EMILY DICKINSON

The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson

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The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson

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The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson

Editor’s Note: Many of Dickinson’s poems were untitled.

First Series

PREFACE.

The verses of Emily Dickinson belong emphatically to what Emerson long since called “the Poetry of the Portfolio,"—something produced absolutely without the thought of publication, and solely by way of expression of the writer’s own mind. Such verse must inevitably forfeit whatever advantage lies in the discipline of public criticism and the enforced conformity to accepted ways. On the other hand, it may often gain something through the habit of freedom and the unconventional utterance of daring thoughts. In the case of the present author, there was absolutely no choice in the matter; she must write thus, or not at all. A recluse by temperament and habit, literally spending years without setting her foot beyond the doorstep, and many more years during which her walks were strictly limited to her father’s grounds, she habitually concealed her mind, like her person, from all but a very few friends; and it was with great difficulty that she was persuaded to print, during her lifetime, three or four poems. Yet she wrote verses in great abundance; and though brought curiously indifferent to all conventional rules, had yet a rigorous literary standard of her own, and often altered a word many times to suit an ear which had its own tenacious fastidiousness.

Miss Dickinson was born in Amherst, Mass., Dec. 10, 1830, and died there May 15, 1886. Her father, Hon. Edward Dickinson, was the leading lawyer of Amherst, and was treasurer of the well-known college there situated. It was his custom once a year to hold a large reception at his house, attended by all the families connected with the institution and by the leading people of the town. On these occasions his daughter Emily emerged from her wonted retirement and did her part as gracious hostess; nor would any one have known from her manner, I have been told, that this was not a daily occurrence. The annual occasion once past, she withdrew again into her seclusion, and except for a very few friends was as invisible to the world as if she had dwelt in a nunnery. For myself, although I had corresponded with her for many years, I saw her but twice face to face, and brought away the impression of something as unique and remote as Undine or Mignon or Thekla.

This selection from her poems is published to meet the desire of her personal friends, and especially of her surviving sister. It is believed that the thoughtful reader will find in these pages a quality more suggestive of the poetry of William Blake than of anything to be elsewhere found,—flashes of wholly original and profound insight into nature and life; words and phrases exhibiting an extraordinary vividness of descriptive and imaginative power, yet often set in a seemingly whimsical or even rugged frame. They are here published as they were written, with very few and

superficial changes; although it is fair to say that the titles have been assigned, almost invariably, by the editors. In many cases these verses will seem to the reader like poetry torn up by the roots, with rain and dew and earth still clinging to them, giving a freshness and a fragrance not otherwise to be conveyed. In other cases, as in the few poems of shipwreck or of mental conflict, we can only wonder at the gift of vivid imagination by which this recluse woman can delineate, by a few touches, the very crises of physical or mental struggle. And sometimes again we catch glimpses of a lyric strain, sustained perhaps but for a line or two at a time, and making the reader regret its sudden cessation. But the main quality of these poems is that of extraordinary grasp and insight, uttered with an uneven vigor sometimes exasperating, seemingly wayward, but really unsought and inevitable. After all, when a thought takes one's breath away, a lesson on grammar seems an impertinence. As Ruskin wrote in his earlier and better days, "No weight nor mass nor beauty of execution can outweigh one grain or fragment of thought."

—-Thomas Wentworth Higginson

This is my letter to the world,

That never wrote to me, —

The simple news that Nature told,

With tender majesty.

Her message is committed

To hands I cannot see;

For love of her, sweet countrymen,

Judge tenderly of me!

Part One: Life

I: SUCCESS.

[Published in “A Masque of Poets”

at the request of “H.H.,” the author’s

fellow-townswoman and friend.]

Success is counted sweetest

By those who ne’er succeed.

To comprehend a nectar

Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple host

Who took the flag to-day

Can tell the definition,

So clear, of victory,

As he, defeated, dying,

On whose forbidden ear

The distant strains of triumph

Break, agonized and clear!

II.

Our share of night to bear,

Our share of morning,

Our blank in bliss to fill,

Our blank in scorning.

Here a star, and there a star,

Some lose their way.

Here a mist, and there a mist,

Afterwards — day!

III: ROUGE ET NOIR.

Soul, wilt thou toss again?

By just such a hazard

Hundreds have lost, indeed,

But tens have won an all.

Angels’ breathless ballot

Lingers to record thee;

Imps in eager caucus

Raffle for my soul.

IV: ROUGE GAGNE.

‘T is so much joy! ‘T is so much joy!

If I should fail, what poverty!

And yet, as poor as I

Have ventured all upon a throw;

Have gained! Yes! Hesitated so

This side the victory!

Life is but life, and death but death!

Bliss is but bliss, and breath but breath!

And if, indeed, I fail,

At least to know the worst is sweet.

Defeat means nothing but defeat,

No drearier can prevail!

And if I gain, — oh, gun at sea,

Oh, bells that in the steeples be,

At first repeat it slow!

For heaven is a different thing

Conjectured, and waked sudden in,

And might o’erwhelm me so!

V.

Glee! The great storm is over!

Four have recovered the land;

Forty gone down together

Into the boiling sand.

Ring, for the scant salvation!

Toll, for the bonnie souls, —

Neighbor and friend and bridegroom,

Spinning upon the shoals!

How they will tell the shipwreck

When winter shakes the door,

Till the children ask, “But the forty?

Did they come back no more?”

Then a silence suffuses the story,

And a softness the teller’s eye;

And the children no further question,

And only the waves reply.

VI.

If I can stop one heart from breaking,

I shall not live in vain;

If I can ease one life the aching,

Or cool one pain,

Or help one fainting robin

Unto his nest again,

I shall not live in vain.

VII: ALMOST!

Within my reach!

I could have touched!

I might have chanced that way!

Soft sauntered through the village,

Sauntered as soft away!

So unsuspected violets

Within the fields lie low,

Too late for striving fingers

That passed, an hour ago.

VIII.

A wounded deer leaps highest,

I’ve heard the hunter tell;

‘T is but the ecstasy of death,

And then the brake is still.

The smitten rock that gushes,

The trampled steel that springs;

A cheek is always redder

Just where the hectic stings!

Mirth is the mail of anguish,

In which it cautions arm,

Lest anybody spy the blood

And “You’re hurt” exclaim!

IX.

The heart asks pleasure first,

And then, excuse from pain;

And then, those little anodynes

That deaden suffering;

And then, to go to sleep;

And then, if it should be

The will of its Inquisitor,

The liberty to die.

X: IN A LIBRARY.

A precious, mouldering pleasure ‘t is

To meet an antique book,

In just the dress his century wore;

A privilege, I think,

His venerable hand to take,

And warming in our own,

A passage back, or two, to make

To times when he was young.

His quaint opinions to inspect,

His knowledge to unfold

On what concerns our mutual mind,

The literature of old;

What interested scholars most,

What competitions ran

When Plato was a certainty.

And Sophocles a man;

When Sappho was a living girl,

And Beatrice wore

The gown that Dante deified.

Facts, centuries before,

He traverses familiar,

As one should come to town

And tell you all your dreams were true;

He lived where dreams were sown.

His presence is enchantment,

You beg him not to go;

Old volumes shake their vellum heads

And tantalize, just so.

XI.

Much madness is divinest sense

To a discerning eye;

Much sense the starkest madness.

‘T is the majority

In this, as all, prevails.

Assent, and you are sane;

Demur, — you’re straightway dangerous,

And handled with a chain.

XII.

I asked no other thing,

No other was denied.

I offered Being for it;

The mighty merchant smiled.

Brazil? He twirled a button,

Without a glance my way:

“But, madam, is there nothing else

That we can show to-day?”

XIII: EXCLUSION.

The soul selects her own society,

Then shuts the door;

On her divine majority

Obtrude no more.

Unmoved, she notes the chariot’s pausing

At her low gate;

Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling

Upon her mat.

I’ve known her from an ample nation

Choose one;

Then close the valves of her attention

Like stone.

XIV: THE SECRET.

Some things that fly there be, —

Birds, hours, the bumble-bee:

Of these no elegy.

Some things that stay there be, —

Grief, hills, eternity:

Nor this behooveth me.

There are, that resting, rise.

Can I expound the skies?

How still the riddle lies!

XV: THE LONELY HOUSE.

I know some lonely houses off the road

A robber ‘d like the look of, —

Wooden barred,

And windows hanging low,

Inviting to

A portico,

Where two could creep:

One hand the tools,

The other peep

To make sure all’s asleep.

Old-fashioned eyes,

Not easy to surprise!

How orderly the kitchen ‘d look by night,

With just a clock, —

But they could gag the tick,

And mice won’t bark;

And so the walls don’t tell,

None will.

A pair of spectacles ajar just stir —

An almanac’s aware.

Was it the mat winked,

Or a nervous star?

The moon slides down the stair

To see who’s there.

There’s plunder, — where?

Tankard, or spoon,

Earring, or stone,

A watch, some ancient brooch

To match the grandmamma,

Staid sleeping there.

Day rattles, too,

Stealth’s slow;

The sun has got as far

As the third sycamore.

Screams chanticleer,

“Who’s there?”

And echoes, trains away,

Sneer — “Where?”

While the old couple, just astir,

Fancy the sunrise left the door ajar!

XVI.

To fight aloud is very brave,

But gallanter, I know,

Who charge within the bosom,

The cavalry of woe.

Who win, and nations do not see,

Who fall, and none observe,

Whose dying eyes no country

Regards with patriot love.

We trust, in plumed procession,

For such the angels go,

Rank after rank, with even feet

And uniforms of snow.

XVII: DAWN.

When night is almost done,

And sunrise grows so near

That we can touch the spaces,

It ‘s time to smooth the hair

And get the dimples ready,

And wonder we could care

For that old faded midnight

That frightened but an hour.

XVIII: THE BOOK OF MARTYRS.

Read, sweet, how others strove,

Till we are stouter;

What they renounced,

Till we are less afraid;

How many times they bore

The faithful witness,

Till we are helped,

As if a kingdom cared!

Read then of faith

That shone above the fagot;

Clear strains of hymn

The river could not drown;

Brave names of men

And celestial women,

Passed out of record

Into renown!

XIX: THE MYSTERY OF PAIN.

Pain has an element of blank;

It cannot recollect

When it began, or if there were

A day when it was not.

It has no future but itself,

Its infinite realms contain

Its past, enlightened to perceive

New periods of pain.

XX.

I taste a liquor never brewed,

From tankards scooped in pearl;

Not all the vats upon the Rhine

Yield such an alcohol!

Inebriate of air am I,

And debauchee of dew,

Reeling, through endless summer days,

From inns of molten blue.

When landlords turn the drunken bee

Out of the foxglove’s door,

When butterflies renounce their drams,

I shall but drink the more!

Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,

And saints to windows run,

To see the little tippler

Leaning against the sun!

XXI: A BOOK.

He ate and drank the precious words,

His spirit grew robust;

He knew no more that he was poor,

Nor that his frame was dust.

He danced along the dingy days,

And this bequest of wings

Was but a book. What liberty

A loosened spirit brings!

XXII.

I had no time to hate, because

The grave would hinder me,

And life was not so ample I

Could finish enmity.

Nor had I time to love; but since

Some industry must be,

The little toil of love, I thought,

Was large enough for me.

XXIII: UNRETURNING.

‘T was such a little, little boat

That toddled down the bay!

‘T was such a gallant, gallant sea

That beckoned it away!

‘T was such a greedy, greedy wave

That licked it from the coast;

Nor ever guessed the stately sails

My little craft was lost!

XXIV.

Whether my bark went down at sea,

Whether she met with gales,

Whether to isles enchanted

She bent her docile sails;

By what mystic mooring

She is held to-day, —

This is the errand of the eye

Out upon the bay.

XXV.

Belshazzar had a letter, —

He never had but one;

Belshazzar’s correspondent

Concluded and begun

In that immortal copy

The conscience of us all

Can read without its glasses

On revelation’s wall.

XXVI.

The brain within its groove

Runs evenly and true;

But let a splinter swerve,

‘T were easier for you

To put the water back

When floods have slit the hills,

And scooped a turnpike for themselves,

And blotted out the mills!

Part Two: Love

I: MINE.

Mine by the right of the white election!

Mine by the royal seal!

Mine by the sign in the scarlet prison

Bars cannot conceal!

Mine, here in vision and in veto!

Mine, by the grave’s repeal

Titled, confirmed, — delirious charter!

Mine, while the ages steal!

II: BEQUEST.

You left me, sweet, two legacies, —

A legacy of love

A Heavenly Father would content,

Had He the offer of;

You left me boundaries of pain

Capacious as the sea,

Between eternity and time,

Your consciousness and me.

III.

Alter? When the hills do.

Falter? When the sun

Question if his glory

Be the perfect one.

Surfeit? When the daffodil

Doth of the dew:

Even as herself, O friend!

I will of you!

IV: SUSPENSE.

Elysium is as far as to

The very nearest room,

If in that room a friend await

Felicity or doom.

What fortitude the soul contains,

That it can so endure

The accent of a coming foot,

The opening of a door!

V: SURRENDER.

Doubt me, my dim companion!

Why, God would be content

With but a fraction of the love

Poured thee without a stint.

The whole of me, forever,

What more the woman can, —

Say quick, that I may dower thee

With last delight I own!

It cannot be my spirit,

For that was thine before;

I ceded all of dust I knew, —

What opulence the more

Had I, a humble maiden,

Whose farthest of degree

Was that she might,

Some distant heaven,

Dwell timidly with thee!

VI.

If you were coming in the fall,

I'd brush the summer by

With half a smile and half a spurn,

As housewives do a fly.

If I could see you in a year,

I'd wind the months in balls,

And put them each in separate drawers,

Until their time befalls.

If only centuries delayed,

I'd count them on my hand,

Subtracting till my fingers dropped

Into Van Diemen's land.

If certain, when this life was out,

That yours and mine should be,

I’d toss it yonder like a rind,

And taste eternity.

But now, all ignorant of the length

Of time’s uncertain wing,

It goads me, like the goblin bee,

That will not state its sting.

VII: WITH A FLOWER.

I hide myself within my flower,

That wearing on your breast,

You, unsuspecting, wear me too —

And angels know the rest.

I hide myself within my flower,

That, fading from your vase,

You, unsuspecting, feel for me

Almost a loneliness.

VIII: PROOF.

That I did always love,

I bring thee proof:

That till I loved

I did not love enough.

That I shall love alway,

I offer thee

That love is life,

And life hath immortality.

This, dost thou doubt, sweet?

Then have I

Nothing to show

But Calvary.

IX.

Have you got a brook in your little heart,

Where bashful flowers blow,

And blushing birds go down to drink,

And shadows tremble so?

And nobody knows, so still it flows,

That any brook is there;

And yet your little draught of life

Is daily drunken there.

Then look out for the little brook in March,

When the rivers overflow,

And the snows come hurrying from the hills,

And the bridges often go.

And later, in August it may be,

When the meadows parching lie,

Beware, lest this little brook of life

Some burning noon go dry!

X: TRANSPLANTED.

As if some little Arctic flower,

Upon the polar hem,

Went wandering down the latitudes,

Until it puzzled came

To continents of summer,

To firmaments of sun,

To strange, bright crowds of flowers,

And birds of foreign tongue!

I say, as if this little flower

To Eden wandered in —

What then? Why, nothing, only,

Your inference therefrom!

XI: THE OUTLET.

My river runs to thee:

Blue sea, wilt welcome me?

My river waits reply.

Oh sea, look graciously!

I’ll fetch thee brooks

From spotted nooks, —

Say, sea,

Take me!

XII: IN VAIN.

I cannot live with you,

It would be life,

And life is over there

Behind the shelf

The sexton keeps the key to,

Putting up

Our life, his porcelain,

Like a cup

Discarded of the housewife,

Quaint or broken;

A newer Sevres pleases,

Old ones crack.

I could not die with you,

For one must wait

To shut the other’s gaze down, —

You could not.

And I, could I stand by

And see you freeze,

Without my right of frost,

Death’s privilege?

Nor could I rise with you,

Because your face

Would put out Jesus’,

That new grace

Glow plain and foreign

On my homesick eye,

Except that you, than he

Shone closer by.

They’d judge us — how?

For you served Heaven, you know,

Or sought to;

I could not,

Because you saturated sight,

And I had no more eyes

For sordid excellence

As Paradise.

