
Human, the moan of life mowed as the grass of the meadow.
One sharp shudder ran through the host of the South, the beholders.
(Over the mind of the Chief a memory, thrilling electric,
Flashed, the revenge of Time: and he saw the blue-coated battalions
Move through the wintry light of the cruel Thirteenth of December
Up to the sunken wall that was topped with the rifles of Georgia:
Stubborn and stern they came, to pile the bleak field with their bodies.

He, who had looked on that day, looked now on his own, his Virginians,
 Drinking the cup of fire, like their brothers, their foemen, before them.
 Sorrow and pride in his soul struggled; he suffered, and spoke not.)
 Pain possessed the field, and the smoke-veil settled upon it;
 Yet underneath the cloud, as a strong wave under the sea-mist,
 Rolled the lessening line, steadily, steadily onward.
 Rifle-bolt, round-shot, and shell, from the right, from the left of them raking,
 Buzzing and screaming and bursting, harrowed the ranks of them redly;
 Strangely the Centre was silent,—the Centre, and eyes of the captains
 Fixed, in the storm, on the landmark, the dark little cluster of oak-trees
 Faintly and fitfully seen, and the low stone wall through the smoke-veil.
 Mingled anon in the whirl the whistle and whip of the bullets
 Sped from the sharpshooters' rifles; anon in the iron confusion,
 Musketry crashed on the flank; and now on the breast of the column
 Flamed the canister-fire from the gunners of Hays and of Gibbon.
 Blending, the sheeted blaze of the heavily-volleying muskets
 Suddenly fringed the front, from the regiments crouching expectant:
 Almost with awe they awaited the furious onset of foemen
 Tried in the five-fold fire, and from hell undaunted emerging.
 Waited not long: with the crash of answering volley for volley,
 Raising the yell of the charge, wild as the howl of the wolf-pack,
 Surged up out of the smoke the first of the lean tanned faces,
 Teeth half-bared as in joy, and the sunken eyes savagely gleaming
 Under the old gray brims and the slant of the battered visors.
 Man to man at last!
 In the grip and the sway of the wrestle
 Springing the regiments clinched, flinging away their formation,
 Red-blind, sobbing for breath, mad in the terrible mellay,
 Mad for the blood-bright flags, for the star-crossed flags of the Southland,
 Borne on the crest of the wave through the broken lines of the Union—
 Broken ——
 Again to close; brief was the desperate triumph!
 Happy the Southron who died as cheering he planted his colors,
 Passed on the crest of the wave as it curved to the crash of its falling!
 Happy, not knowing defeat, Garnett, the gallant, and happy
 Armistead leaping the wall, lifting his cap on his sword-point,
 Smiting his hand on the cannon, and suddenly sinking across it!
 Not for them the crawl of the sick slow days of the captive,
 Torture of wounds, nor bruit of the perishing cause that they fought for—
 Rather swift conquest of Peace, and to enter the City of Silence!
 Not for them be sorrow; but sorrow for such men as haply,
 Flung on the flag of the South as it burst through the line of the Union,
 Fell, and died in their doubt, and knew not the sweep of the darkness
 Over their faces upturned was the passing of Victory's garment!
 Victory! Shattered supports reeled on the right, and rolled backward.
 Islanded, closed in the copse, lost, without hope, the Virginian

Doggedly loaded once more, and the Tennessean beside him;
Thus had they chosen to die, each dealing death in his dying.
Sullen, some bowed them to fate, waved the white sign of surrender,
Droopingly trailed to the rear with the bayonet-glitter to guard them;
Brokenly over the plain receded the sorrowful remnant,
Choosing retreat through fire.
Even so, dragged back to the ocean,
So have you seen on the shore, reluctant, and leaving behind it
Swathes of the dark-red weed, and the beaten foam, and the leaping
Gasping silver life of the deep, and the tragical driftwood,
Some great wave withdrawn, at the turn of the tide, from the floodmark.
Sad it seethes back to the sea.
That was the turn of the war-tide,
Ebb of the hope of the South, end of the Battle of Battles!

VIII

Noon of the night was come; and over the field sacrificial,
Over the trampled corn, and the broken trees, and the horror,—
Horror of soulless pain of the beasts that perish unknowing,
Horror of human ruin, the shattered sheaths of the spirit,
Horror men pray to forget, and the tongue refuses to tell it,—
Now was the taintless light of the large moon shed out of heaven,
Glory unchanged as the Face of the Father of Lights, to whom upward
Gropes the groaning world.
On the sweet summer grass in the moonlight,
Long, by the tent of his leader, a watcher lay patiently waiting,
Waiting the great Gray Captain, so many times hailed as the victor
On those fields foregone; and the far-away cities had feared him.
Ever with wild lost cry the whippoorwill cried in the woodland.
Late, through the light of the moon, and the flickering shadow of branches,
Lee came riding alone, the beloved magnanimous chieftain,
All alone with defeat in the lucent night and the silence.
Slowly he rode, as one who rides by the bier of a soldier,
Hearing the muffled drums and the sob of a martial sorrow;
Slowly he rode, with downcast head, and the deep moon-shadow
Lay underneath his brows. At the last, from his horse, overwearied,
Hardly he might dismount; on the saddle heavily flinging
One lax arm, he stood awhile without word to the other;
Moveless, horse and man, as if by the art of the sculptor
Wrought in enduring bronze for an everlasting remembrance.
Still in his brain, unbidden, labored the pitiless hammers
Forging the things to be; and he saw the train of the wounded,
Mile upon mile of moan, waggon to waggon succeeding,
Crawl like a crippled snake painfully toward the Potomac;
Saw his crippled Cause, as she dragged her way in the distance
Dim, through fields of fire to a last sad field of surrender.
—Memory, passionate, proud, sprang of a sudden resurgent;
Swiftly he lived again the day, and beheld his Virginians
Splendidly sweep to the shock that the land shall remember forever;
Flashed the ardent eyes, and the spell of his silence was broken.
Proudly he spoke of the charge, in a voice that deepened and trembled
Naming dear names of the dead; then turned to the task of the living,
Motioned to enter the tent, and delivered the trust of the morrow.
So the spark of pride, in the heart of the leader beloved,
Kindled a fresh, false hope; and he sat by the flare of the candle
Planning the morrow's course, and retrieval, if haply it might be.
(Under the same clear moon, by the flow of the far Mississippi,
Grant was waking too, the invincible taciturn soldier
Chosen of fate; in his tent, by the candle-light feeble and fitful,
Writing the final terms of the longed-for surrender of Vicksburg.)