And were you lost, I would be,

Though my name

Rang loudest

On the heavenly fame.

And were you saved,

And I condemned to be

Where you were not,

That self were hell to me.

So we must keep apart,

You there, I here,

With just the door ajar

That oceans are,

And prayer,

And that pale sustenance,

Despair!

XIII: RENUNCIATION.

There came a day at summer’s full

Entirely for me;

I thought that such were for the saints,

Where revelations be.

The sun, as common, went abroad,

The flowers, accustomed, blew,

As if no soul the solstice passed

That maketh all things new.

The time was scarce profaned by speech;

The symbol of a word

Was needless, as at sacrament

The wardrobe of our Lord.

Each was to each the sealed church,

Permitted to commune this time,

Lest we too awkward show

At supper of the Lamb.

The hours slid fast, as hours will,

Clutched tight by greedy hands;

So faces on two decks look back,

Bound to opposing lands.

And so, when all the time had failed,

Without external sound,

Each bound the other’s crucifix,

We gave no other bond.

Sufficient troth that we shall rise —

Deposed, at length, the grave —

To that new marriage, justified

Through Calvaries of Love!

XIV: LOVE’S BAPTISM.

I’m ceded, I’ve stopped being theirs;

The name they dropped upon my face

With water, in the country church,

Is finished using now,

And they can put it with my dolls,

My childhood, and the string of spools

I’ve finished threading too.

Baptized before without the choice,

But this time consciously, of grace

Unto supremest name,

Called to my full, the crescent dropped,

Existence’s whole arc filled up

With one small diadem.

My second rank, too small the first,

Crowned, crowing on my father’s breast,

A half unconscious queen;

But this time, adequate, erect,

With will to choose or to reject.

And I choose — just a throne.

XV: RESURRECTION.

‘T was a long parting, but the time

For interview had come;

Before the judgment-seat of God,

The last and second time

These fleshless lovers met,

A heaven in a gaze,

A heaven of heavens, the privilege

Of one another’s eyes.

No lifetime set on them,

Apparelled as the new

Unborn, except they had beheld,

Born everlasting now.

Was bridal e’er like this?

A paradise, the host,

And cherubim and seraphim

The most familiar guest.

XVI: APOCALYPSE.

I’m wife; I’ve finished that,

That other state;

I’m Czar, I’m woman now:

It’s safer so.

How odd the girl’s life looks

Behind this soft eclipse!

I think that earth seems so

To those in heaven now.

This being comfort, then

That other kind was pain;

But why compare?

I’m wife! stop there!

XVII: THE WIFE.

She rose to his requirement, dropped

The playthings of her life

To take the honorable work

Of woman and of wife.

If aught she missed in her new day

Of amplitude, or awe,

Or first prospective, or the gold

In using wore away,

It lay unmentioned, as the sea

Develops pearl and weed,

But only to himself is known

The fathoms they abide.

XVIII: APOTHEOSIS.

Come slowly, Eden!

Lips unused to thee,

Bashful, sip thy jasmines,

As the fainting bee,

Reaching late his flower,

Round her chamber hums,

Counts his nectars — enters,

And is lost in balms!

Part Three: Nature

I.

New feet within my garden go,

New fingers stir the sod;

A troubadour upon the elm

Betrays the solitude.

New children play upon the green,

New weary sleep below;

And still the pensive spring returns,

And still the punctual snow!

II: MAY-FLOWER.

Pink, small, and punctual,

Aromatic, low,

Covert in April,

Candid in May,

Dear to the moss,

Known by the knoll,

Next to the robin

In every human soul.

Bold little beauty,

Bedecked with thee,

Nature forswears

Antiquity.

III: WHY?

The murmur of a bee

A witchcraft yieldeth me.

If any ask me why,

‘T were easier to die

Than tell.

The red upon the hill

Taketh away my will;

If anybody sneer,

Take care, for God is here,

That’s all.

The breaking of the day

Addeth to my degree;

If any ask me how,

Artist, who drew me so,

Must tell!

IV.

Perhaps you’d like to buy a flower?

But I could never sell.

If you would like to borrow

Until the daffodil

Unties her yellow bonnet

Beneath the village door,

Until the bees, from clover rows

Their hock and sherry draw,

Why, I will lend until just then,

But not an hour more!

V.

The pedigree of honey

Does not concern the bee;

A clover, any time, to him

Is aristocracy.

VI: A SERVICE OF SONG.

Some keep the Sabbath going to church;

I keep it staying at home,

With a bobolink for a chorister,

And an orchard for a dome.

Some keep the Sabbath in surplice;

I just wear my wings,

And instead of tolling the bell for church,

Our little sexton sings.

God preaches, — a noted clergyman, —

And the sermon is never long;

So instead of getting to heaven at last,

I’m going all along!

VII.

The bee is not afraid of me,

I know the butterfly;

The pretty people in the woods

Receive me cordially.

The brooks laugh louder when I come,

The breezes madder play.

Wherefore, mine eyes, thy silver mists?

Wherefore, O summer’s day?

VIII: SUMMER’S ARMIES.

Some rainbow coming from the fair!

Some vision of the world Cashmere

I confidently see!

Or else a peacock’s purple train,

Feather by feather, on the plain

Fritters itself away!

The dreamy butterflies bestir,

Lethargic pools resume the whir

Of last year’s sundered tune.

From some old fortress on the sun

Baronial bees march, one by one,

In murmuring platoon!

The robins stand as thick to-day

As flakes of snow stood yesterday,

On fence and roof and twig.

The orchis binds her feather on

For her old lover, Don the Sun,

Revisiting the bog!

Without commander, countless, still,

The regiment of wood and hill

In bright detachment stand.

Behold! Whose multitudes are these?

The children of whose turbaned seas,

Or what Circassian land?

IX: THE GRASS.

The grass so little has to do, —

A sphere of simple green,

With only butterflies to brood,

And bees to entertain,

And stir all day to pretty tunes

The breezes fetch along,

And hold the sunshine in its lap

And bow to everything;

And thread the dews all night, like pearls,

And make itself so fine, —

A duchess were too common

For such a noticing.

And even when it dies, to pass

In odors so divine,

As lowly spices gone to sleep,

Or amulets of pine.

And then to dwell in sovereign barns,

And dream the days away, —

The grass so little has to do,

I wish I were the hay!

X.

A little road not made of man,

Enabled of the eye,

Accessible to thill of bee,

Or cart of butterfly.

If town it have, beyond itself,

‘T is that I cannot say;

I only sigh, — no vehicle

Bears me along that way.

XI: SUMMER SHOWER.

A drop fell on the apple tree,

Another on the roof;

A half a dozen kissed the eaves,

And made the gables laugh.

A few went out to help the brook,

That went to help the sea.

Myself conjectured, Were they pearls,

What necklaces could be!

The dust replaced in hoisted roads,

The birds jocoser sung;

The sunshine threw his hat away,

The orchards spangles hung.

The breezes brought dejected lutes,

And bathed them in the glee;

The East put out a single flag,

And signed the fete away.

XII: PSALM OF THE DAY.

A something in a summer’s day,

As slow her flambeaux burn away,

Which solemnizes me.

A something in a summer’s noon, —

An azure depth, a wordless tune,

Transcending ecstasy.

And still within a summer’s night

A something so transporting bright,

I clap my hands to see;

Then veil my too inspecting face,

Lest such a subtle, shimmering grace

Flutter too far for me.

The wizard-fingers never rest,

The purple brook within the breast

Still chafes its narrow bed;

Still rears the East her amber flag,

Guides still the sun along the crag

His caravan of red,

Like flowers that heard the tale of dews,

But never deemed the dripping prize

Awaited their low brows;

Or bees, that thought the summer’s name

Some rumor of delirium

No summer could for them;

Or Arctic creature, dimly stirred

By tropic hint, — some travelled bird

Imported to the wood;

Or wind’s bright signal to the ear,

Making that homely and severe,

Contented, known, before

The heaven unexpected came,

To lives that thought their worshipping

A too presumptuous psalm.

XIII: THE SEA OF SUNSET.

This is the land the sunset washes,

These are the banks of the Yellow Sea;

Where it rose, or whither it rushes,

These are the western mystery!

Night after night her purple traffic

Strews the landing with opal bales;

Merchantmen poise upon horizons,

Dip, and vanish with fairy sails.

XIV: PURPLE CLOVER.

There is a flower that bees prefer,

And butterflies desire;

To gain the purple democrat

The humming-birds aspire.

And whatsoever insect pass,

A honey bears away

Proportioned to his several dearth

And her capacity.

Her face is rounder than the moon,

And ruddier than the gown

Of orchis in the pasture,

Or rhododendron worn.

She doth not wait for June;

Before the world is green

Her sturdy little countenance

Against the wind is seen,

Contending with the grass,

Near kinsman to herself,

For privilege of sod and sun,

Sweet litigants for life.

And when the hills are full,

And newer fashions blow,

Doth not retract a single spice

For pang of jealousy.

Her public is the noon,

Her providence the sun,

Her progress by the bee proclaimed

In sovereign, swerveless tune.

The bravest of the host,

Surrendering the last,

Nor even of defeat aware

When cancelled by the frost.

XV: THE BEE.

Like trains of cars on tracks of plush

I hear the level bee:

A jar across the flowers goes,

Their velvet masonry

Withstands until the sweet assault

Their chivalry consumes,

While he, victorious, tilts away

To vanquish other blooms.

His feet are shod with gauze,

His helmet is of gold;

His breast, a single onyx

With chrysoprase, inlaid.

His labor is a chant,

His idleness a tune;

Oh, for a bee’s experience

Of clovers and of noon!

XVI.

Presentiment is that long shadow on the lawn

Indicative that suns go down;

The notice to the startled grass

That darkness is about to pass.

XVII.

As children bid the guest good-night,

And then reluctant turn,

My flowers raise their pretty lips,

Then put their nightgowns on.

As children caper when they wake,

Merry that it is morn,

My flowers from a hundred cribs

Will peep, and prance again.

XVIII.

Angels in the early morning

May be seen the dews among,

Stooping, plucking, smiling, flying:

Do the buds to them belong?

Angels when the sun is hottest

May be seen the sands among,

Stooping, plucking, sighing, flying;

Parched the flowers they bear along.

XIX.

So bashful when I spied her,

So pretty, so ashamed!

So hidden in her leaflets,

Lest anybody find;

So breathless till I passed her,

So helpless when I turned

And bore her, struggling, blushing,

Her simple haunts beyond!

For whom I robbed the dingle,

For whom betrayed the dell,

Many will doubtless ask me,

But I shall never tell!

XX: TWO WORLDS.

It makes no difference abroad,

The seasons fit the same,

The mornings blossom into noons,

And split their pods of flame.

Wild-flowers kindle in the woods,

The brooks brag all the day;

No blackbird bates his jargoning

For passing Calvary.

Auto-da-fe and judgment

Are nothing to the bee;

His separation from his rose

To him seems misery.

XXI: THE MOUNTAIN.

The mountain sat upon the plain

In his eternal chair,

His observation omnifold,

His inquest everywhere.

The seasons prayed around his knees,

Like children round a sire:

Grandfather of the days is he,

Of dawn the ancestor.

XXII: A DAY.

I’ll tell you how the sun rose, —

A ribbon at a time.

The steeples swam in amethyst,

The news like squirrels ran.

The hills untied their bonnets,

The bobolinks begun.

Then I said softly to myself,

“That must have been the sun!”

* * *

But how he set, I know not.

There seemed a purple stile

Which little yellow boys and girls

Were climbing all the while

Till when they reached the other side,

A dominie in gray

Put gently up the evening bars,

And led the flock away.

XXIII.

The butterfly’s assumption-gown,

In chrysoprase apartments hung,

  This afternoon put on.

How condescending to descend,

And be of buttercups the friend

  In a New England town!

XXIV: THE WIND.

Of all the sounds despatched abroad,

There’s not a charge to me

Like that old measure in the boughs,

That phraseless melody

The wind does, working like a hand

Whose fingers brush the sky,

Then quiver down, with tufts of tune

Permitted gods and me.

When winds go round and round in bands,

And thrum upon the door,

And birds take places overhead,

To bear them orchestra,

I crave him grace, of summer boughs,

If such an outcast be,

He never heard that fleshless chant

Rise solemn in the tree,

As if some caravan of sound

On deserts, in the sky,

Had broken rank,

Then knit, and passed

In seamless company.

XXV: DEATH AND LIFE.

Apparently with no surprise

To any happy flower,

The frost beheads it at its play

In accidental power.

The blond assassin passes on,

The sun proceeds unmoved

To measure off another day

For an approving God.

XXVI.

‘T was later when the summer went

Than when the cricket came,

And yet we knew that gentle clock

Meant nought but going home.

‘T was sooner when the cricket went

Than when the winter came,

Yet that pathetic pendulum

Keeps esoteric time.

XXVII: INDIAN SUMMER.

These are the days when birds come back,

A very few, a bird or two,

To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies put on

The old, old sophistries of June, —

A blue and gold mistake.

Oh, fraud that cannot cheat the bee,

Almost thy plausibility

Induces my belief,

Till ranks of seeds their witness bear,

And softly through the altered air

Hurries a timid leaf!

Oh, sacrament of summer days,

Oh, last communion in the haze,

Permit a child to join,

Thy sacred emblems to partake,

Thy consecrated bread to break,

Taste thine immortal wine!

XXVIII: AUTUMN.

The morns are meeker than they were,

The nuts are getting brown;

The berry’s cheek is plumper,

The rose is out of town.

The maple wears a gayer scarf,

The field a scarlet gown.

Lest I should be old-fashioned,

I’ll put a trinket on.

XXIX: BECLOUDED.

The sky is low, the clouds are mean,

A travelling flake of snow

Across a barn or through a rut

Debates if it will go.

A narrow wind complains all day

How some one treated him;

Nature, like us, is sometimes caught

Without her diadem.

XXX: THE HEMLOCK.

I think the hemlock likes to stand

Upon a marge of snow;

It suits his own austerity,

And satisfies an awe

That men must slake in wilderness,

Or in the desert cloy, —

An instinct for the hoar, the bald,

Lapland’s necessity.

The hemlock’s nature thrives on cold;

The gnash of northern winds

Is sweetest nutriment to him,

His best Norwegian wines.

To satin races he is nought;

But children on the Don

Beneath his tabernacles play,

And Dnieper wrestlers run.

XXXI.

There’s a certain slant of light,

On winter afternoons,

That oppresses, like the weight

Of cathedral tunes.

Heavenly hurt it gives us;

We can find no scar,

But internal difference

Where the meanings are.

None may teach it anything,

‘ T is the seal, despair, —

An imperial affliction

Sent us of the air.

When it comes, the landscape listens,

Shadows hold their breath;

When it goes, ‘t is like the distance

On the look of death.

Part 4: TIME AND ETERNITY.

I.

One dignity delays for all,

One mitred afternoon.

None can avoid this purple,

None evade this crown.

Coach it insures, and footmen,

Chamber and state and throng;

Bells, also, in the village,

As we ride grand along.

What dignified attendants,

What service when we pause!

How loyally at parting

Their hundred hats they raise!

How pomp surpassing ermine,

When simple you and I

Present our meek escutcheon,

And claim the rank to die!

II: TOO LATE.

Delayed till she had ceased to know,

Delayed till in its vest of snow

  Her loving bosom lay.

An hour behind the fleeting breath,

Later by just an hour than death, —

  Oh, lagging yesterday!

Could she have guessed that it would be;

Could but a crier of the glee

  Have climbed the distant hill;

Had not the bliss so slow a pace, —

Who knows but this surrendered face

  Were undefeated still?

Oh, if there may departing be

Any forgot by victory

In her imperial round,

Show them this meek apparelled thing,

That could not stop to be a king,

Doubtful if it be crowned!

III: ASTRA CASTRA.

Departed to the judgment,

A mighty afternoon;

Great clouds like ushers leaning,

Creation looking on.

The flesh surrendered, cancelled,

The bodiless begun;

Two worlds, like audiences, disperse

And leave the soul alone.

IV.

Safe in their alabaster chambers,

Untouched by morning and untouched by noon,

Sleep the meek members of the resurrection,

Rafter of satin, and roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze in her castle of sunshine;

Babbles the bee in a stolid ear;

Pipe the sweet birds in ignorant cadence, —

Ah, what sagacity perished here!

Grand go the years in the crescent above them;

Worlds scoop their arcs, and firmaments row,

Diadems drop and Doges surrender,

Soundless as dots on a disk of snow.

V.

On this long storm the rainbow rose,

On this late morn the sun;

The clouds, like listless elephants,

Horizons straggled down.

The birds rose smiling in their nests,

The gales indeed were done;

Alas! how heedless were the eyes

On whom the summer shone!

The quiet nonchalance of death

No daybreak can bestir;

The slow archangel’s syllables

Must awaken her.

VI: FROM THE CHRYSALIS.

My cocoon tightens, colors tease,

I’m feeling for the air;

A dim capacity for wings

Degrades the dress I wear.

A power of butterfly must be

The aptitude to fly,

Meadows of majesty concedes

And easy sweeps of sky.

So I must baffle at the hint

And cipher at the sign,

And make much blunder, if at last

I take the clew divine.

VII: SETTING SAIL.

Exultation is the going

Of an inland soul to sea, —

Past the houses, past the headlands,

Into deep eternity!

Bred as we, among the mountains,

Can the sailor understand

The divine intoxication

Of the first league out from land?

VIII.

Look back on time with kindly eyes,

He doubtless did his best;

How softly sinks his trembling sun

In human nature’s west!

IX.

A train went through a burial gate,

A bird broke forth and sang,

And trilled, and quivered, and shook his throat

Till all the churchyard rang;

And then adjusted his little notes,

And bowed and sang again.

Doubtless, he thought it meet of him

To say good-by to men.

X.

I died for beauty, but was scarce

Adjusted in the tomb,

When one who died for truth was lain

In an adjoining room.

He questioned softly why I failed?

“For beauty,” I replied.

“And I for truth, — the two are one;

We brethren are,” he said.

And so, as kinsmen met a night,

We talked between the rooms,

Until the moss had reached our lips,

And covered up our names.

XI: ‘TROUBLED ABOUT MANY THINGS.’

How many times these low feet staggered,

Only the soldered mouth can tell;

Try! can you stir the awful rivet?

Try! can you lift the hasps of steel?

Stroke the cool forehead, hot so often,

Lift, if you can, the listless hair;

Handle the adamantine fingers

Never a thimble more shall wear.

Buzz the dull flies on the chamber window;

Brave shines the sun through the freckled pane;

Fearless the cobweb swings from the ceiling —

Indolent housewife, in daisies lain!

XII: REAL.

I like a look of agony,

Because I know it ‘s true;

Men do not sham convulsion,

Nor simulate a throe.

The eyes glaze once, and that is death.

Impossible to feign

The beads upon the forehead

By homely anguish strung.

XIII: THE FUNERAL.

That short, potential stir

That each can make but once,

That bustle so illustrious

‘T is almost consequence,

Is the eclat of death.

Oh, thou unknown renown

That not a beggar would accept,

Had he the power to spurn!

XIV.

I went to thank her,

But she slept;

Her bed a funnelled stone,

With nosegays at the head and foot,

That travellers had thrown,

Who went to thank her;

But she slept.

‘T was short to cross the sea

To look upon her like, alive,

But turning back ‘t was slow.

XV.

I’ve seen a dying eye

Run round and round a room

In search of something, as it seemed,

Then cloudier become;

And then, obscure with fog,

And then be soldered down,

Without disclosing what it be,

‘T were blessed to have seen.

XVI: REFUGE.

The clouds their backs together laid,

The north begun to push,

The forests galloped till they fell,

The lightning skipped like mice;

The thunder crumbled like a stuff —

How good to be safe in tombs,

Where nature’s temper cannot reach,

Nor vengeance ever comes!

XVII.

I never saw a moor,

I never saw the sea;

Yet know I how the heather looks,

And what a wave must be.

I never spoke with God,

Nor visited in heaven;

Yet certain am I of the spot

As if the chart were given.

XVIII: PLAYMATES.

God permits industrious angels

Afternoons to play.

I met one, — forgot my school-mates,

All, for him, straightway.

God calls home the angels promptly

At the setting sun;

I missed mine. How dreary marbles,

After playing Crown!

XIX.

To know just how he suffered would be dear;

To know if any human eyes were near

To whom he could intrust his wavering gaze,

Until it settled firm on Paradise.

To know if he was patient, part content,

Was dying as he thought, or different;

Was it a pleasant day to die,

And did the sunshine face his way?

What was his furthest mind, of home, or God,

Or what the distant say

At news that he ceased human nature

On such a day?

And wishes, had he any?

Just his sigh, accented,

Had been legible to me.

And was he confident until

Ill fluttered out in everlasting well?

And if he spoke, what name was best,

What first,

What one broke off with

At the drowsiest?

Was he afraid, or tranquil?

Might he know

How conscious consciousness could grow,

Till love that was, and love too blest to be,

Meet — and the junction be Eternity?

XX.

The last night that she lived,

It was a common night,

Except the dying; this to us

Made nature different.

We noticed smallest things, —

Things overlooked before,

By this great light upon our minds

Italicized, as ‘t were.

That others could exist

While she must finish quite,

A jealousy for her arose

So nearly infinite.

We waited while she passed;

It was a narrow time,

Too jostled were our souls to speak,

At length the notice came.

She mentioned, and forgot;

Then lightly as a reed

Bent to the water, shivered scarce,

Consented, and was dead.

And we, we placed the hair,

And drew the head erect;

And then an awful leisure was,

Our faith to regulate.

XXI: THE FIRST LESSON.

Not in this world to see his face

Sounds long, until I read the place

Where this is said to be

But just the primer to a life

Unopened, rare, upon the shelf,

Clasped yet to him and me.

And yet, my primer suits me so

I would not choose a book to know

Than that, be sweeter wise;

Might some one else so learned be,

And leave me just my A B C,

Himself could have the skies.

XXII.

The bustle in a house

The morning after death

Is solemnest of industries

Enacted upon earth, —

The sweeping up the heart,

And putting love away

We shall not want to use again

Until eternity.

XXIII.

I reason, earth is short,

And anguish absolute,

And many hurt;

But what of that?

I reason, we could die:

The best vitality

Cannot excel decay;

But what of that?

I reason that in heaven

Somehow, it will be even,

Some new equation given;

But what of that?

XXIV.

Afraid? Of whom am I afraid?

Not death; for who is he?

The porter of my father’s lodge

As much abasheth me.

Of life? ‘T were odd I fear a thing

That comprehendeth me

In one or more existences

At Deity’s decree.

Of resurrection? Is the east

Afraid to trust the morn

With her fastidious forehead?

As soon impeach my crown!

XXV: DYING.

The sun kept setting, setting still;

No hue of afternoon

Upon the village I perceived, —

From house to house ‘t was noon.

The dusk kept dropping, dropping still;

No dew upon the grass,

But only on my forehead stopped,

And wandered in my face.

My feet kept drowsing, drowsing still,

My fingers were awake;

Yet why so little sound myself

Unto my seeming make?

How well I knew the light before!

I could not see it now.

‘T is dying, I am doing; but

I’m not afraid to know.

XXVI.

Two swimmers wrestled on the spar

Until the morning sun,

When one turned smiling to the land.

O God, the other one!

The stray ships passing spied a face

Upon the waters borne,

With eyes in death still begging raised,

And hands beseeching thrown.

XXVII: THE CHARIOT.

Because I could not stop for Death,

He kindly stopped for me;

The carriage held but just ourselves

And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,

And I had put away

My labor, and my leisure too,

For his civility.

We passed the school where children played,

Their lessons scarcely done;

We passed the fields of gazing grain,

We passed the setting sun.

We paused before a house that seemed

A swelling of the ground;

The roof was scarcely visible,

The cornice but a mound.

Since then ‘t is centuries; but each

Feels shorter than the day

I first surmised the horses’ heads

Were toward eternity.

XXVIII.

She went as quiet as the dew

From a familiar flower.

Not like the dew did she return

At the accustomed hour!

She dropt as softly as a star

From out my summer’s eve;

Less skilful than Leverrier

It’s sorer to believe!

XXIX: RESURGAM.

At last to be identified!

At last, the lamps upon thy side,

The rest of life to see!

Past midnight, past the morning star!

Past sunrise! Ah! what leagues there are

Between our feet and day!

XXX.

Except to heaven, she is nought;

Except for angels, lone;

Except to some wide-wandering bee,

A flower superfluous blown;

Except for winds, provincial;

Except by butterflies,

Unnoticed as a single dew

That on the acre lies.

The smallest housewife in the grass,

Yet take her from the lawn,

And somebody has lost the face

That made existence home!

XXXI.

Death is a dialogue between

The spirit and the dust.

“Dissolve,” says Death. The Spirit, “Sir,

I have another trust.”

Death doubts it, argues from the ground.

The Spirit turns away,

Just laying off, for evidence,

An overcoat of clay.

XXXII.

It was too late for man,

But early yet for God;

Creation impotent to help,

But prayer remained our side.

How excellent the heaven,

When earth cannot be had;

How hospitable, then, the face

Of our old neighbor, God!

XXXIII: ALONG THE POTOMAC.

When I was small, a woman died.

To-day her only boy

Went up from the Potomac,

His face all victory,

To look at her; how slowly

The seasons must have turned

Till bullets clipt an angle,

And he passed quickly round!

If pride shall be in Paradise

I never can decide;

Of their imperial conduct,

No person testified.

But proud in apparition,

That woman and her boy

Pass back and forth before my brain,

As ever in the sky.

XXXIV.

The daisy follows soft the sun,

And when his golden walk is done,

Sits shyly at his feet.

He, waking, finds the flower near.

“Wherefore, marauder, art thou here?”

“Because, sir, love is sweet!”

We are the flower, Thou the sun!

Forgive us, if as days decline,

We nearer steal to Thee, —

Enamoured of the parting west,

The peace, the flight, the amethyst,

Night’s possibility!

XXXV: EMANCIPATION.

No rack can torture me,

My soul’s at liberty

Behind this mortal bone

There knits a bolder one

You cannot prick with saw,

Nor rend with scymitar.

Two bodies therefore be;

Bind one, and one will flee.

The eagle of his nest

No easier divest

And gain the sky,

Than mayest thou,

Except thyself may be

Thine enemy;

Captivity is consciousness,

So’s liberty.

XXXVI: LOST.

I lost a world the other day.

Has anybody found?

You’ll know it by the row of stars

Around its forehead bound.

A rich man might not notice it;

Yet to my frugal eye

Of more esteem than ducats.

Oh, find it, sir, for me!

XXXVII.

If I shouldn’t be alive

When the robins come,

Give the one in red cravat

A memorial crumb.

If I couldn’t thank you,

Being just asleep,

You will know I’m trying

With my granite lip!

XXXVIII.

Sleep is supposed to be,

By souls of sanity,

The shutting of the eye.

Sleep is the station grand

Down which on either hand

The hosts of witness stand!

Morn is supposed to be,

By people of degree,

The breaking of the day.

Morning has not occurred!

That shall aurora be

East of eternity;

One with the banner gay,

One in the red array, —

That is the break of day.

XXXIX.

I shall know why, when time is over,

And I have ceased to wonder why;

Christ will explain each separate anguish

In the fair schoolroom of the sky.

He will tell me what Peter promised,

And I, for wonder at his woe,

I shall forget the drop of anguish

That scalds me now, that scalds me now.

XL.

I never lost as much but twice,

And that was in the sod;

Twice have I stood a beggar

Before the door of God!

Angels, twice descending,

Reimbursed my store.

Burglar, banker, father,

I am poor once more!

Second Series

PREFACE

The eagerness with which the first volume of Emily Dickinson's poems has been read shows very clearly that all our alleged modern artificiality does not prevent a prompt appreciation of the qualities of directness and simplicity in approaching the greatest themes,—life and love and death. That "irresistible needle-touch," as one of her best critics has called it, piercing at once the very core of a thought, has found a response as wide and sympathetic as it has been unexpected even to those who knew best her compelling power. This second volume, while open to the same criticism as to form with its predecessor, shows also the same shining beauties.

Although Emily Dickinson had been in the habit of sending occasional poems to friends and correspondents, the full extent of her writing was by no means imagined by them. Her friend "H.H." must at least have suspected it, for in a letter dated 5th September, 1884, she wrote:—

MY DEAR FRIEND,— What portfolios full of verses you must have! It is a cruel wrong to your "day and generation" that you will not give them light.

If such a thing should happen as that I should outlive you, I wish you would make me your literary legatee and executor. Surely after you are what is called "dead" you will be willing that the poor ghosts you have left behind should be cheered and pleased by your verses, will you not? You ought to be. I do not think we have a right to withhold from the world a word or a thought any more than a deed which might help a single soul. . . .

Truly yours,

HELEN JACKSON.

The "portfolios" were found, shortly after Emily Dickinson's death, by her sister and only surviving housemate. Most of the poems had been carefully copied on sheets of note-paper, and tied in little fascicules, each of six or eight sheets. While many of them bear evidence of having

been thrown off at white heat, still more had received thoughtful revision. There is the frequent addition of rather perplexing foot-notes, affording large choice of words and phrases. And in the copies which she sent to friends, sometimes one form, sometimes another, is found to have been used. Without important exception, her friends have generously placed at the disposal of the Editors any poems they had received from her; and these have given the obvious advantage of comparison among several renderings of the same verse.

To what further rigorous pruning her verses would have been subjected had she published them herself, we cannot know. They should be regarded in many cases as merely the first strong and suggestive sketches of an artist, intended to be embodied at some time in the finished picture.

Emily Dickinson appears to have written her first poems in the winter of 1862. In a letter to one of the present Editors the April following, she says, “I made no verse, but one or two, until this winter.”

The handwriting was at first somewhat like the delicate, running Italian hand of our elder gentlewomen; but as she advanced in breadth of thought, it grew bolder and more abrupt, until in her latest years each letter stood distinct and separate from its fellows. In most of her poems, particularly the later ones, everything by way of punctuation was discarded, except numerous dashes; and all important words began with capitals. The effect of a page of her more recent manuscript is exceedingly quaint and strong. The fac-simile given in the present volume is from one of the earlier transition periods. Although there is nowhere a date, the handwriting makes it possible to arrange the poems with general chronologic accuracy.

As a rule, the verses were without titles; but “A Country Burial,” “A Thunder-Storm,” “The Humming-Bird,” and a few others were named by their author, frequently at the end,—sometimes only in the accompanying note, if sent to a friend.

The variation of readings, with the fact that she often wrote in pencil and not always clearly, have at times thrown a good deal of responsibility upon her Editors. But all interference not absolutely inevitable has been avoided. The very roughness of her rendering is part of herself, and not lightly to be touched; for it seems in many cases that she intentionally avoided the smoother and more usual rhymes.

Like impressionist pictures, or Wagner's rugged music, the very absence of conventional form challenges attention. In Emily Dickinson's exacting hands, the especial, intrinsic fitness of a particular order of words might not be sacrificed to anything virtually extrinsic; and her verses all show a strange cadence of inner rhythmical music. Lines are always daringly constructed, and the "thought-rhyme" appears frequently,—appealing, indeed, to an unrecognized sense more elusive than hearing.

Emily Dickinson scrutinized everything with clear-eyed frankness. Every subject was proper ground for legitimate study, even the sombre facts of death and burial, and the unknown life beyond. She touches these themes sometimes lightly, sometimes almost humorously, more often with weird and peculiar power; but she is never by any chance frivolous or trivial. And while, as one critic has said, she may exhibit toward God "an Emersonian self-possession," it was because she looked upon all life with a candor as unprejudiced as it is rare.

She had tried society and the world, and found them lacking. She was not an invalid, and she lived in seclusion from no love-disappointment. Her life was the normal blossoming of a nature introspective to a high degree, whose best thought could not exist in pretence.

Storm, wind, the wild March sky, sunsets and dawns; the birds and bees, butterflies and flowers of her garden, with a few trusted human friends, were sufficient companionship. The coming of the first robin was a jubilee beyond crowning of monarch or birthday of pope; the first red leaf hurrying through "the altered air," an epoch. Immortality was close about her; and while never morbid or melancholy, she lived in its presence.

MABEL LOOMIS TODD.

AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS,

August, 1891.

My nosegays are for captives;

Dim, long-expectant eyes,

Fingers denied the plucking,

Patient till paradise,

To such, if they should whisper

Of morning and the moor,

They bear no other errand,

And I, no other prayer.

Part One: LIFE.