Stars swept on, meanwhile, in their still, predestinate pathways;
 Mornward wheeled the world; and Time, inexhaustible Mother,
 Bore to us once again the Day of the birth of a Nation
 Sprung from the life-blood of heroes, and consecrated to Freedom.
 Guns of the Gettysburg heights, we hear you as out of the distance:
 Shall we not understand? Ye spake, in your awful contending,
 Words ye spake through the cloud, with austere oracular voices,
 Mighty reverberant watchwords of Titan-forces in conflict:
 Crying, "The sundered stars!" and replying "The heavens in their clusters,
 Led in the lines of law, and linked in their differing glory
 Star unto star to the end, until God folds them up as a vesture!"
 Crying, "Fit rule of the Few, and a serfdom meet for the Many!"
 Thundering out of the smoke, as the Voice on the summit of Sinai,—
 Then on the great Third Day, when the trumpet was loud, and the lightnings
 Leaped in the mount, and the people fell down at the Voice of Jehovah,—
 Thundering out of the smoke with the final august proclamation:
 "Nay! but the larger Hope, and the limitless future of Manhood!"
 (Nathless a nation elect, a people led forth out of bondage,
 Led of the cloud and led of the fire, and upheld in the battle,
 Borne upon wings of eagles, and saved in the midst of the waters,
 Made to them gods of gold, even there, in the desert of Sinai.)
 Guns of the Gettysburg heights, we hear you as out of the distance:
 Cease not to roll, vast Echoes! Reverberate solemn, immortal!
 Speak to us out of the past of the splendor of valor triumphant,
 Speak of the splendor of valor transcending defeat, of the manhood
 Tried to the utmost, and true to some lofty and ultimate brightness
 Secretly set above self: O speak, that we too in our measure,—
 Fallen on diverse days, far otherwise tempted and tested,—
 Work the Eternal Will, in the chaos a force of salvation,
 Motes of the dust as it streams, yet touched with the light of God's purpose!

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

February 12, 1909

I

The centuries pass, yea as a dream they pass.
Nations and races, with all that they have sown,
Sink as the prairie-grass,
By the invisible scythe silently mown.
The wind breathes over them, and the place thereof
Knows them no more.
But the unsounded sky still broods above,
Blue ocean without shore,
Eternal in its breadth and depth and fire of love.
So the o'erbrooding Soul, purely ablaze,
Full-flooded with the light of God,
Outlasts Man's body and all his works and ways,
Outlasts this little earth whereon he trod.

II

We come not, then, to praise
That which transcends our praises, but to crave
The light of one great soul, kind as the sky,
Upon these later days,—
Not like the simpler time gone by,
But set with snares of sense and ease,
And crowded with poor phantom flatteries
That serve us, and enslave.
We come, forgetting for a while
Our million-peopled cities, pile on pile
Upsoaring starry-windowed in the night
To perilous Babel-height;
We come, forgetting all our new-found powers,
The magic of the mastery that is ours,
The shoes of swiftness we may lightly wear,
And that fresh-captured Ariel of the air,
All, all that makes Man's face to shine
With pride of conquest, flushing him as wine,—
We come, forgetting all, a little while
To look in Lincoln's eyes,
So loving-sad, so kindly-wise;
To stand, as judged, before his patient smile;
Until his large mould shames us, and we know
We are as children, yet have hope to grow,
Since this may be the stature of a man.

III

Strangely his life began,
Rough-cradled in the savage wood.
Haply our foolish softness grieves
O'er much that he found good,
The hut of logs, the bed of leaves.
By the faint candle, or the winter's fire,
He groped to his desire,
The long, lean, sallow, knowledge-hungry lad,
Deerskin or homespun clad.
Slow-stumbling upward, in good time he grew
To that just man his little city knew,
His plain, persuasive speech
Shaped by an instinct none could ever teach,
Savoring of honest earth, and sharp with wilding jest.
Then came his country's call.
Humble and hesitant, in doubt and dread,
And stooping that tall head
Black-ruffled like the eagle's crest,
He passed up to the highest place of all.