I.

I’m nobody! Who are you?

Are you nobody, too?

Then there ‘s a pair of us — don’t tell!

They ‘d banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!

How public, like a frog

To tell your name the livelong day

To an admiring bog!

II.

I bring an unaccustomed wine

To lips long parching, next to mine,

And summon them to drink.

Crackling with fever, they essay;

I turn my brimming eyes away,

And come next hour to look.

The hands still hug the tardy glass;

The lips I would have cooled, alas!

Are so superfluous cold,

I would as soon attempt to warm

The bosoms where the frost has lain

Ages beneath the mould.

Some other thirsty there may be

To whom this would have pointed me

Had it remained to speak.

And so I always bear the cup

If, haply, mine may be the drop

Some pilgrim thirst to slake, —

If, haply, any say to me,

“Unto the little, unto me,”

When I at last awake.

III.

The nearest dream recedes, unrealized.

The heaven we chase

Like the June bee

Before the school-boy

Invites the race;

Stoops to an easy clover —

Dips — evades — teases — deploys;

Then to the royal clouds

Lifts his light pinnace

Heedless of the boy

Staring, bewildered, at the mocking sky.

Homesick for steadfast honey,

Ah! the bee flies not

That brews that rare variety.

IV.

We play at paste,

Till qualified for pearl,

Then drop the paste,

And deem ourself a fool.

The shapes, though, were similar,

And our new hands

Learned gem-tactics

Practising sands.

V.

I found the phrase to every thought

I ever had, but one;

And that defies me, — as a hand

Did try to chalk the sun

To races nurtured in the dark; —

How would your own begin?

Can blaze be done in cochineal,

Or noon in mazarin?

VI: HOPE.

Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul,

And sings the tune without the words,

And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;

And sore must be the storm

That could abash the little bird

That kept so many warm.

I ‘ve heard it in the chillest land,

And on the strangest sea;

Yet, never, in extremity,

It asked a crumb of me.

VII: THE WHITE HEAT.

Dare you see a soul at the white heat?

Then crouch within the door.

Red is the fire’s common tint;

But when the vivid ore

Has sated flame’s conditions,

Its quivering substance plays

Without a color but the light

Of unanointed blaze.

Least village boasts its blacksmith,

Whose anvil’s even din

Stands symbol for the finer forge

That soundless tugs within,

Refining these impatient ores

With hammer and with blaze,

Until the designated light

Repudiate the forge.

VIII: TRIUMPHANT.

Who never lost, are unprepared

A coronet to find;

Who never thirsted, flagons

And cooling tamarind.

Who never climbed the weary league —

Can such a foot explore

The purple territories

On Pizarro’s shore?

How many legions overcome?

The emperor will say.

How many colors taken

On Revolution Day?

How many bullets bearest?

The royal scar hast thou?

Angels, write “Promoted”

On this soldier’s brow!

IX: THE TEST.

I can wade grief,

Whole pools of it, —

I ‘m used to that.

But the least push of joy

Breaks up my feet,

And I tip — drunken.

Let no pebble smile,

‘T was the new liquor, —

That was all!

Power is only pain,

Stranded, through discipline,

Till weights will hang.

Give balm to giants,

And they ‘ll wilt, like men.

Give Himmaleh, —

They ‘ll carry him!

X: ESCAPE.

I never hear the word “escape”

Without a quicker blood,

A sudden expectation,

A flying attitude.

I never hear of prisons broad

By soldiers battered down,

But I tug childish at my bars, —

Only to fail again!

XI: COMPENSATION.

For each ecstatic instant

We must an anguish pay

In keen and quivering ratio

To the ecstasy.

For each beloved hour

Sharp pittances of years,

Bitter contested farthings

And coffers heaped with tears.

XII: THE MARTYRS.

Through the straight pass of suffering

The martyrs even trod,

Their feet upon temptation,

Their faces upon God.

A stately, shriven company;

Convulsion playing round,

Harmless as streaks of meteor

Upon a planet’s bound.

Their faith the everlasting troth;

Their expectation fair;

The needle to the north degree

Wades so, through polar air.

XIII: A PRAYER.

I meant to have but modest needs,

Such as content, and heaven;

Within my income these could lie,

And life and I keep even.

But since the last included both,

It would suffice my prayer

But just for one to stipulate,

And grace would grant the pair.

And so, upon this wise I prayed, —

Great Spirit, give to me

A heaven not so large as yours,

But large enough for me.

A smile suffused Jehovah’s face;

The cherubim withdrew;

Grave saints stole out to look at me,

And showed their dimples, too.

I left the place with all my might, —

My prayer away I threw;

The quiet ages picked it up,

And Judgment twinkled, too,

That one so honest be extant

As take the tale for true

That “Whatsoever you shall ask,

Itself be given you.”

But I, grown shrewder, scan the skies

With a suspicious air, —

As children, swindled for the first,

All swindlers be, infer.

XIV.

The thought beneath so slight a film

Is more distinctly seen, —

As laces just reveal the surge,

Or mists the Apennine.

XV.

The soul unto itself

Is an imperial friend, —

Or the most agonizing spy

An enemy could send.

Secure against its own,

No treason it can fear;

Itself its sovereign, of itself

The soul should stand in awe.

XVI.

Surgeons must be very careful

When they take the knife!

Underneath their fine incisions

Stirs the culprit, — Life!

XVII: THE RAILWAY TRAIN.

I like to see it lap the miles,

And lick the valleys up,

And stop to feed itself at tanks;

And then, prodigious, step

Around a pile of mountains,

And, supercilious, peer

In shanties by the sides of roads;

And then a quarry pare

To fit its sides, and crawl between,

Complaining all the while

In horrid, hooting stanza;

Then chase itself down hill

And neigh like Boanerges;

Then, punctual as a star,

Stop — docile and omnipotent —

At its own stable door.

XVIII: THE SHOW.

The show is not the show,

But they that go.

Menagerie to me

My neighbor be.

Fair play —

Both went to see.

XIX.

Delight becomes pictorial

When viewed through pain, —

More fair, because impossible

That any gain.

The mountain at a given distance

In amber lies;

Approached, the amber flits a little, —

And that ‘s the skies!

XX.

A thought went up my mind to-day

That I have had before,

But did not finish, — some way back,

I could not fix the year,

Nor where it went, nor why it came

The second time to me,

Nor definitely what it was,

Have I the art to say.

But somewhere in my soul, I know

I ‘ve met the thing before;

It just reminded me — ‘t was all —

And came my way no more.

XXI.

Is Heaven a physician?

They say that He can heal;

But medicine posthumous

Is unavailable.

Is Heaven an exchequer?

They speak of what we owe;

But that negotiation

I ‘m not a party to.

XXII: THE RETURN.

Though I get home how late, how late!

So I get home, ‘t will compensate.

Better will be the ecstasy

That they have done expecting me,

When, night descending, dumb and dark,

They hear my unexpected knock.

Transporting must the moment be,

Brewed from decades of agony!

To think just how the fire will burn,

Just how long-cheated eyes will turn

To wonder what myself will say,

And what itself will say to me,

Beguiles the centuries of way!

XXIII.

A poor torn heart, a tattered heart,

That sat it down to rest,

Nor noticed that the ebbing day

Flowed silver to the west,

Nor noticed night did soft descend

Nor constellation burn,

Intent upon the vision

Of latitudes unknown.

The angels, happening that way,

This dusty heart espied;

Tenderly took it up from toil

And carried it to God.

There, — sandals for the barefoot;

There, — gathered from the gales,

Do the blue havens by the hand

Lead the wandering sails.

XXIV: TOO MUCH.

I should have been too glad, I see,
Too lifted for the scant degree
  Of life’s penurious round;
My little circuit would have shamed
This new circumference, have blamed
  The homelier time behind.

I should have been too saved, I see,
Too rescued; fear too dim to me
  That I could spell the prayer
I knew so perfect yesterday, —
That scalding one, “Sabachthani,”
  Recited fluent here.

Earth would have been too much, I see,

And heaven not enough for me;

I should have had the joy

Without the fear to justify, —

The palm without the Calvary;

So, Saviour, crucify.

Defeat whets victory, they say;

The reefs in old Gethsemane

Endear the shore beyond.

‘T is beggars banquets best define;

‘T is thirsting vitalizes wine, —

Faith faints to understand.

XXV: SHIPWRECK.

It tossed and tossed, —

A little brig I knew, —

O’ertook by blast,

It spun and spun,

And groped delirious, for morn.

It slipped and slipped,

As one that drunken stepped;

Its white foot tripped,

Then dropped from sight.

Ah, brig, good-night

To crew and you;

The ocean’s heart too smooth, too blue,

To break for you.

XXVI.

Victory comes late,

And is held low to freezing lips

Too rapt with frost

To take it.

How sweet it would have tasted,

Just a drop!

Was God so economical?

His table ‘s spread too high for us

Unless we dine on tip-toe.

Crumbs fit such little mouths,

Cherries suit robins;

The eagle’s golden breakfast

Strangles them.

God keeps his oath to sparrows,

Who of little love

Know how to starve!

XXVII: ENOUGH.

God gave a loaf to every bird,

But just a crumb to me;

I dare not eat it, though I starve, —

My poignant luxury

To own it, touch it, prove the feat

That made the pellet mine, —

Too happy in my sparrow chance

For ampler coveting.

It might be famine all around,

I could not miss an ear,

Such plenty smiles upon my board,

My garner shows so fair.

I wonder how the rich may feel, —

An Indiaman — an Earl?

I deem that I with but a crumb

Am sovereign of them all.

XXVIII.

Experiment to me

Is every one I meet.

If it contain a kernel?

The figure of a nut

Presents upon a tree,

Equally plausibly;

But meat within is requisite,

To squirrels and to me.

XXIX: MY COUNTRY’S WARDROBE.

My country need not change her gown,

Her triple suit as sweet

As when ‘t was cut at Lexington,

And first pronounced “a fit.”

Great Britain disapproves “the stars;”

Disparagement discreet, —

There ‘s something in their attitude

That taunts her bayonet.

XXX.

Faith is a fine invention

For gentlemen who see;

But microscopes are prudent

In an emergency!

XXXI.

Except the heaven had come so near,

So seemed to choose my door,

The distance would not haunt me so;

I had not hoped before.

But just to hear the grace depart

I never thought to see,

Afflicts me with a double loss;

‘T is lost, and lost to me.

XXXII.

Portraits are to daily faces

As an evening west

To a fine, pedantic sunshine

In a satin vest.

XXXIII: THE DUEL.

I took my power in my hand.

And went against the world;

‘T was not so much as David had,

But I was twice as bold.

I aimed my pebble, but myself

Was all the one that fell.

Was it Goliath was too large,

Or only I too small?

XXXIV.

A shady friend for torrid days

Is easier to find

Than one of higher temperature

For frigid hour of mind.

The vane a little to the east

Scares muslin souls away;

If broadcloth breasts are firmer

Than those of organdy,

Who is to blame? The weaver?

Ah! the bewildering thread!

The tapestries of paradise

So notelessly are made!

XXXV: THE GOAL.

Each life converges to some centre

Expressed or still;

Exists in every human nature

A goal,

Admitted scarcely to itself, it may be,

Too fair

For credibility’s temerity

To dare.

Adored with caution, as a brittle heaven,

To reach

Were hopeless as the rainbow’s raiment

To touch,

Yet persevered toward, surer for the distance;

How high

Unto the saints’ slow diligence

The sky!

Ungained, it may be, by a life’s low venture,

But then,

Eternity enables the endeavoring

Again.

XXXVI: SIGHT.

Before I got my eye put out,

I liked as well to see

As other creatures that have eyes,

And know no other way.

But were it told to me, to-day,

That I might have the sky

For mine, I tell you that my heart

Would split, for size of me.

The meadows mine, the mountains mine, —

All forests, stintless stars,

As much of noon as I could take

Between my finite eyes.

The motions of the dipping birds,

The lightning’s jointed road,

For mine to look at when I liked, —

The news would strike me dead!

So safer, guess, with just my soul

Upon the window-pane

Where other creatures put their eyes,

Incautious of the sun.

XXXVII.

Talk with prudence to a beggar

Of ‘Potosi’ and the mines!

Reverently to the hungry

Of your viands and your wines!

Cautious, hint to any captive

You have passed enfranchised feet!

Anecdotes of air in dungeons

Have sometimes proved deadly sweet!

XXXVIII: THE PREACHER.

He preached upon “breadth” till it argued him narrow, —

The broad are too broad to define;

And of “truth” until it proclaimed him a liar, —

The truth never flaunted a sign.

Simplicity fled from his counterfeit presence

As gold the pyrites would shun.

What confusion would cover the innocent Jesus

To meet so enabled a man!

XXXIX.

Good night! which put the candle out?

A jealous zephyr, not a doubt.

  Ah! friend, you little knew

How long at that celestial wick

The angels labored diligent;

  Extinguished, now, for you!

It might have been the lighthouse spark

Some sailor, rowing in the dark,

  Had importuned to see!

It might have been the waning lamp

That lit the drummer from the camp

  To purer reveille!

XL.

When I hoped I feared,

Since I hoped I dared;

Everywhere alone

As a church remain;

Spectre cannot harm,

Serpent cannot charm;

He deposes doom,

Who hath suffered him.

XLI: DEED.

A deed knocks first at thought,

And then it knocks at will.

That is the manufacturing spot,

And will at home and well.

It then goes out an act,

Or is entombed so still

That only to the ear of God

Its doom is audible.

XLII: TIME’S LESSON.

Mine enemy is growing old, —

I have at last revenge.

The palate of the hate departs;

If any would avenge, —

Let him be quick, the viand flits,

It is a faded meat.

Anger as soon as fed is dead;

‘T is starving makes it fat.

XLIII: REMORSE.

Remorse is memory awake,

Her companies astir, —

A presence of departed acts

At window and at door.

It’s past set down before the soul,

And lighted with a match,

Perusal to facilitate

Of its condensed despatch.

Remorse is cureless, — the disease

Not even God can heal;

For ‘t is his institution, —

The complement of hell.

XLIV: THE SHELTER.

The body grows outside, —

The more convenient way, —

That if the spirit like to hide,

Its temple stands alway

Ajar, secure, inviting;

It never did betray

The soul that asked its shelter

In timid honesty.

XLV.

Undue significance a starving man attaches

To food

Far off; he sighs, and therefore hopeless,

And therefore good.

Partaken, it relieves indeed, but proves us

That spices fly

In the receipt. It was the distance

Was savory.

XLVI.

Heart not so heavy as mine,

Wending late home,

As it passed my window

Whistled itself a tune, —

A careless snatch, a ballad,

A ditty of the street;

Yet to my irritated ear

An anodyne so sweet,

It was as if a bobolink,

Sauntering this way,

Carolled and mused and carolled,

Then bubbled slow away.

It was as if a chirping brook

Upon a toilsome way

Set bleeding feet to minuets

Without the knowing why.

To-morrow, night will come again,

Weary, perhaps, and sore.

Ah, bugle, by my window,

I pray you stroll once more!

XLVII.

I many times thought peace had come,

When peace was far away;

As wrecked men deem they sight the land

At centre of the sea,

And struggle slacker, but to prove,

As hopelessly as I,

How many the fictitious shores

Before the harbor lie.

XLVIII.

Unto my books so good to turn

Far ends of tired days;

It half endears the abstinence,

And pain is missed in praise.

As flavors cheer retarded guests

With banquetings to be,

So spices stimulate the time

Till my small library.

It may be wilderness without,

Far feet of failing men,

But holiday excludes the night,

And it is bells within.

I thank these kinsmen of the shelf;

Their countenances bland

Enamour in prospective,

And satisfy, obtained.

XLIX.

This merit hath the worst, —

It cannot be again.

When Fate hath taunted last

And thrown her furthest stone,

The maimed may pause and breathe,

And glance securely round.

The deer invites no longer

Than it eludes the hound.

L: HUNGER.

I had been hungry all the years;

My noon had come, to dine;

I, trembling, drew the table near,

And touched the curious wine.

‘T was this on tables I had seen,

When turning, hungry, lone,

I looked in windows, for the wealth

I could not hope to own.

I did not know the ample bread,

‘T was so unlike the crumb

The birds and I had often shared

In Nature’s dining-room.

The plenty hurt me, ‘t was so new, —

Myself felt ill and odd,

As berry of a mountain bush

Transplanted to the road.

Nor was I hungry; so I found

That hunger was a way

Of persons outside windows,

The entering takes away.

LI.

I gained it so,

By climbing slow,

By catching at the twigs that grow

Between the bliss and me.

It hung so high,

As well the sky

Attempt by strategy.

I said I gained it, —

This was all.

Look, how I clutch it,

Lest it fall,

And I a pauper go;

Unfitted by an instant’s grace

For the contented beggar’s face

I wore an hour ago.

LII.

To learn the transport by the pain,

As blind men learn the sun;

To die of thirst, suspecting

That brooks in meadows run;

To stay the homesick, homesick feet

Upon a foreign shore

Haunted by native lands, the while,

And blue, beloved air —

This is the sovereign anguish,

This, the signal woe!

These are the patient laureates

Whose voices, trained below,

Ascend in ceaseless carol,

Inaudible, indeed,

To us, the duller scholars

Of the mysterious bard!

LIII: RETURNING.

I years had been from home,

And now, before the door,

I dared not open, lest a face

I never saw before

Stare vacant into mine

And ask my business there.

My business, — just a life I left,

Was such still dwelling there?

I fumbled at my nerve,

I scanned the windows near;

The silence like an ocean rolled,

And broke against my ear.

I laughed a wooden laugh

That I could fear a door,

Who danger and the dead had faced,

But never quaked before.

I fitted to the latch

My hand, with trembling care,

Lest back the awful door should spring,

And leave me standing there.

I moved my fingers off

As cautiously as glass,

And held my ears, and like a thief

Fled gasping from the house.

LIV: PRAYER.

Prayer is the little implement

Through which men reach

Where presence is denied them.

They fling their speech

By means of it in God’s ear;

If then He hear,

This sums the apparatus

Comprised in prayer.

LV.

I know that he exists

Somewhere, in silence.

He has hid his rare life

From our gross eyes.

‘T is an instant’s play,

‘T is a fond ambush,

Just to make bliss

Earn her own surprise!

But should the play

Prove piercing earnest,

Should the glee glaze

In death’s stiff stare,

Would not the fun

Look too expensive?

Would not the jest

Have crawled too far?

LVI: MELODIES UNHEARD.

Musicians wrestle everywhere:

All day, among the crowded air,

I hear the silver strife;

And — waking long before the dawn —

Such transport breaks upon the town

I think it that “new life!”

It is not bird, it has no nest;

Nor band, in brass and scarlet dressed,

Nor tambourine, nor man;

It is not hymn from pulpit read, —

The morning stars the treble led

On time’s first afternoon!

Some say it is the spheres at play!

Some say that bright majority

Of vanished dames and men!

Some think it service in the place

Where we, with late, celestial face,

Please God, shall ascertain!

LVII: CALLED BACK.

Just lost when I was saved!

Just felt the world go by!

Just girt me for the onset with eternity,

When breath blew back,

And on the other side

I heard recede the disappointed tide!

Therefore, as one returned, I feel,

Odd secrets of the line to tell!

Some sailor, skirting foreign shores,

Some pale reporter from the awful doors

Before the seal!

Next time, to stay!

Next time, the things to see

By ear unheard,

Unscrutinized by eye.

Next time, to tarry,

While the ages steal, —

Slow tramp the centuries,

And the cycles wheel.

Part 2: Love

I: CHOICE.

Of all the souls that stand create

I have elected one.

When sense from spirit files away,

And subterfuge is done;

When that which is and that which was

Apart, intrinsic, stand,

And this brief tragedy of flesh

Is shifted like a sand;

When figures show their royal front

And mists are carved away, —

Behold the atom I preferred

To all the lists of clay!

II.

I have no life but this,

To lead it here;

Nor any death, but lest

Dispelled from there;

Nor tie to earths to come,

Nor action new,

Except through this extent,

The realm of you.

III.

Your riches taught me poverty.

Myself a millionnaire

In little wealths, — as girls could boast, —

Till broad as Buenos Ayre,

You drifted your dominions

A different Peru;

And I esteemed all poverty,

For life’s estate with you.

Of mines I little know, myself,

But just the names of gems, —

The colors of the commonest;

And scarce of diadems

So much that, did I meet the queen,

Her glory I should know:

But this must be a different wealth,

To miss it beggars so.

I ‘m sure ‘t is India all day

To those who look on you

Without a stint, without a blame, —

Might I but be the Jew!

I ‘m sure it is Golconda,

Beyond my power to deem, —

To have a smile for mine each day,

How better than a gem!

At least, it solaces to know

That there exists a gold,

Although I prove it just in time

Its distance to behold!

It ‘s far, far treasure to surmise,

And estimate the pearl

That slipped my simple fingers through

While just a girl at school!

IV: THE CONTRACT.

I gave myself to him,

And took himself for pay.

The solemn contract of a life

Was ratified this way.

The wealth might disappoint,

Myself a poorer prove

Than this great purchaser suspect,

The daily own of Love

Depreciate the vision;

But, till the merchant buy,

Still fable, in the isles of spice,

The subtle cargoes lie.

At least, ‘t is mutual risk, —

Some found it mutual gain;

Sweet debt of Life, — each night to owe,

Insolvent, every noon.

V: THE LETTER.

“Going to him! Happy letter! Tell him —

Tell him the page I didn’t write;

Tell him I only said the syntax,

And left the verb and the pronoun out.

Tell him just how the fingers hurried,

Then how they waded, slow, slow, slow;

And then you wished you had eyes in your pages,

So you could see what moved them so.

“Tell him it wasn’t a practised writer,

You guessed, from the way the sentence toiled;

You could hear the bodice tug, behind you,

As if it held but the might of a child;

You almost pitied it, you, it worked so.

Tell him — No, you may quibble there,

For it would split his heart to know it,

And then you and I were silenter.

“Tell him night finished before we finished,

And the old clock kept neighing ‘day!’

And you got sleepy and begged to be ended —

What could it hinder so, to say?

Tell him just how she sealed you, cautious,

But if he ask where you are hid

Until to-morrow, — happy letter!

Gesture, coquette, and shake your head!”

VI.

The way I read a letter ‘s this:

‘T is first I lock the door,

And push it with my fingers next,

For transport it be sure.

And then I go the furthest off

To counteract a knock;

Then draw my little letter forth

And softly pick its lock.

Then, glancing narrow at the wall,

And narrow at the floor,

For firm conviction of a mouse

Not exorcised before,

Peruse how infinite I am

To — no one that you know!

And sigh for lack of heaven, — but not

The heaven the creeds bestow.

VII.

Wild nights! Wild nights!

Were I with thee,

Wild nights should be

Our luxury!

Futile the winds

To a heart in port, —

Done with the compass,

Done with the chart.

Rowing in Eden!

Ah! the sea!

Might I but moor

To-night in thee!

VIII: AT HOME.

The night was wide, and furnished scant

With but a single star,

That often as a cloud it met

Blew out itself for fear.

The wind pursued the little bush,

And drove away the leaves

November left; then clambered up

And fretted in the eaves.

No squirrel went abroad;

A dog’s belated feet

Like intermittent plush were heard

Adown the empty street.

To feel if blinds be fast,

And closer to the fire

Her little rocking-chair to draw,

And shiver for the poor,

The housewife’s gentle task.

“How pleasanter,” said she

Unto the sofa opposite,

“The sleet than May — no thee!”

IX: POSSESSION.

Did the harebell loose her girdle

To the lover bee,

Would the bee the harebell hallow

Much as formerly?

Did the paradise, persuaded,

Yield her moat of pearl,

Would the Eden be an Eden,

Or the earl an earl?

X.

A charm invests a face

Imperfectly beheld, —

The lady dare not lift her veil

For fear it be dispelled.

But peers beyond her mesh,

And wishes, and denies, —

Lest interview annul a want

That image satisfies.

XI: THE LOVERS.

The rose did caper on her cheek,

Her bodice rose and fell,

Her pretty speech, like drunken men,

Did stagger pitiful.

Her fingers fumbled at her work, —

Her needle would not go;

What ailed so smart a little maid

It puzzled me to know,

Till opposite I spied a cheek

That bore another rose;

Just opposite, another speech

That like the drunkard goes;

A vest that, like the bodice, danced

To the immortal tune, —

Till those two troubled little clocks

Ticked softly into one.

XII.

In lands I never saw, they say,

Immortal Alps look down,

Whose bonnets touch the firmament,

Whose sandals touch the town, —

Meek at whose everlasting feet

A myriad daisies play.

Which, sir, are you, and which am I,

Upon an August day?

XIII.

The moon is distant from the sea,

And yet with amber hands

She leads him, docile as a boy,

Along appointed sands.

He never misses a degree;

Obedient to her eye,

He comes just so far toward the town,

Just so far goes away.

Oh, Signor, thine the amber hand,

And mine the distant sea, —

Obedient to the least command

Thine eyes impose on me.

XIV.

He put the belt around my life, —

I heard the buckle snap,

And turned away, imperial,

My lifetime folding up

Deliberate, as a duke would do

A kingdom’s title-deed, —

Henceforth a dedicated sort,

A member of the cloud.

Yet not too far to come at call,

And do the little toils

That make the circuit of the rest,

And deal occasional smiles

To lives that stoop to notice mine

And kindly ask it in, —

Whose invitation, knew you not

For whom I must decline?

XV: THE LOST JEWEL.

I held a jewel in my fingers

And went to sleep.

The day was warm, and winds were prosy;

I said: “‘T will keep.”

I woke and chid my honest fingers, —

The gem was gone;

And now an amethyst remembrance

Is all I own.

XVI.

What if I say I shall not wait?

What if I burst the fleshly gate

And pass, escaped, to thee?

What if I file this mortal off,

See where it hurt me, — that ‘s enough, —

And wade in liberty?

They cannot take us any more, —

Dungeons may call, and guns implore;

Unmeaning now, to me,

As laughter was an hour ago,

Or laces, or a travelling show,

Or who died yesterday!

Part 3: Nature

I: MOTHER NATURE.

Nature, the gentlest mother,

Impatient of no child,

The feeblest or the waywardest, —

Her admonition mild

In forest and the hill

By traveller is heard,

Restraining rampant squirrel

Or too impetuous bird.

How fair her conversation,

A summer afternoon, —

Her household, her assembly;

And when the sun goes down

Her voice among the aisles

Incites the timid prayer

Of the minutest cricket,

The most unworthy flower.

When all the children sleep

She turns as long away

As will suffice to light her lamps;

Then, bending from the sky

With infinite affection

And infiniter care,

Her golden finger on her lip,

Wills silence everywhere.

II: OUT OF THE MORNING.

Will there really be a morning?

Is there such a thing as day?

Could I see it from the mountains

If I were as tall as they?

Has it feet like water-lilies?

Has it feathers like a bird?

Is it brought from famous countries

Of which I have never heard?

Oh, some scholar! Oh, some sailor!

Oh, some wise man from the skies!

Please to tell a little pilgrim

Where the place called morning lies!

III.

At half-past three a single bird

Unto a silent sky

Propounded but a single term

Of cautious melody.

At half-past four, experiment

Had subjugated test,

And lo! her silver principle

Supplanted all the rest.

At half-past seven, element

Nor implement was seen,

And place was where the presence was,

Circumference between.

IV: DAY’S PARLOR.

The day came slow, till five o’clock,

Then sprang before the hills

Like hindered rubies, or the light

A sudden musket spills.

The purple could not keep the east,

The sunrise shook from fold,

Like breadths of topaz, packed a night,

The lady just unrolled.

The happy winds their timbrels took;

The birds, in docile rows,

Arranged themselves around their prince

(The wind is prince of those).

The orchard sparkled like a Jew, —

How mighty ‘t was, to stay

A guest in this stupendous place,

The parlor of the day!

V: THE SUN’S WOOING.

The sun just touched the morning;

The morning, happy thing,

Supposed that he had come to dwell,

And life would be all spring.

She felt herself supremer, —

A raised, ethereal thing;

Henceforth for her what holiday!

Meanwhile, her wheeling king

Trailed slow along the orchards

His haughty, spangled hems,

Leaving a new necessity, —

The want of diadems!

The morning fluttered, staggered,

Felt feebly for her crown, —

Her unanointed forehead

Henceforth her only one.

VI: THE ROBIN.

The robin is the one

That interrupts the morn

With hurried, few, express reports

When March is scarcely on.

The robin is the one

That overflows the noon

With her cherubic quantity,

An April but begun.

The robin is the one

That speechless from her nest

Submits that home and certainty

And sanctity are best.

VII: THE BUTTERFLY’S DAY.

From cocoon forth a butterfly

As lady from her door

Emerged — a summer afternoon —

Repairing everywhere,

Without design, that I could trace,

Except to stray abroad

On miscellaneous enterprise

The clovers understood.

Her pretty parasol was seen

Contracting in a field

Where men made hay, then struggling hard

With an opposing cloud,

Where parties, phantom as herself,

To Nowhere seemed to go

In purposeless circumference,

As ‘t were a tropic show.

And notwithstanding bee that worked,

And flower that zealous blew,

This audience of idleness

Disdained them, from the sky,

Till sundown crept, a steady tide,

And men that made the hay,

And afternoon, and butterfly,

Extinguished in its sea.

VIII: THE BLUEBIRD.

Before you thought of spring,

Except as a surmise,

You see, God bless his suddenness,

A fellow in the skies

Of independent hues,

A little weather-worn,

Inspiriting habiliments

Of indigo and brown.

With specimens of song,

As if for you to choose,

Discretion in the interval,

With gay delays he goes

To some superior tree

Without a single leaf,

And shouts for joy to nobody

But his seraphic self!

IX: APRIL.

An altered look about the hills;

A Tyrian light the village fills;

A wider sunrise in the dawn;

A deeper twilight on the lawn;

A print of a vermilion foot;

A purple finger on the slope;

A flippant fly upon the pane;

A spider at his trade again;

An added strut in chanticleer;

A flower expected everywhere;

An axe shrill singing in the woods;

Fern-odors on untravelled roads, —

All this, and more I cannot tell,

A furtive look you know as well,

And Nicodemus’ mystery

Receives its annual reply.

X: THE SLEEPING FLOWERS.

“Whose are the little beds,” I asked,

“Which in the valleys lie?”

Some shook their heads, and others smiled,

And no one made reply.

“Perhaps they did not hear,” I said;

“I will inquire again.

Whose are the beds, the tiny beds

So thick upon the plain?”

“‘T is daisy in the shortest;

A little farther on,

Nearest the door to wake the first,

Little leontodon.

“‘T is iris, sir, and aster,

Anemone and bell,

Batschia in the blanket red,

And chubby daffodil.”

Meanwhile at many cradles

Her busy foot she plied,

Humming the quaintest lullaby

That ever rocked a child.

“Hush! Epigea wakens! —

The crocus stirs her lids,

Rhodora’s cheek is crimson, —

She’s dreaming of the woods.”

Then, turning from them, reverent,

“Their bed-time ‘t is,” she said;

“The bumble-bees will wake them

When April woods are red.”

XI: MY ROSE

Pigmy seraphs gone astray,

Velvet people from Vevay,

Belles from some lost summer day,

Bees’ exclusive coterie.

Paris could not lay the fold

Belted down with emerald;

Venice could not show a cheek

Of a tint so lustrous meek.

Never such an ambuscade

As of brier and leaf displayed

For my little damask maid.

I had rather wear her grace

Than an earl’s distinguished face;

I had rather dwell like her

Than be Duke of Exeter

Royalty enough for me

To subdue the bumble-bee!

XII: THE ORIOLE’S SECRET.

To hear an oriole sing

May be a common thing,

Or only a divine.

It is not of the bird

Who sings the same, unheard,

As unto crowd.

The fashion of the ear

Attireth that it hear

In dun or fair.

So whether it be rune,

Or whether it be none,

Is of within;

The “tune is in the tree,”

The sceptic showeth me;

“No, sir! In thee!”

XIII: THE ORIOLE.

One of the ones that Midas touched,

Who failed to touch us all,

Was that confiding prodigal,

The blissful oriole.

So drunk, he disavows it

With badinage divine;

So dazzling, we mistake him

For an alighting mine.

A pleader, a dissembler,

An epicure, a thief, —

Betimes an oratorio,

An ecstasy in chief;

The Jesuit of orchards,

He cheats as he enchants

Of an entire attar

For his decamping wants.