IV

Ah, who shall tell the tale of those wild years,
Of pride and grief, of blood and tears?
The horror and the splendor and the sorrow,
The marching-songs of midnight, the sick fears
Of every fateful morrow?
Sometimes a waft of song, a random strain,
Suddenly lifts a curtain in the brain:
Some sweet old homesick soldier-ballad, one
Beloved of many a sunburnt longing son
Of Michigan or Maine,
Or that light laughing tune wherewith the South
Fifed her boy-soldiers blithe to the cannon's mouth,—
Suddenly all is real once more,
The hoping, the despairing,
The pity and the passion and the daring,
And all the agony of the Brother-War!

V

Each bore his burden: but he all burdens bore,
Whose sad heart folded all the sufferers in;
While with a master's steady hand he played,
Mournful but undismayed,
That giant game where it was pain to win.
Ah, pain to win, but double death to lose!
He saw the end, he knew the thing at stake
Was Manhood's captain-jewel: he could not choose
But play the grim game out, though that great heart should break.
He smiled, as he had need
To keep him sane:
Sad Lincoln laughed! on mountain-side or plain
Not any soldier did a braver deed.

VI

Last, all his duty done,—
All the dark bondmen freed,
The long-sought leader found, the piteous victory won,—
Arrived for him one hour of April sun
Wherein he breathed free as the forest again,
In glad goodwill to men
Nursing some vast forgiveness in his mind.
Then—all turned blank and blind.
Dare we remember the tragic lilac-time
Crimsoned with that mad crime?
Nay, hush! Ye have heard how sacrifice must close
The supreme service; 'tis the way God chose.

VII

Ah, haply we, the native-born,
And sprung of grandsires native too,
Proud of soul this stately morn
Would with his fame one race, one land indue;
Would claim him ours, and ours alone,
Flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone,
Inseparably our own!
Ours by the English name,
And that old England whence his forebears came,
And that dear English of his tongue and pen;
Mightier successor of our most mighty men;
Ours, by his birth beneath our western sky,
Ours, by the flag he died to save,
Ours, by the home-fields of his labor, and by
The home-earth of his grave!

VIII

But hark! as if some league-long barrier broke
To let wide waters in tumultuously,
[Pg 37]
I hear the voices of the outland folk
From sea to sea—yea, rolling over-sea:
“You shall not limit his large glory thus,
You shall not mete his greatness with a span!
This man belongs to us,
Gentile and Jew, Teuton and Celt and Russ
And whatso else we be!
This man belongs to Man!
And never, till a flood of love efface
The hard distrusts that sever race from race,
Comes his true jubilee!
Never, till all the wars,
Yea, even the noble wars that strive to peace,
With all the thunder of all the drums shall cease,
And all the booming guns on all the brother-shores;
Never, till that worst strife of every day,
More bitter-sordid than the clash of steel,
By some new solving word our lips may learn to say,
Be wholly done away,
Deep-drowned in brotherhood, quenched in the common weal,
Ah, never, till every spirit shall stand up free,
Comes the great Liberator’s jubilee!”

GREENCASTLE JENNY

A BALLAD OF 'SIXTY-THREE

Oh, Greencastle streets were a stream of steel
With the slanted muskets the soldiers bore,
And the scared earth muttered and shook to feel
The tramp and the rumble of Longstreet's Corps;
The bands were blaring "The Bonny Blue Flag,"
And the banners borne were a motley many;
And watching the gray column wind and drag
Was a slip of a girl—we'll call her Jenny.
A slip of a girl—what needs her name?—
With her cheeks aflame and her lips aquiver,
As she leaned and looked with a loyal shame
At the steady flow of the steely river:
Till a storm grew black in the hazel eyes
Time had not tamed, nor a lover sighed for;
And she ran and she girded her, apron-wise,
With the flag she loved and her brothers died for.
Out of the doorway they saw her start
(Pickett's Virginians were marching through),
The hot little foolish hero-heart
Armored with stars and the sacred blue.
Clutching the folds of red and white
Stood she and bearded those ranks of theirs,
Shouting shrilly with all her might,
"Come and take it, the man that dares!"
Pickett's Virginians were passing through;
Supple as steel and brown as leather,
Rusty and dusty of hat and shoe,
Wanted to hunger and war and weather;
Peerless, fearless, an army's flower!
Stern soldiers the world saw never,
Marching lightly, that summer hour,
To death and failure and fame forever.
Rose from the rippling ranks a cheer;
Pickett saluted, with bold eyes beaming,
Sweeping his hat like a cavalier,
With his lion locks in the warm wind streaming.
Fierce little Jenny! her courage fell,
As the firm lines flickered with friendly laughter,
And Greencastle streets gave back the yell
That Gettysburg slopes gave back soon after.
So they cheered for the flag they fought
With the generous glow of the stubborn fighter,
Loving the brave as the brave man ought,

And never a finger was raised to fright her:
So they marched, though they knew it not,
Through the fresh green June to the shock infernal,
To the hell of the shell and the plunging shot,
And the charge that has won them a name eternal.
And she felt at last, as she hid her face,
There had lain at the root of her childish daring
A trust in the men of her own brave race,
And a secret faith in the foe's forbearing.
And she sobbed, till the roll of the rumbling gun
And the swinging tramp of the marching men
Were a memory only, and day was done,
And the stars in the fold of the blue again.
*(Thank God that the day of the sword is done,
And the stars in the fold of the blue again!)*

BY THE BLOCKHOUSE ON THE HILL

A Ballad of 'Ninety-Eight

The soul of the fair young man sprang up
From the earth where his body lay,
And he was aware of a grim dark soul
Companioning his way.
“Who are you, brother?” the fair soul said;
“We wing together still!”
And the soul replied, that was swart and red,
“The spirit of him who shot you dead
By the blockhouse on the hill.
“Your men and you on the crest were first,
And the last foe left was I;
In the crackle of rifles I dropped and cursed,
Lightning-struck as the cheer outburst
And the hot charge panted nigh.
“You saw me writhe at the side of the trench:
You bade—I know not what:
With one last gnash, with one last wrench,
I sped my last, sure shot.
“The thing that lies on the sodden ground
Like a wrack of the whirlwind’s track,
Your men have made of the body of me,—
But they could not call you back!
“In that black game I won, I won!
But had you worked your will,
Speak now the shame that you would have done
By the blockhouse on the hill!”
“God judge my men!” said the fair young soul;
“He knows you tried them sore.
Had He given me power to bide an hour
I had wrought that they forbore.
“I bade them, ere your bullet brought
This swift, this sweet release,
To bear your body out of the fire
That you might pass in peace.”
Said the grim dark soul, “Farewell, farewell,
Farewell ’twixt you and me,
Till they set red Judas loose from hell
To kneel at the Lord Christ’s knee!”
“Not so, not so,” said the fair young soul,
“But reach me out your hand:
We two will kneel at the Lord Christ’s knee,
And He that was hanged on the cruel tree
Will remember and understand.

“We two will pray at the Lord Christ’s knee
That never on earth again
The breath of the hot brute guns shall cloud
The sight in the eyes of men!”
The clean stars came into the sky;
The perfect night was still;
Yet rose to heaven the old blood-cry,
By the blockhouse on the hill.

THE ADMIRAL'S STORY

This the Admiral told,
The Admiral early-old,
Gentle, and tragic-eyed,
The year before he died;
Told to the lads of the street,
At the Settlement where they meet,
Jake and Patsy and Pete,
Sons of the lean East Side.
Eyes of the Irish blue,
Jewel-bright eyes of the Jew,
Stared at him, wonder-wide,
As he stood there blanched and frail,
Telling a world-known tale
With a look that was far away.
Some that were once as they,
Aliens, lads of the street,
Served with the great gray fleet
On Santiago Day.
They looked upon him then
With eyes that did not swerve,
Gravely; they too were men;
Haply they too might serve!
Sunday it was, he said;
The warm sky overhead
Bright blue, without a fleck;
And the flagship steaming east
To Shafter at Siboney,
With the Admiral on her deck.
Westward the Morro lay,
Seven long miles at least.
(Each in her station right,
The gray ships ranged in a ring;
[Pg 43]
Slender the Spaniard's chance for flight!
So grim birds on a poisoning wing
Threaten a wounded beast.)
Suddenly burst from the Morro bluff
One round, cloud-white puff!
Nobody felt a doubt:
The Spaniard was coming out,
And the Admiral seven miles east—
Seven long miles at least!
(Ah, fate's master-stroke,
Irony royal-rare!

After the long blockade
 And the patient plans well laid,
 The search-light's sleepless glare
 And the growl of the cannonade—
 The whole fleet bid to the battle-feast,
 And the Admiral seven miles east!)
 Forth from the channel they came,—
 Adventure of despair!—
 Each stately and splendid name
 Foredoomed to thunder and flame,
 Foredoomed to ruin and fame,
 But the Admiral was not there!
 He saw from afar his ships close in,
 The smoke-veils thicken, the chase begin,
 (And *O for wings!* sighed the Admiral's heart,
 As the flagship followed, apart.)
 "Then it was, as we speeded west,
 Just as the flagship came abreast
 Of the poor Theresa there, on the beach,
 And the Almirante Oquendo, each
 Wrecked and ablaze," he said,
 "We saw on the seaward side,
 All alone in the waters wide,
 Rising and falling, the round black head
 Of a Spanish sailor as good as dead,
 Fighting death in the sea.
 "Strange it seemed when the strife
 Shrank to a single man,
 Fighting alone for his life!
 One of the flagship's crew
 A second stood at a loss,
 Then leaped and shouted and ran
 And reached and lifted and threw
 The desk with the wooden cross
 Where the chaplain used to read.
 He hurled it over the side.
 'Dago, cling to the Cross
 And you shall be saved!' he cried.
 And the thing was so indeed.
 "Strange, how the terrible battle-strain
 Goes like wine to the brain!
 Those were the words we heard him speak,
 With a twitch of his leathern cheek.
 Did he jest? would his own soul know?
 '*Dago, cling to the Cross*
And you shall be saved!' he cried;

And indeed the thing was so.”
This the Admiral told
To the boys of alien race,
Each eager, sparkling face
Insistently outthrust
To hear and to behold;
He, robbed of his desire,
Gentle and blanched and frail,
War’s martyr, ashen-pale,
Burnt brittle in that fire,—
And now a long time dust.

DEATH AFTER WAR

Gone the Red Harvester, with heaped-up wain
Darkening against the blood-bright sky; yet lingers
The lone, gaunt Gleaner on the twilight plain,
Blind-gathering with the clutch of hungry fingers.