The splendor of a Burmah,

The meteor of birds,

Departing like a pageant

Of ballads and of bards.

I never thought that Jason sought

For any golden fleece;

But then I am a rural man,

With thoughts that make for peace.

But if there were a Jason,

Tradition suffer me

Behold his lost emolument

Upon the apple-tree.

XIV: IN SHADOW.

I dreaded that first robin so,

But he is mastered now,

And I ‘m accustomed to him grown, —

He hurts a little, though.

I thought if I could only live

Till that first shout got by,

Not all pianos in the woods

Had power to mangle me.

I dared not meet the daffodils,

For fear their yellow gown

Would pierce me with a fashion

So foreign to my own.

I wished the grass would hurry,

So when ‘t was time to see,

He ‘d be too tall, the tallest one

Could stretch to look at me.

I could not bear the bees should come,

I wished they ‘d stay away

In those dim countries where they go:

What word had they for me?

They ‘re here, though; not a creature failed,

No blossom stayed away

In gentle deference to me,

The Queen of Calvary.

Each one salutes me as he goes,

And I my childish plumes

Lift, in bereaved acknowledgment

Of their unthinking drums.

XV: THE HUMMING-BIRD.

A route of evanescence

With a revolving wheel;

A resonance of emerald,

A rush of cochineal;

And every blossom on the bush

Adjusts its tumbled head, —

The mail from Tunis, probably,

An easy morning’s ride.

XVI: SECRETS.

The skies can’t keep their secret!

They tell it to the hills —

The hills just tell the orchards —

And they the daffodils!

A bird, by chance, that goes that way

Soft overheard the whole.

If I should bribe the little bird,

Who knows but she would tell?

I think I won’t, however,

It’s finer not to know;

If summer were an axiom,

What sorcery had snow?

So keep your secret, Father!

I would not, if I could,

Know what the sapphire fellows do,

In your new-fashioned world!

XVII.

Who robbed the woods,

The trusting woods?

The unsuspecting trees

Brought out their burrs and mosses

His fantasy to please.

He scanned their trinkets, curious,

He grasped, he bore away.

What will the solemn hemlock,

What will the fir-tree say?

XVIII: TWO VOYAGERS.

Two butterflies went out at noon

And waltzed above a stream,

Then stepped straight through the firmament

And rested on a beam;

And then together bore away

Upon a shining sea, —

Though never yet, in any port,

Their coming mentioned be.

If spoken by the distant bird,

If met in ether sea

By frigate or by merchantman,

Report was not to me.

XIX: BY THE SEA.

I started early, took my dog,

And visited the sea;

The mermaids in the basement

Came out to look at me,

And frigates in the upper floor

Extended hempen hands,

Presuming me to be a mouse

Aground, upon the sands.

But no man moved me till the tide

Went past my simple shoe,

And past my apron and my belt,

And past my bodice too,

And made as he would eat me up

As wholly as a dew

Upon a dandelion’s sleeve —

And then I started too.

And he — he followed close behind;

I felt his silver heel

Upon my ankle, — then my shoes

Would overflow with pearl.

Until we met the solid town,

No man he seemed to know;

And bowing with a mighty look

At me, the sea withdrew.

XX: OLD-FASHIONED.

Arcturus is his other name, —

I’d rather call him star!

It’s so unkind of science

To go and interfere!

I pull a flower from the woods, —

A monster with a glass

Computes the stamens in a breath,

And has her in a class.

Whereas I took the butterfly

Aforetime in my hat,

He sits erect in cabinets,

The clover-bells forgot.

What once was heaven, is zenith now.

Where I proposed to go

When time’s brief masquerade was done,

Is mapped, and charted too!

What if the poles should frisk about

And stand upon their heads!

I hope I ‘m ready for the worst,

Whatever prank betides!

Perhaps the kingdom of Heaven ‘s changed!

I hope the children there

Won’t be new-fashioned when I come,

And laugh at me, and stare!

I hope the father in the skies

Will lift his little girl, —

Old-fashioned, naughty, everything, —

Over the stile of pearl!

XXI: A TEMPEST.

An awful tempest mashed the air,

The clouds were gaunt and few;

A black, as of a spectre’s cloak,

Hid heaven and earth from view.

The creatures chuckled on the roofs

And whistled in the air,

And shook their fists and gnashed their teeth.

And swung their frenzied hair.

The morning lit, the birds arose;

The monster’s faded eyes

Turned slowly to his native coast,

And peace was Paradise!

XXII: THE SEA.

An everywhere of silver,

With ropes of sand

To keep it from effacing

The track called land.

XXIII: IN THE GARDEN.

A bird came down the walk:

He did not know I saw;

He bit an angle-worm in halves

And ate the fellow, raw.

And then he drank a dew

From a convenient grass,

And then hopped sidewise to the wall

To let a beetle pass.

He glanced with rapid eyes

That hurried all abroad, —

They looked like frightened beads, I thought;

He stirred his velvet head

Like one in danger; cautious,

I offered him a crumb,

And he unrolled his feathers

And rowed him softer home

Than oars divide the ocean,

Too silver for a seam,

Or butterflies, off banks of noon,

Leap, plashless, as they swim.

XXIV: THE SNAKE.

A narrow fellow in the grass

Occasionally rides;

You may have met him, — did you not,

His notice sudden is.

The grass divides as with a comb,

A spotted shaft is seen;

And then it closes at your feet

And opens further on.

He likes a boggy acre,

A floor too cool for corn.

Yet when a child, and barefoot,

I more than once, at morn,

Have passed, I thought, a whip-lash

Unbraiding in the sun, —

When, stooping to secure it,

It wrinkled, and was gone.

Several of nature’s people

I know, and they know me;

I feel for them a transport

Of cordiality;

But never met this fellow,

Attended or alone,

Without a tighter breathing,

And zero at the bone.

XXV: THE MUSHROOM.

The mushroom is the elf of plants,

At evening it is not;

At morning in a truffled hut

It stops upon a spot

As if it tarried always;

And yet its whole career

Is shorter than a snake’s delay,

And fleeter than a tare.

‘T is vegetation’s juggler,

The germ of alibi;

Doth like a bubble antedate,

And like a bubble hie.

I feel as if the grass were pleased

To have it intermit;

The surreptitious scion

Of summer’s circumspect.

Had nature any outcast face,

Could she a son contemn,

Had nature an Iscariot,

That mushroom, — it is him.

XXVI: THE STORM.

There came a wind like a bugle;

It quivered through the grass,

And a green chill upon the heat

So ominous did pass

We barred the windows and the doors

As from an emerald ghost;

The doom’s electric moccason

That very instant passed.

On a strange mob of panting trees,

And fences fled away,

And rivers where the houses ran

The living looked that day.

The bell within the steeple wild

The flying tidings whirled.

How much can come

And much can go,

And yet abide the world!

XXVII: THE SPIDER.

A spider sewed at night

Without a light

Upon an arc of white.

If ruff it was of dame

Or shroud of gnome,

Himself, himself inform.

Of immortality

His strategy

Was physiognomy.

XXVIII.

I know a place where summer strives

With such a practised frost,

She each year leads her daisies back,

Recording briefly, “Lost.”

But when the south wind stirs the pools

And struggles in the lanes,

Her heart misgives her for her vow,

And she pours soft refrains

Into the lap of adamant,

And spices, and the dew,

That stiffens quietly to quartz,

Upon her amber shoe.

XXIX.

The one that could repeat the summer day

Were greater than itself, though he

Minutest of mankind might be.

And who could reproduce the sun,

At period of going down —

The lingering and the stain, I mean —

When Orient has been outgrown,

And Occident becomes unknown,

His name remain.

XXX: THE WlND'S VISIT.

The wind tapped like a tired man,

And like a host, "Come in,"

I boldly answered; entered then

My residence within

A rapid, footless guest,

To offer whom a chair

Were as impossible as hand

A sofa to the air.

No bone had he to bind him,

His speech was like the push

Of numerous humming-birds at once

From a superior bush.

His countenance a billow,

His fingers, if he pass,

Let go a music, as of tunes

Blown tremulous in glass.

He visited, still flitting;

Then, like a timid man,

Again he tapped — ‘t was flurriedly —

And I became alone.

XXXI.

Nature rarer uses yellow

Than another hue;

Saves she all of that for sunsets, —

Prodigal of blue,

Spending scarlet like a woman,

Yellow she affords

Only scantly and selectly,

Like a lover’s words.

XXXII: GOSSIP.

The leaves, like women, interchange

  Sagacious confidence;

Somewhat of nods, and somewhat of

  Portentous inference,

The parties in both cases

  Enjoining secrecy, —

Inviolable compact

  To notoriety.

XXXIII: SIMPLICITY.

How happy is the little stone

That rambles in the road alone,

And doesn’t care about careers,

And exigencies never fears;

Whose coat of elemental brown

A passing universe put on;

And independent as the sun,

Associates or glows alone,

Fulfilling absolute decree

In casual simplicity.

XXXIV: STORM.

It sounded as if the streets were running,

And then the streets stood still.

Eclipse was all we could see at the window,

And awe was all we could feel.

By and by the boldest stole out of his covert,

To see if time was there.

Nature was in her beryl apron,

Mixing fresher air.

XXXV: THE RAT.

The rat is the concisest tenant.

He pays no rent, —

Repudiates the obligation,

On schemes intent.

Balking our wit

To sound or circumvent,

Hate cannot harm

A foe so reticent.

Neither decree

Prohibits him,

Lawful as

Equilibrium.

XXXVI.

Frequently the woods are pink,

Frequently are brown;

Frequently the hills undress

Behind my native town.

Oft a head is crested

I was wont to see,

And as oft a cranny

Where it used to be.

And the earth, they tell me,

On its axis turned, —

Wonderful rotation

By but twelve performed!

XXXVII: A THUNDER-STORM.

The wind begun to rock the grass

With threatening tunes and low, —

He flung a menace at the earth,

A menace at the sky.

The leaves unhooked themselves from trees

And started all abroad;

The dust did scoop itself like hands

And throw away the road.

The wagons quickened on the streets,

The thunder hurried slow;

The lightning showed a yellow beak,

And then a livid claw.

The birds put up the bars to nests,

The cattle fled to barns;

There came one drop of giant rain,

And then, as if the hands

That held the dams had parted hold,

The waters wrecked the sky,

But overlooked my father’s house,

Just quartering a tree.

XXXVIII: WITH FLOWERS.

South winds jostle them,

Bumblebees come,

Hover, hesitate,

Drink, and are gone.

Butterflies pause

On their passage Cashmere;

I, softly plucking,

Present them here!

XXXIX: SUNSET.

Where ships of purple gently toss

On seas of daffodil,

Fantastic sailors mingle,

And then — the wharf is still.

XL.

She sweeps with many-colored brooms,

And leaves the shreds behind;

Oh, housewife in the evening west,

Come back, and dust the pond!

You dropped a purple ravelling in,

You dropped an amber thread;

And now you ‘ve littered all the East

With duds of emerald!

And still she plies her spotted brooms,

And still the aprons fly,

Till brooms fade softly into stars —

And then I come away.

XLI.

Like mighty footlights burned the red

At bases of the trees, —

The far theatricals of day

Exhibiting to these.

‘T was universe that did applaud

While, chiefest of the crowd,

Enabled by his royal dress,

Myself distinguished God.

XLII: PROBLEMS.

Bring me the sunset in a cup,

Reckon the morning’s flagons up,

And say how many dew;

Tell me how far the morning leaps,

Tell me what time the weaver sleeps

Who spun the breadths of blue!

Write me how many notes there be

In the new robin’s ecstasy

Among astonished boughs;

How many trips the tortoise makes,

How many cups the bee partakes, —

The debauchee of dews!

Also, who laid the rainbow’s piers,

Also, who leads the docile spheres

By withes of supple blue?

Whose fingers string the stalactite,

Who counts the wampum of the night,

To see that none is due?

Who built this little Alban house

And shut the windows down so close

My spirit cannot see?

Who ‘ll let me out some gala day,

With implements to fly away,

Passing pomposity?

XLIII: THE JUGGLER OF DAY.

Blazing in gold and quenching in purple,

Leaping like leopards to the sky,

Then at the feet of the old horizon

Laying her spotted face, to die;

Stooping as low as the otter’s window,

Touching the roof and tinting the barn,

Kissing her bonnet to the meadow, —

And the juggler of day is gone!

XLIV: MY CRICKET.

Farther in summer than the birds,

Pathetic from the grass,

A minor nation celebrates

Its unobtrusive mass.

No ordinance is seen,

So gradual the grace,

A pensive custom it becomes,

Enlarging loneliness.

Antiquest felt at noon

When August, burning low,

Calls forth this spectral canticle,

Repose to typify.

Remit as yet no grace,

No furrow on the glow,

Yet a druidic difference

Enhances nature now.

XLV.

As imperceptibly as grief

The summer lapsed away, —

Too imperceptible, at last,

To seem like perfidy.

A quietness distilled,

As twilight long begun,

Or Nature, spending with herself

Sequestered afternoon.

The dusk drew earlier in,

The morning foreign shone, —

A courteous, yet harrowing grace,

As guest who would be gone.

And thus, without a wing,

Or service of a keel,

Our summer made her light escape

Into the beautiful.

XLVI.

It can’t be summer, — that got through;

It ‘s early yet for spring;

There ‘s that long town of white to cross

Before the blackbirds sing.

It can’t be dying, — it’s too rouge, —

The dead shall go in white.

So sunset shuts my question down

With clasps of chrysolite.

XLVII: SUMMER’S OBSEQUIES.

The gentian weaves her fringes,

The maple’s loom is red.

My departing blossoms

Obviate parade.

A brief, but patient illness,

An hour to prepare;

And one, below this morning,

Is where the angels are.

It was a short procession, —

The bobolink was there,

An aged bee addressed us,

And then we knelt in prayer.

We trust that she was willing, —

We ask that we may be.

Summer, sister, seraph,

Let us go with thee!

In the name of the bee

And of the butterfly

And of the breeze, amen!

XLVIII: FRINGED GENTIAN.

God made a little gentian;

It tried to be a rose

And failed, and all the summer laughed.

But just before the snows

There came a purple creature

That ravished all the hill;

And summer hid her forehead,

And mockery was still.

The frosts were her condition;

The Tyrian would not come

Until the North evoked it.

“Creator! shall I bloom?”

XLIX: NOVEMBER.

Besides the autumn poets sing,

A few prosaic days

A little this side of the snow

And that side of the haze.

A few incisive mornings,

A few ascetic eyes, —

Gone Mr. Bryant’s golden-rod,

And Mr. Thomson’s sheaves.

Still is the bustle in the brook,

Sealed are the spicy valves;

Mesmeric fingers softly touch

The eyes of many elves.

Perhaps a squirrel may remain,

My sentiments to share.

Grant me, O Lord, a sunny mind,

Thy windy will to bear!

L: THE SNOW.

It sifts from leaden sieves,

It powders all the wood,

It fills with alabaster wool

The wrinkles of the road.

It makes an even face

Of mountain and of plain, —

Unbroken forehead from the east

Unto the east again.

It reaches to the fence,

It wraps it, rail by rail,

Till it is lost in fleeces;

It flings a crystal veil

On stump and stack and stem, —

The summer’s empty room,

Acres of seams where harvests were,

Recordless, but for them.

It ruffles wrists of posts,

As ankles of a queen, —

Then stills its artisans like ghosts,

Denying they have been.

LI: THE BLUE JAY.

No brigadier throughout the year

So civic as the jay.

A neighbor and a warrior too,

With shrill felicity

Pursuing winds that censure us

A February day,

The brother of the universe

Was never blown away.

The snow and he are intimate;

I ‘ve often seen them play

When heaven looked upon us all

With such severity,

I felt apology were due

To an insulted sky,

Whose pompous frown was nutriment

To their temerity.

The pillow of this daring head

Is pungent evergreens;

His larder — terse and militant —

Unknown, refreshing things;

His character a tonic,

His future a dispute;

Unfair an immortality

That leaves this neighbor out.

Part 4: TIME AND ETERNITY.

I.

Let down the bars, O Death!

The tired flocks come in

Whose bleating ceases to repeat,

Whose wandering is done.

Thine is the stillest night,

Thine the securest fold;

Too near thou art for seeking thee,

Too tender to be told.

II.

Going to heaven!

I don’t know when,

Pray do not ask me how, —

Indeed, I ‘m too astonished

To think of answering you!