THE RIDDLE OF WRECK

Dark hemlocks, seventy and seven,
High on the hill-slope sigh in dream,
With plummy heads in heaven;
They silver the sunbeam.
One broken body of a tree,
Stabbed through and slashed by lightning keen,
Unsouled, and grim to see,
Hangs o'er the hushed ravine.
A hundred masts, a hundred more,
Crowd close against the sunset-fires.
Their late adventure o'er,
They mingle with the spires.
But one is lying prone, alone,
Where gleaming gulls to seaward sweep,
White sand of burial blown
In sheets about its sleep.
When lightning's leashed, and sea is still,
Ye sacrificial mysteries dread,
Scapegoats of shore and hill,
Your riddle may be read.

THE COMMON STREET

The common street climbed up against the sky,
Gray meeting gray; and wearily to and fro
I saw the patient, common people go,
Each with his sordid burden trudging by.
And the rain dropped; there was not any sigh
Or stir of a live wind; dull, dull and slow
All motion; as a tale told long ago
The faded world; and creeping night drew nigh.
Then burst the sunset, flooding far and fleet,
Leavening the whole of life with magic leaven.
Suddenly down the long wet glistening hill
Pure splendor poured—and lo! the common street,
A golden highway into golden heaven,
With the dark shapes of men ascending still.

CALNAN'S CHRISTMAS

When you hear the fire-gongs beat fierce along the startled street,
See the great-limbed horses bound, and the gleaming engine sway,
And the driver in his place, with his fixed, heroic face,
Say a prayer for Calnan's sake—he that died on Christmas day!
Cling! Cling! Each to his station!
Clang! Clang! Quick to clear the way!
(Christ keep the soldiers of salvation,
Fighting nameless battles in the war of every day!)
In the morning, blue and mild, of the Mother and the Child,
While the blessed bells were calling, thrilled the summons through the wire;
In the morning, blue and mild, for a woman and a child
Died a man of gentle will, plunging on to fight the fire.
Ring, swing, bells in the steeple!
Ring the Child and ring the Star, as sweetly as ye may!
Ring, swing, bells, to tell the people
God's good will to earthly men, the men of every day!
"Thirty-four" swung out a gleam, with her mighty, bounding team;
Horses' honor pricked them on, and they leaped as at a goad;
Jimmy Calnan in his place, with his clean-cut Irish face,
Iron hands upon the reins, eyes a-strain upon the road.
Clang! Clang! Quick to clear the way!
(Sweetly rang, above the clang, the bells of Christmas day.)
Tearing, plunging through the din, scarce a man can hold them in;
None on earth could pull them short: Mary Mother, guard from harm
Yonder woman straight ahead, stony-still with sudden dread,
And the little woman-child, with her waxen child in arm!
Oh, God's calls, how swift they are! Oh, the Cross that hides the Star!
Oh, the fire-gong beating fierce through the bells of Christmas day!
Just a second there to choose, and a life to keep or lose—
To the curb he swung the horses, and he flung his life away!
Ring, swing, bells in the steeple!
Ring the Star and ring the Cross, for Star and Cross are one!
Ring, swing, bells, to tell the people
God is pleased with manly men, and deeds that they have done!

GUION

Is it so hard to die in the glory and fury of fight?
Sweet is the death for the flag—splendid the death when Fame
Snatches the sinking torch, and lifts it alive, alight!—
Let us remember his name who drank of a cup of flame
Silently pledging Duty, and would not shirk
Death in the plain day's work.
Guion was running the lift
There at the doomed hotel
When the grim chance befell.
Twenty years, day out, day in,
Still the same had the day's work been:
Up and down, steady and swift,
At the thrill of the calling bell.
Boy and man, and still the same;
Then—the wild moment came.
Fire and fear, and the rush, and the gush of the choking smoke;
Cries, and the hoarse command, and the engine's clanging stroke;
Still, at the well-known call, in the wonted way,
Up and down, steady and swift,
Guion kept running the lift;
Many and many a life is his gift
That had else gone out that day.
How it billowed, the surge of black
On the delicate springtime sky!
The firemen knew they were come to the end of it all,—
They were beaten, the roof must fall.
Hands laid hold upon Guion: "You can't go back!"
But he answered, "I'll stand by!"
And again through the tumult—hark!
Shrill, oh pitiful-shrill,
The throb of the bell that summoned, the agony-thrill,
Calling,—it fell on his soul like the sting of a spark.
"One more trip!" said Guion; and steady and swift
Mounted the man and the lift.
—Save in the dust of ruin, that baffles ken,
None saw Guion again.
Year after year, when the great March sunsets flame,
Let us remember his name.

POVERTY ROW

Brave old neighbors in Poverty Row,
Why should we grudge to dwell with you?
Pinch of poverty well ye know—
Doubtful dinner and clouted shoe.
Grinned the wolf at your doors, and yet
You sang your songs and you said your say.
Lashed to labor by devil Debt,
All were manful, and some were gay.
What, old Chaucer! a royal jest
Once you made in your laughing verse:
“No more goldfinch-song in the nest—
Autumn nest of the empty purse!”
Master Spenser, your looks are spare;
Princes’ favors, how fleet they be!
Thinking that yours was the selfsame fare,
Crust or crumb shall be sweet to me.
Worshipful Shakespeare of Stratford town,
Prosperous-portly in doublet red,
What of the days when you first came down
To London city to earn your bread?
What of the lodging where Juliet’s face
Startled your dream with its Southern glow,
Flooding with splendor the sordid place?
That was a garret in Poverty Row!
Many a worthy has here, I ween,
Made brief sojourn or long abode:
Johnson, dining behind the screen;
Goldsmith, vagrant along the road;
Keats, ah, pitiful! poor and ill,
Harassed and hurt, in his short spring day;
[Pg 53]
Best Sir Walter, with flagging quill
Digging the mountain of debt away.
Needy comrade, whose evil star,
Pallid-frowning, decrees you wrong,
Greatly neighbored, in truth, we are;
Hold your heart up and sing your song!
Lift your eyes to the book-shelf where,
Glorious-gilded, a shining show,
Every man in his mansion fair,
Dwell the princes of Poverty Row!

THE INN OF THE STAR

When the Old Year plods down
Toward the end of the hill,
Where the white little town
Lies asleep, wonder-still,
Then he mends his dull pace,
For a ray, streaming far,
Strikes a gleam on his face
From the Inn of the Star.
Then the staff is set by,
And the shoon from his feet,
And the burden let lie,
And he sitteth at meat;
Old jests round the board,
Old songs round the blaze,
While the faint bells accord
Like the souls of old days.
In the sweet bed of peace
He shall sleep for a night,
And faith, like a fleece,
Lap him kindly and light;
Then the wind, crooning wild,
Mystic music shall seem,
And the brow of the Child
Be a light through his dream.
And we, too, follow down
The long slope of the hill:
See, the white little Town,
Where it shines, wonder-still!
Be our hopes quenched or bright,
Be our griefs what they are,
We shall sojourn a night
At the Inn of the Star.

MARINA SINGS

(Pericles, Act V, Sc. i.)

This is the song Marina sang
To forlorn Pericles:
Silver the young voice rang.
The gray beard blew about his knees,
And the hair of his bowed head, like a veil,
Fell over his cheeks and blent with it:
He knew not anything.
Above him the Tyrian fold
Of the curtain billowed, fringed with gold,
As might beseem a king.
Sunset was rose on every sail
That did along the far sea flit,
And rose on the cedarn deck
Of the ship that at anchor swayed;
And the harbor was golden-lit.
He lifted not his neck
At the coming of the maid.
She swept him with her eyes,
As though some tender wing
Just touched a bleaching wreck
In sheeted sand that lies;
Then she began to sing.

THE SONG

Hush, ah hush! the sea is kind!
Lullaby is in the wind;
Grief the babe forgets to weep,
Lapped and spelled and laid to sleep:
His lip is wet with the milk of the spray;
He shall not wake till another day.
Ah hush! the sea is kind!
Who can tell, ah who can tell,
The cradling nurse's croonèd spell?
While the slumber-web she weaves
Never nursling stirs or grieves:
The tears that drowned his sweet eye-beams
Are turned to mists of rainbow dreams.
Ah hush! she charms us well!
"All thy hurts I balm and bind;
All thy heart's loves thou shalt find!"
Yea, this she murmurs, best of all:
"It was not loss that did befall!
All thy joys are put away;
They shall be thine another day!"
Ah hush! the sea is kind!
She sang; she trembled like a lyre;
Her pure eyes burned with azure fire;
About her lucent brow the hair
Played like light flames divine ones wear:
The maid was very fair.
But when she saw he gave no heed,—
Close-mantled up in ancient pain
As in some sad-wound weed,
Dumb as a shape of stone,
Being years past all moan,—
She tried no other strain,
But softly spake: "Most royal sir!"
He raised his head and looked at her.
So might a castaway, half dead,
Lift up his haggard head,
Waked by the swirl of sudden rain,
A cool, unhopèd-for grace,
Against his tearless face:
And see, with happy-crazèd mind,
Upon his raft a Bright One stand,—
His love of youth, her grave long left behind
In some sweet-watered land.

THE KING'S DIAMOND

*This diamond he greets your wife withal
By the name of most kind hostess.
Macbeth, Act II, sc. i.*

Duncan the King,—Heaven rest his bier!—
Had a diamond icy-clear;
Clear as ice and fierce as flame,—
I wot not whence he had the same.
Its fellow was not in the land.
It shot keen shafts of every hue
On the old king's trembling hand
Where the veins were large and blue.
A jewel of price was that indeed,
Fit to buy a prince's life;
A royal gift for the lady wife
Of a kinsman bold and true
Who had served the king at need.
Who was he, but the Red Macbeth
That wrought the false Macdonwald's death,
And drave the sea-wolf in dismay,
Sweyn the king of Norroway?
Being guest to that great thane,
Ere his limbs on couch had lain
Duncan sent that frozen flame
To Lady Gruach, the gracious dame.
(Clear as ice was the lady's fame,
A flawless jewel indeed!)
Duncan the king at Colmkill sleeps,
So sound he will not turn or moan;
His slumber-draught was deep, I ween,
Bitter-spiced with daggers keen.
It is the Red Macbeth that keeps
Stern state upon the throne,
With Gruach, his kind queen.
("Most kind," the old King Duncan said,
Before he lay in his last bed.)
The Lady Gruach wears the crown,
She wears the glistering golden gown,
But yet she has not worn the ring
That was the guerdon of the king.
In the dark the diamond lies,
Seen of no vassal's eyes.
Nor any vassal's tongue can tell
How,—when the spying Day is sped