Going to heaven! —

How dim it sounds!

And yet it will be done

As sure as flocks go home at night

Unto the shepherd’s arm!

Perhaps you ‘re going too!

Who knows?

If you should get there first,

Save just a little place for me

Close to the two I lost!

The smallest “robe” will fit me,

And just a bit of “crown;”

For you know we do not mind our dress

When we are going home.

I ‘m glad I don’t believe it,

For it would stop my breath,

And I ‘d like to look a little more

At such a curious earth!

I am glad they did believe it

Whom I have never found

Since the mighty autumn afternoon

I left them in the ground.

III.

At least to pray is left, is left.

O Jesus! in the air

I know not which thy chamber is, —

I ‘m knocking everywhere.

Thou stirrest earthquake in the South,

And maelstrom in the sea;

Say, Jesus Christ of Nazareth,

Hast thou no arm for me?

IV: EPITAPH.

Step lightly on this narrow spot!

The broadest land that grows

Is not so ample as the breast

These emerald seams enclose.

Step lofty; for this name is told

As far as cannon dwell,

Or flag subsist, or fame export

Her deathless syllable.

V.

Morns like these we parted;

Noons like these she rose,

Fluttering first, then firmer,

To her fair repose.

Never did she lisp it,

And ‘t was not for me;

She was mute from transport,

I, from agony!

Till the evening, nearing,

One the shutters drew —

Quick! a sharper rustling!

And this linnet flew!

VI.

A death-blow is a life-blow to some

Who, till they died, did not alive become;

Who, had they lived, had died, but when

They died, vitality begun.

VII.

I read my sentence steadily,

Reviewed it with my eyes,

To see that I made no mistake

In its extremest clause, —

The date, and manner of the shame;

And then the pious form

That “God have mercy” on the soul

The jury voted him.

I made my soul familiar

With her extremity,

That at the last it should not be

A novel agony,

But she and Death, acquainted,

Meet tranquilly as friends,

Salute and pass without a hint —

And there the matter ends.

VIII.

I have not told my garden yet,

Lest that should conquer me;

I have not quite the strength now

To break it to the bee.

I will not name it in the street,

For shops would stare, that I,

So shy, so very ignorant,

Should have the face to die.

The hillsides must not know it,

Where I have rambled so,

Nor tell the loving forests

The day that I shall go,

Nor lisp it at the table,

Nor heedless by the way

Hint that within the riddle

One will walk to-day!

IX: THE BATTLE-FIELD.

They dropped like flakes, they dropped like stars,

  Like petals from a rose,

When suddenly across the June

  A wind with fingers goes.

They perished in the seamless grass, —

  No eye could find the place;

But God on his repealless list

  Can summon every face.

X.

The only ghost I ever saw

Was dressed in mechlin, — so;

He wore no sandal on his foot,

And stepped like flakes of snow.

His gait was soundless, like the bird,

But rapid, like the roe;

His fashions quaint, mosaic,

Or, haply, mistletoe.

His conversation seldom,

His laughter like the breeze

That dies away in dimples

Among the pensive trees.

Our interview was transient,—

Of me, himself was shy;

And God forbid I look behind

Since that appalling day!

XI.

Some, too fragile for winter winds,

The thoughtful grave encloses, —

Tenderly tucking them in from frost

Before their feet are cold.

Never the treasures in her nest

The cautious grave exposes,

Building where schoolboy dare not look

And sportsman is not bold.

This covert have all the children

Early aged, and often cold, —

Sparrows unnoticed by the Father;

Lambs for whom time had not a fold.

XII.

As by the dead we love to sit,

Become so wondrous dear,

As for the lost we grapple,

Though all the rest are here, —

In broken mathematics

We estimate our prize,

Vast, in its fading ratio,

To our penurious eyes!

XIII: MEMORIALS.

Death sets a thing significant

The eye had hurried by,

Except a perished creature

Entreat us tenderly

To ponder little workmanships

In crayon or in wool,

With “This was last her fingers did,”

Industrious until

The thimble weighed too heavy,

The stitches stopped themselves,

And then ‘t was put among the dust

Upon the closet shelves.

A book I have, a friend gave,

Whose pencil, here and there,

Had notched the place that pleased him, —

At rest his fingers are.

Now, when I read, I read not,

For interrupting tears

Obliterate the etchings

Too costly for repairs.

XIV.

I went to heaven, —

‘T was a small town,

Lit with a ruby,

Lathed with down.

Stiller than the fields

At the full dew,

Beautiful as pictures

No man drew.

People like the moth,

Of mechlin, frames,

Duties of gossamer,

And eider names.

Almost contented

I could be

‘Mong such unique

Society.

XV.

Their height in heaven comforts not,

Their glory nought to me;

‘T was best imperfect, as it was;

I ‘m finite, I can’t see.

The house of supposition,

The glimmering frontier

That skirts the acres of perhaps,

To me shows insecure.

The wealth I had contented me;

If ‘t was a meaner size,

Then I had counted it until

It pleased my narrow eyes

Better than larger values,

However true their show;

This timid life of evidence

Keeps pleading, “I don’t know.”

XVI.

There is a shame of nobleness

Confronting sudden pelf, —

A finer shame of ecstasy

Convicted of itself.

A best disgrace a brave man feels,

Acknowledged of the brave, —

One more “Ye Blessed” to be told;

But this involves the grave.

XVII: TRIUMPH.

Triumph may be of several kinds.

There ‘s triumph in the room

When that old imperator, Death,

By faith is overcome.

There ‘s triumph of the finer mind

When truth, affronted long,

Advances calm to her supreme,

Her God her only throng.

A triumph when temptation’s bribe

Is slowly handed back,

One eye upon the heaven renounced

And one upon the rack.

Severer triumph, by himself

Experienced, who can pass

Acquitted from that naked bar,

Jehovah’s countenance!

XVIII.

Pompless no life can pass away;

The lowliest career

To the same pageant wends its way

As that exalted here.

How cordial is the mystery!

The hospitable pall

A “this way” beckons spaciously, —

A miracle for all!

XIX.

I noticed people disappeared,

When but a little child, —

Supposed they visited remote,

Or settled regions wild.

Now know I they both visited

And settled regions wild,

But did because they died, — a fact

Withheld the little child!

XX: FOLLOWING.

I had no cause to be awake,

My best was gone to sleep,

And morn a new politeness took,

And failed to wake them up,

But called the others clear,

And passed their curtains by.

Sweet morning, when I over-sleep,

Knock, recollect, for me!

I looked at sunrise once,

And then I looked at them,

And wishfulness in me arose

For circumstance the same.

‘T was such an ample peace,

It could not hold a sigh, —

‘T was Sabbath with the bells divorced,

‘T was sunset all the day.

So choosing but a gown

And taking but a prayer,

The only raiment I should need,

I struggled, and was there.

XXI.

If anybody’s friend be dead,

It ‘s sharpest of the theme

The thinking how they walked alive,

At such and such a time.

Their costume, of a Sunday,

Some manner of the hair, —

A prank nobody knew but them,

Lost, in the sepulchre.

How warm they were on such a day:

You almost feel the date,

So short way off it seems; and now,

They ‘re centuries from that.

How pleased they were at what you said;

You try to touch the smile,

And dip your fingers in the frost:

When was it, can you tell,

You asked the company to tea,

Acquaintance, just a few,

And chatted close with this grand thing

That don’t remember you?

Past bows and invitations,

Past interview, and vow,

Past what ourselves can estimate, —

That makes the quick of woe!

XXII: THE JOURNEY.

Our journey had advanced;

Our feet were almost come

To that odd fork in Being’s road,

Eternity by term.

Our pace took sudden awe,

Our feet reluctant led.

Before were cities, but between,

The forest of the dead.

Retreat was out of hope, —

Behind, a sealed route,

Eternity’s white flag before,

And God at every gate.

XXIII: A COUNTRY BURIAL.

Ample make this bed.

Make this bed with awe;

In it wait till judgment break

Excellent and fair.

Be its mattress straight,

Be its pillow round;

Let no sunrise’ yellow noise

Interrupt this ground.

XXIV: GOING.

On such a night, or such a night,

Would anybody care

If such a little figure

Slipped quiet from its chair,

So quiet, oh, how quiet!

That nobody might know

But that the little figure

Rocked softer, to and fro?

On such a dawn, or such a dawn,

Would anybody sigh

That such a little figure

Too sound asleep did lie

For chanticleer to wake it, —

Or stirring house below,

Or giddy bird in orchard,

Or early task to do?

There was a little figure plump

For every little knoll,

Busy needles, and spools of thread,

And trudging feet from school.

Playmates, and holidays, and nuts,

And visions vast and small.

Strange that the feet so precious charged

Should reach so small a goal!

XXV.

Essential oils are wrung:

The attar from the rose

Is not expressed by suns alone,

It is the gift of screws.

The general rose decays;

But this, in lady’s drawer,

Makes summer when the lady lies

In ceaseless rosemary.

XXVI.

I lived on dread; to those who know

The stimulus there is

In danger, other impetus

Is numb and vital-less.

As ‘t were a spur upon the soul,

A fear will urge it where

To go without the spectre’s aid

Were challenging despair.

XXVII.

If I should die,

And you should live,

And time should gurgle on,

And morn should beam,

And noon should burn,

As it has usual done;

If birds should build as early,

And bees as bustling go, —

One might depart at option

From enterprise below!

‘T is sweet to know that stocks will stand

When we with daisies lie,

That commerce will continue,

And trades as briskly fly.

It makes the parting tranquil

And keeps the soul serene,

That gentlemen so sprightly

Conduct the pleasing scene!

XXVIII: AT LENGTH.

Her final summer was it,

And yet we guessed it not;

If tenderer industriousness

Pervaded her, we thought

A further force of life

Developed from within, —

When Death lit all the shortness up,

And made the hurry plain.

We wondered at our blindness, —

When nothing was to see

But her Carrara guide-post, —

At our stupidity,

When, duller than our dulness,

The busy darling lay,

So busy was she, finishing,

So leisurely were we!

XXIX: GHOSTS.

One need not be a chamber to be haunted,

One need not be a house;

The brain has corridors surpassing

Material place.

Far safer, of a midnight meeting

External ghost,

Than an interior confronting

That whiter host.

Far safer through an Abbey gallop,

The stones achase,

Than, moonless, one’s own self encounter

In lonesome place.

Ourself, behind ourself concealed,

Should startle most;

Assassin, hid in our apartment,

Be horror’s least.

The prudent carries a revolver,

He bolts the door,

O’erlooking a superior spectre

More near.

XXX: VANISHED.

She died, — this was the way she died;

And when her breath was done,

Took up her simple wardrobe

And started for the sun.

Her little figure at the gate

The angels must have spied,

Since I could never find her

Upon the mortal side.

XXXI: PRECEDENCE.

Wait till the majesty of Death

Invests so mean a brow!

Almost a powdered footman

Might dare to touch it now!

Wait till in everlasting robes

This democrat is dressed,

Then prate about “preferment”

And “station” and the rest!

Around this quiet courtier

Obsequious angels wait!

Full royal is his retinue,

Full purple is his state!

A lord might dare to lift the hat

To such a modest clay,

Since that my Lord, “the Lord of lords”

Receives unblushingly!

XXXII: GONE.

Went up a year this evening!

I recollect it well!

Amid no bells nor bravos

The bystanders will tell!

Cheerful, as to the village,

Tranquil, as to repose,

Chastened, as to the chapel,

This humble tourist rose.

Did not talk of returning,

Alluded to no time

When, were the gales propitious,

We might look for him;

Was grateful for the roses

In life’s diverse bouquet,

Talked softly of new species

To pick another day.

Beguiling thus the wonder,

The wondrous nearer drew;

Hands bustled at the moorings —

The crowd respectful grew.

Ascended from our vision

To countenances new!

A difference, a daisy,

Is all the rest I knew!

XXXIII: REQUIEM.

Taken from men this morning,

Carried by men to-day,

Met by the gods with banners

Who marshalled her away.

One little maid from playmates,

One little mind from school, —

There must be guests in Eden;

All the rooms are full.

Far as the east from even,

Dim as the border star, —

Courtiers quaint, in kingdoms,

Our departed are.

XXXIV

What inn is this

Where for the night

Peculiar traveller comes?

Who is the landlord?

Where the maids?

Behold, what curious rooms!

No ruddy fires on the hearth,

No brimming tankards flow.

Necromancer, landlord,

Who are these below?

XXXV.

It was not death, for I stood up,

And all the dead lie down;

It was not night, for all the bells

Put out their tongues, for noon.

It was not frost, for on my flesh

I felt siroccos crawl, —

Nor fire, for just my marble feet

Could keep a chancel cool.

And yet it tasted like them all;

The figures I have seen

Set orderly, for burial,

Reminded me of mine,

As if my life were shaven

And fitted to a frame,

And could not breathe without a key;

And ‘t was like midnight, some,

When everything that ticked has stopped,

And space stares, all around,

Or grisly frosts, first autumn morns,

Repeal the beating ground.

But most like chaos, — stopless, cool, —

Without a chance or spar,

Or even a report of land

To justify despair.

XXXVI: TILL THE END.

I should not dare to leave my friend,

Because — because if he should die

While I was gone, and I — too late —

Should reach the heart that wanted me;

If I should disappoint the eyes

That hunted, hunted so, to see,

And could not bear to shut until

They “noticed” me — they noticed me;

If I should stab the patient faith

So sure I ‘d come — so sure I ‘d come,

It listening, listening, went to sleep

Telling my tardy name, —

My heart would wish it broke before,

Since breaking then, since breaking then,

Were useless as next morning’s sun,

Where midnight frosts had lain!

XXXVII: VOID.

Great streets of silence led away

To neighborhoods of pause;

Here was no notice, no dissent,

No universe, no laws.

By clocks ‘t was morning, and for night

The bells at distance called;

But epoch had no basis here,

For period exhaled.

XXXVIII.

A throe upon the features

A hurry in the breath,

An ecstasy of parting

Denominated “Death,” —

An anguish at the mention,

Which, when to patience grown,

I ‘ve known permission given

To rejoin its own.

XXXIX: SAVED!

Of tribulation these are they

Denoted by the white;

The spangled gowns, a lesser rank

Of victors designate.

All these did conquer; but the ones

Who overcame most times

Wear nothing commoner than snow,

No ornament but palms.

Surrender is a sort unknown

On this superior soil;

Defeat, an outgrown anguish,

Remembered as the mile

Our panting ankle barely gained

When night devoured the road;

But we stood whispering in the house,

And all we said was “Saved”!

XL.

I think just how my shape will rise

When I shall be forgiven,

Till hair and eyes and timid head

Are out of sight, in heaven.

I think just how my lips will weigh

With shapeless, quivering prayer

That you, so late, consider me,

The sparrow of your care.

I mind me that of anguish sent,

Some drifts were moved away

Before my simple bosom broke, —

And why not this, if they?

And so, until delirious borne

I con that thing, — “forgiven,” —

Till with long fright and longer trust

I drop my heart, unshriven!

XLI: THE FORGOTTEN GRAVE.

After a hundred years

Nobody knows the place, —

Agony, that enacted there,

Motionless as peace.

Weeds triumphant ranged,

Strangers strolled and spelled

At the lone orthography

Of the elder dead.

Winds of summer fields

Recollect the way, —

Instinct picking up the key

Dropped by memory.

XLII.

Lay this laurel on the one

Too intrinsic for renown.

Laurel! veil your deathless tree, —

Him you chasten, that is he!

Third Series

It’s all I have to bring to-day,

  This, and my heart beside,

This, and my heart, and all the fields,

  And all the meadows wide.

Be sure you count, should I forget, —

  Some one the sum could tell, —

This, and my heart, and all the bees

  Which in the clover dwell.

PREFACE.

The intellectual activity of Emily Dickinson was so great that a large and characteristic choice is still possible among her literary material, and this third volume of her verses is put forth in response to the repeated wish of the admirers of her peculiar genius. Much of Emily Dickinson's prose was rhythmic, —even rhymed, though frequently not set apart in lines.

Also many verses, written as such, were sent to friends in letters; these were published in 1894, in the volumes of her Letters. It has not been necessary, however, to include them in this Series, and all have been omitted, except three or four exceptionally strong ones, as "A Book," and "With Flowers."