And sleeps with the safe dead;
 When Gruach loosens her long hair
 Midnight-black on her shoulders bare,
 And sinks to the comfort of despair;
 At the witches' hour, when the shadows swell
 As the swinging cressets flare,
 And the small swart crickets harp and harp
 On the tune remembered, torturing-sharp,
 And the sobbing owlets wake,—
 The diamond in the dark
 Draws, draws her, like the spark
 In the head of a deadly snake.
 Then will she sit, and dully stare
 On the cold diamond's serpent-glare;
 Her lip is fallen, she does not stir,
 Her life is sucked into the gem;
 It is as though the Powers malign
 Had made with mystery in the mine
 A thing to be like the soul of her:
 It was a jest to them!
 All the light upgathered they
 That might have been a sunshine day,
 Broadcast blessing and heavenly boon,
 Peace of even and power of noon;
 Seized the rays with a spell unknown,
 Forced them into a core of fire
 Like the glede of a covetous desire,
 Shut them fast in the heart of a stone.
 And hard, and harder than the sword,
 They made the crystal, fiery-cored;
 On steel that oft had steel withstood
 Might it grave the word it would.
 A gem of beauty and of bale,
 A prisoned force in narrow pale,
 Evil-perfect, pure of good!
 —So will she sit, till naked Morn
 Peers at the world with visage white
 Like a sleeper roused in fright,
 Aghast and most forlorn.
 What of the end? since end must be.
 She knows a skilled artificer,
 And he shall set in a dagger's haft
 The thing that is like the soul of her.
 When first she thought thereon, she laughed,
 And then she shuddered fearfully.
 Ah, what if Heaven no end will grant,

Resolved in any heats of wrath,
To that which for its symbol hath
The unsubduable adamant?
Ah, what if like a falling jewel
The soul whose light was mocking-cruel,
Through gulfs of loss unplummeted
Should fall, and fall, forevermore,
Fire of torment at its core?
Oh, horrible and leaden dread!
The grace of God blot out our sins!
—The women knock at the chamber door,
The queen starts up, the day begins.

DEATH-TRYST

(*Shelley, 1822: Tennyson, 1892.*)

I

One sailed an azure sea in fateful hour:
A Youth, yet age had touched him, and he seemed
Lovely and piteous, like a frosted flower.
A Book was in his hand, a page that teemed
With joy of beauty. (He who made it, slept
Where o'er his heart the Roman violets dreamed.)
Sailing, he smiled; a tryst his spirit kept;
Thoughts lucent-pinioned did as psyches flit
Across his summer dream; till on him swept
The swift black storm, and Fate and Death did sit
Betwixt its cloudy wings as down it bore;
And he who read was rapt to him who writ.
Twin stars they shine, one fame forevermore.
A fire of funeral blazed, beside the sobbing shore.

II

One slept a sacred sleep, while golden lay
Autumnal moonlight glorious on his bed,—
Sleep ebbing deathward like a sea-drawn bay.
A Book was in his hand, whence late he read
Majestic words of that great Spirit that still
Doth haunt by Avon April-garlanded.
So sleeping, held he fast with fixed will
His Master's Book; and all the night was peace,
Bright peace on lawn and terrace, dale and hill.
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Calm consummation, and most sweet surcease!
That tryst of sovereign powers Death would not wrong,
Shattering the bars with all-too-rough release,
But softly dealt.—They rule in splendor long,
Large lights, a moon and sun in England's heaven of song.

THE IRIS-BRIDGE

That morn when men to one another said
“Browning is dead in Venice,” ere the thrill
Of the tidings touched us, lo! our eyes beheld
Strange portent flashed upon the winter sky.
From hill to hill the jewel-splendid span
Of the light rainbow leaped, transcendent joy,
The brave bright delicate bridge, frail as a flower,
Yet firm enough to bear the feet of Hope.
—“Browning is dead,” they told us; but our thoughts
Followed along the aerial sunbuilt arch
The onward quest of that still ardent soul.
Could he be holden of death, who built indeed,
Flinging his lyric faith across the vast,
An iris-bridge for man while words endure?

DESIRE OF FAME

O unapproachable glories of the night!
You type not my desire: enough for me
The vanished meteor's immortality,
Brief memory of a moment touched with light.

ROSE-RENT

Life! lordly giver and gay!
I, for this manor of Time,
Lightly and lovingly pay
Rent with the rose of a rhyme.

THE FRIGATE-GHOST

Yes, you may build her again
As she was when she sailed the sea;
She may bear the brave old name,
And the harbors hail her the same;
'Tis her semblance, it is not she!
She is gone from our mortal ken.
I know not how or when,
But her spirit escaped away
From the dock and the dull decay,
From the uses of unprized age
And the changes wrought of men;
Like a wild sea-bird from a cage,
Her soul took flight from the form
To the tides that none can tame,
To the restless fields of her fame,
To the wet salt wind and the storm!
Somewhere she ranges free,
Stately, a shape of light,
Revisiting leagues of sea
Illumined with glorious fight.
She hangs like a lucent cloud
On the coast where her guns spoke loud,
In the gates of the Moslem proud,
Till the Crescent grew faint with fright.
Exultant she bounds on the brine,
Tracing the course of the race
When the Æolus held her in chase,
And the Belvidere and the Shannon,
And the Africa, ship-o'-the-line,
With another, doomed to her cannon,
To be blazoned in flame at the last,
When the grim sea-duel was done:
God rest the souls that passed
Ere the Guerrière's leeward gun!
Ere the noblest flag on the sea
Came down to the Stripes and Stars!
Oh, the frigate-ghost, as she ranges free,
Thrills yet through her spectral spars!
Aye, the old pride stirs her still
As she sails and sails at will;
In her cross-trees memories nestle,
Though she walks the wave a ghost.
Well she minds the wary wrestle
When her shot poured hot as lava

On the shattered, stubborn Java,
Off the dim Brazilian coast;
And she haunts the moonlit seas
Where her crashing broadsides broke
Through the drift of silvered smoke
While she waged a double battle
In the waters Portuguese.
Still the ghostly muskets rattle,
And the old drums beat, beat, beat,
Like a heart that will not die;
And the old fife whistles high,
And the powder-scent is rank,
And she feels on her hollow plank
The old, dead heroes' feet!
Ah, never sailor-man
Has seen her where she ranges,
Escaped from time and changes
As only spirits can,
Clear, absolute, and free!
Yet, some stern hour to be,
When a fight is fought at sea,
And the right of the fight is ours,
And the cause of the right is failing,
There shall rise a frigate sailing,
A luminous presence paling
Through the powder-cloud where it lowers;
Pale smoke from her side shall break,
Pale faces over her railing
Shall frown, till the foemen shake
With fear and bewildered passion,
Marking her old-time fashion,
In the turrets of hostile powers;
And then shall the rumor run
Like a lightning from lip to lip,
And shall leap from ship to ship,
While the wounded gunner reels
Again to his reeking gun,
Touched with a magic that heals,
Feeling this vision remind him
That the strong Dead fight behind him:
"Tis the ghost of IRONSIDES,
Come back from the tameless tides,
From the ocean-fields unbounded,
Complete with her scattered spars,
Manned with the shades of her tars,
With the smoke of her guns surrounded,

To succor the Stripes and Stars!”

FAIR ENGLAND

White England shouldering from the sea,
Green England in thy rainy veil,
Old island-nest of Liberty
And loveliest Song, all hail!
God guard thee long from scath and grief!
Not any wish of ours would mar
One richly glooming ivy-leaf,
One rosy daisy-star.
What! phantoms are we, spectre-thin,
Unfathered, out of nothing born?
Did Being in this world begin
With blaze of yestermorn?
Nay! sacred Life, a scarlet thread,
Through lost unnumbered lives has run;
No strength can tear us from the dead;
The sire is in the son.
Nay! through the years God's purpose glides,
And links in sequence deed with deed;
Hoar Time along his chaplet slides
Bead after jewel-bead.
O brother, breathing English air!
If both be just, if both be free,
A lordlier heritage we share
Than any earth can be:
If hearts be high, if hands be pure,
A bond unseen shall bind us still,—
The only bond that can endure,
Being welded with God's will!
A bond unseen! and yet God speed
The apparent sign, when He finds good;
When in His sight it types indeed
That inward brotherhood.
For not the rose-and-emerald bow
Can bid the battling storm to cease,
But leaps at last, that all may know
The sign, not source, of peace.
Oh, what shall shameful peace avail,
If east or west, if there or here,
Men sprung of ancient England fail
To hold their birthright dear?
If west or east, if here or there,
Brute Mammon sit in Freedom's place,
And judge a wailing world's despair
With hard, averted face?

O great Co-heir, whose lot is cast
Beside the hearthstone loved of yore!
Inherit with us that best Past
That lives for evermore!
Inherit with us! Lo, the days
Are evil; who may know the end?
Strike hands, and dare the darkening ways,
Twin strengths, with God to friend!

TO THE MEMORY OF RICHARD WATSON GILDER

*Again the summer days beside the sea:
The billowing of the russet-feathered grass
In the warm wind; the shadow of clouds that sail;
The orange field-flower flaming like a torch
To light all wings of wavering butterflies;
The long wash of the everlasting wave,
The same and not the same forevermore.
Again the summer nights, a-throb with stars,
And that clear Star, the glory of the Lyre,
White-burning, hung at the high heart of heaven.
Again the summer days, the summer nights,—
All is as it hath been.
Nay, not for those
Who have felt the shadow fall of that strange cloud
Which yet seems full of light, the shadow of death,
Is aught as it hath been. The dark sea-line
Solemnly deepens, and the sunset sweeps
With graver splendors through its pageant-pomp.
I know not why these meadows, yester-year,
And these stark pines against the sunset-rose,
And these young woods where haply one beholds
In some brown pool the mirrored cardinal-flower
Lovely and lonely,—why along these ways
Sprang up so oft the sudden thought of him,
A wayside joy; why memories of his song
Floated upon the silvery thistledown;
Yet near he seemed. And not less near to-day,
Though all he loved, and sang of, gleams through tears,
Fresh-haloed with the pathos of the thought
That near or far we shall not see again
Those luminous eyes whence looked his lyric soul.
Star of the Lyre! a spirit like to thee,
White-burning, close to the high heart of heaven,
We knew; a spirit as clear, with ardors pure
Trembling to every touch of the divine
Serene sphere-music. Such was he, our friend,
Our singer; such is he, though mortal sense
Be sealed.
Now to his name I give this book,
Reverent, as placing on an altar-stone
A gift; though slight, not all unmeet—since he
Served all his years a Soldier of the Light:
From those first days when the brave gentle boy,
In passion of service for the land he loved,*

*Stood by the thunderous guns of Gettysburg,
To those last days of service not less true
In the loud streets and swarming human hives,
The clangor and flare, and all the civic stress
Of his beloved city,—his and ours,
Where such as he may rear the City of Light.*