There is internal evidence that many of the poems were simply spontaneous flashes of insight, apparently unrelated to outward circumstance. Others, however, had an obvious personal origin; for example, the verses "I had a Guinea golden," which seem to have been sent to some friend travelling in Europe, as a dainty reminder of letter-writing delinquencies. The surroundings in which any of Emily Dickinson's verses are known to have been written usually serve to explain them clearly; but in general the present volume is full of thoughts needing no interpretation to those who apprehend this scintillating spirit.

M. L. T.

AMHERST, October, 1896.

Part One: LIFE.

I: REAL RICHES.

‘T is little I could care for pearls

  Who own the ample sea;

Or brooches, when the Emperor

  With rubies pelteth me;

Or gold, who am the Prince of Mines;

  Or diamonds, when I see

A diadem to fit a dome

  Continual crowning me.

II: SUPERIORITY TO FATE.

Superiority to fate

  Is difficult to learn.

‘T is not conferred by any,

  But possible to earn

A pittance at a time,

  Until, to her surprise,

The soul with strict economy

  Subsists till Paradise.

III: HOPE.

Hope is a subtle glutton;

He feeds upon the fair;

And yet, inspected closely,

What abstinence is there!

His is the halcyon table

That never seats but one,

And whatsoever is consumed

The same amounts remain.

IV: FORBIDDEN FRUIT.

I.

Forbidden fruit a flavor has
  That lawful orchards mocks;
How luscious lies the pea within
  The pod that Duty locks!

V: FORBIDDEN FRUIT.

II.

Heaven is what I cannot reach!
  The apple on the tree,
Provided it do hopeless hang,
  That ‘heaven’ is, to me.

The color on the cruising cloud,
  The interdicted ground
Behind the hill, the house behind, —
  There Paradise is found!

VI: A WORD.

A word is dead

When it is said,

  Some say.

I say it just

Begins to live

  That day.

VII.

To venerate the simple days

  Which lead the seasons by,

Needs but to remember

  That from you or me

They may take the trifle

  Termed mortality!

To invest existence with a stately air,

Needs but to remember

  That the acorn there

Is the egg of forests

  For the upper air!

VIII: LIFE’S TRADES.

It’s such a little thing to weep,

So short a thing to sigh;

And yet by trades the size of these

We men and women die!

IX.

Drowning is not so pitiful

  As the attempt to rise.

Three times, ‘t is said, a sinking man

  Comes up to face the skies,

And then declines forever

  To that abhorred abode

Where hope and he part company, —

  For he is grasped of God.

The Maker’s cordial visage,

  However good to see,

Is shunned, we must admit it,

  Like an adversity.

X.

How still the bells in steeples stand,

Till, swollen with the sky,

They leap upon their silver feet

In frantic melody!

XI.

If the foolish call them ‘flowers,’

  Need the wiser tell?

If the savans ‘classify’ them,

  It is just as well!

Those who read the Revelations

  Must not criticise

Those who read the same edition

  With beclouded eyes!

Could we stand with that old Moses

  Canaan denied, —

Scan, like him, the stately landscape

  On the other side, —

Doubtless we should deem superfluous

Many sciences

Not pursued by learnèd angels

In scholastic skies!

Low amid that glad Belles lettres

Grant that we may stand,

Stars, amid profound Galaxies,

At that grand ‘Right hand’!

XII: A SYLLABLE.

Could mortal lip divine

The undeveloped freight

Of a delivered syllable,

‘T would crumble with the weight.

XIII: PARTING.

My life closed twice before its close;

It yet remains to see

If Immortality unveil

A third event to me,

So huge, so hopeless to conceive,

As these that twice befell.

Parting is all we know of heaven,

And all we need of hell.

XIV: ASPIRATION.

We never know how high we are

Till we are called to rise;

And then, if we are true to plan,

Our statures touch the skies.

The heroism we recite

Would be a daily thing,

Did not ourselves the cubits warp

For fear to be a king.

XV: THE INEVITABLE.

While I was fearing it, it came,

But came with less of fear,

Because that fearing it so long

Had almost made it dear.

There is a fitting a dismay,

A fitting a despair.

‘Tis harder knowing it is due,

Than knowing it is here.

The trying on the utmost,

The morning it is new,

Is terribler than wearing it

A whole existence through.

XVI: A BOOK.

There is no frigate like a book

To take us lands away,

Nor any coursers like a page

Of prancing poetry.

This traverse may the poorest take

Without oppress of toll;

How frugal is the chariot

That bears a human soul!

XVII.

Who has not found the heaven below

Will fail of it above.

God’s residence is next to mine,

His furniture is love.

XVIII: A PORTRAIT.

A face devoid of love or grace,

  A hateful, hard, successful face,

A face with which a stone

  Would feel as thoroughly at ease

As were they old acquaintances, —

  First time together thrown.

XIX: I HAD A GUINEA GOLDEN.

I had a guinea golden;

I lost it in the sand,

And though the sum was simple,

And pounds were in the land,

Still had it such a value

Unto my frugal eye,

That when I could not find it

I sat me down to sigh.

I had a crimson robin

Who sang full many a day,

But when the woods were painted

He, too, did fly away.

Time brought me other robins, —

Their ballads were the same, —

Still for my missing troubadour

I kept the ‘house at hame.’

I had a star in heaven;

One Pleiad was its name,

And when I was not heeding

It wandered from the same.

And though the skies are crowded,

And all the night ashine,

I do not care about it,

Since none of them are mine.

My story has a moral:

I have a missing friend, —

Pleiad its name, and robin,

And guinea in the sand, —

And when this mournful ditty,

Accompanied with tear,

Shall meet the eye of traitor

In country far from here,

Grant that repentance solemn

May seize upon his mind,

And he no consolation

Beneath the sun may find.

NOTE. — This poem may have had, like many others, a personal origin. It is more than probable that it was sent to some friend travelling in Europe, a dainty reminder of letter-writing delinquencies.

XX: SATURDAY AFTERNOON.

From all the jails the boys and girls

  Ecstatically leap, —

Beloved, only afternoon

  That prison doesn’t keep.

They storm the earth and stun the air,

  A mob of solid bliss.

Alas! that frowns could lie in wait

  For such a foe as this!

XXI.

Few get enough, — enough is one;

To that ethereal throng

Have not each one of us the right

To stealthily belong?

XXII.

Upon the gallows hung a wretch,

  Too sullied for the hell

To which the law entitled him.

  As nature’s curtain fell

The one who bore him tottered in,

  For this was woman’s son.

‘’T was all I had,’ she stricken gasped;

  Oh, what a livid boon!

XXIII: THE LOST THOUGHT.

I felt a clearing in my mind

  As if my brain had split;

I tried to match it, seam by seam,

  But could not make them fit.

The thought behind I strove to join

  Unto the thought before,

But sequence ravelled out of reach

  Like balls upon a floor.

XXIV: RETICENCE.

The reticent volcano keeps
  His never slumbering plan;
Confided are his projects pink
  To no precarious man.

If nature will not tell the tale
  Jehovah told to her,
Can human nature not survive
  Without a listener?

Admonished by her buckled lips
  Let every babbler be.
The only secret people keep
  Is Immortality.

XXV: WITH FLOWERS.

If recollecting were forgetting,

  Then I remember not;

And if forgetting, recollecting,

  How near I had forgot!

And if to miss were merry,

  And if to mourn were gay,

How very blithe the fingers

  That gathered these to-day!

XXVI.

The farthest thunder that I heard

  Was nearer than the sky,

And rumbles still, though torrid noons

  Have lain their missiles by.

The lightning that preceded it

  Struck no one but myself,

But I would not exchange the bolt

  For all the rest of life.

Indebtedness to oxygen

  The chemist may repay,

But not the obligation

  To electricity.

It founds the homes and decks the days,

And every clamor bright

Is but the gleam concomitant

Of that waylaying light.

The thought is quiet as a flake, —

A crash without a sound;

How life’s reverberation

Its explanation found!

XXVII.

On the bleakness of my lot

  Bloom I strove to raise.

Late, my acre of a rock

  Yielded grape and maize.

Soil of flint if steadfast tilled

  Will reward the hand;

Seed of palm by Lybian sun

  Fructified in sand.

XXVIII: CONTRAST.

A door just opened on a street —

I, lost, was passing by —

An instant’s width of warmth disclosed,

And wealth, and company.

The door as sudden shut, and I,

I, lost, was passing by, —

Lost doubly, but by contrast most,

Enlightening misery.

XXIX: FRIENDS.

Are friends delight or pain?

  Could bounty but remain

Riches were good.

But if they only stay

Bolder to fly away,

  Riches are sad.

XXX: FIRE.

Ashes denote that fire was;

  Respect the grayest pile

For the departed creature’s sake

  That hovered there awhile.

Fire exists the first in light,

  And then consolidates, —

Only the chemist can disclose

  Into what carbonates.

XXXI: A MAN.

Fate slew him, but he did not drop;

She felled — he did not fall —

Impaled him on her fiercest stakes —

He neutralized them all.

She stung him, sapped his firm advance,

But, when her worst was done,

And he, unmoved, regarded her,

Acknowledged him a man.

XXXII: VENTURES.

Finite to fail, but infinite to venture.

For the one ship that struts the shore

Many’s the gallant, overwhelmed creature

Nodding in navies nevermore.

XXXIII: GRIEFS.

I measure every grief I meet

With analytic eyes;

I wonder if it weighs like mine,

Or has an easier size.

I wonder if they bore it long,

Or did it just begin?

I could not tell the date of mine,

It feels so old a pain.

I wonder if it hurts to live,

And if they have to try,

And whether, could they choose between,

They would not rather die.

I wonder if when years have piled —

Some thousands — on the cause

Of early hurt, if such a lapse

Could give them any pause;

Or would they go on aching still

Through centuries above,

Enlightened to a larger pain

By contrast with the love.

The grieved are many, I am told;

The reason deeper lies, —

Death is but one and comes but once,

And only nails the eyes.

There’s grief of want, and grief of cold, —

A sort they call ‘despair;’

There’s banishment from native eyes,

In sight of native air.

And though I may not guess the kind

Correctly, yet to me

A piercing comfort it affords

In passing Calvary,

To note the fashions of the cross,

Of those that stand alone,

Still fascinated to presume

That some are like my own.

XXXIV.

I have a king who does not speak;

So, wondering, thro’ the hours meek

I trudge the day away,—

Half glad when it is night and sleep,

If, haply, thro’ a dream to peep

In parlors shut by day.

And if I do, when morning comes,

It is as if a hundred drums

Did round my pillow roll,

And shouts fill all my childish sky,

And bells keep saying ‘victory’

From steeples in my soul!

And if I don’t, the little Bird

Within the Orchard is not heard,

  And I omit to pray,

‘Father, thy will be done’ to-day,

For my will goes the other way,

  And it were perjury!

XXXV: DISENCHANTMENT.

It dropped so low in my regard

I heard it hit the ground,

And go to pieces on the stones

At bottom of my mind;

Yet blamed the fate that fractured, less

Than I reviled myself

For entertaining plated wares

Upon my silver shelf.

XXXVI: LOST FAITH.

To lose one’s faith surpasses

  The loss of an estate,

Because estates can be

  Replenished, — faith cannot.

Inherited with life,

  Belief but once can be;

Annihilate a single clause,

  And Being’s beggary.

XXXVII: LOST JOY.

I had a daily bliss

  I half indifferent viewed,

Till sudden I perceived it stir, —

  It grew as I pursued,

Till when, around a crag,

  It wasted from my sight,

Enlarged beyond my utmost scope,

  I learned its sweetness right.

XXXVIII.

I worked for chaff, and earning wheat

  Was haughty and betrayed.

What right had fields to arbitrate

  In matters ratified?

I tasted wheat, — and hated chaff,

  And thanked the ample friend;

Wisdom is more becoming viewed

  At distance than at hand.

XXXIX.

Life, and Death, and Giants

  Such as these, are still.

Minor apparatus, hopper of the mill,

Beetle at the candle,

  Or a fife’s small fame,

Maintain by accident

  That they proclaim.

XL: ALPINE GLOW.

Our lives are Swiss, —

So still, so cool,

Till, some odd afternoon,

The Alps neglect their curtains,

And we look farther on.

Italy stands the other side,

While, like a guard between,

The solemn Alps,

The siren Alps,

Forever intervene!

XLI: REMEMBRANCE.

Remembrance has a rear and front, —

‘T is something like a house;

It has a garret also

For refuse and the mouse,

Besides, the deepest cellar

That ever mason hewed;

Look to it, by its fathoms

Ourselves be not pursued.

XLII.

To hang our head ostensibly,

And subsequent to find

That such was not the posture

Of our immortal mind,

Affords the sly presumption

That, in so dense a fuzz,

You, too, take cobweb attitudes

Upon a plane of gauze!

XLIII: THE BRAIN.

The brain is wider than the sky,

For, put them side by side,

The one the other will include

With ease, and you beside.

The brain is deeper than the sea,

For, hold them, blue to blue,

The one the other will absorb,

As sponges, buckets do.

The brain is just the weight of God,

For, lift them, pound for pound,

And they will differ, if they do,

As syllable from sound.

XLIV.

The bone that has no marrow;

What ultimate for that?

It is not fit for table,

For beggar, or for cat.

A bone has obligations,

A being has the same;

A marrowless assembly

Is culpabler than shame.

But how shall finished creatures

A function fresh obtain? —

Old Nicodemus' phantom

Confronting us again!

XLV: THE PAST.

The past is such a curious creature,

To look her in the face

A transport may reward us,

Or a disgrace.

Unarmed if any meet her,

I charge him, fly!

Her rusty ammunition

Might yet reply!

XLVI.

To help our bleaker parts

Salubrious hours are given,

Which if they do not fit for earth

Drill silently for heaven.

XLVII.

What soft, cherubic creatures

These gentlewomen are!

One would as soon assault a plush

Or violate a star.

Such dimity convictions,

A horror so refined

Of freckled human nature,

Of Deity ashamed, —

It’s such a common glory,

A fisherman’s degree!

Redemption, brittle lady,

Be so, ashamed of thee.

XLVIII: DESIRE.

Who never wanted, — maddest joy

  Remains to him unknown:

The banquet of abstemiousness

  Surpasses that of wine.

Within its hope, though yet ungrasped

  Desire’s perfect goal,

No nearer, lest reality

  Should disenthrall thy soul.

XLIX: PHILOSOPHY.

It might be easier

To fail with land in sight,

Than gain my blue peninsula

To perish of delight.

L: POWER.

You cannot put a fire out;

A thing that can ignite

Can go, itself, without a fan

Upon the slowest night.

You cannot fold a flood

And put it in a drawer, —

Because the winds would find it out,

And tell your cedar floor.

LI.

A modest lot, a fame petite,

A brief campaign of sting and sweet

Is plenty! Is enough!

A sailor’s business is the shore,

A soldier’s — balls. Who asketh more

Must seek the neighboring life!

LII.

Is bliss, then, such abyss

I must not put my foot amiss

For fear I spoil my shoe?

I’d rather suit my foot

Than save my boot,

For yet to buy another pair

Is possible

At any fair.

But bliss is sold just once;

The patent lost

None buy it any more.

LIII: EXPERIENCE.

I stepped from plank to plank
  So slow and cautiously;
The stars about my head I felt,
  About my feet the sea.

I knew not but the next
  Would be my final inch, —
This gave me that precarious gait
  Some call experience.

LIV: THANKSGIVING DAY.

One day is there of the series

  Termed Thanksgiving day,

Celebrated part at table,

  Part in memory.

Neither patriarch nor pussy,

  I dissect the play;

Seems it, to my hooded thinking,

  Reflex holiday.

Had there been no sharp subtraction

  From the early sum,

Not an acre or a caption

  Where was once a room,

Not a mention, whose small pebble

Wrinkled any bay, —

Unto such, were such assembly,

‘T were Thanksgiving day.

LV: CHILDISH GRIEFS.

Softened by Time’s consummate plush,

How sleek the woe appears

That threatened childhood’s citadel

And undermined the years!

Bisected now by bleaker griefs,

We envy the despair

That devastated childhood’s realm,

So easy to repair.

Part 2: LOVE.

I: CONSECRATION.

Proud of my broken heart since thou didst break it,

Proud of the pain I did not feel till thee,

Proud of my night since thou with moons dost slake it,

Not to partake thy passion, my humility.

II: LOVE’S HUMILITY.

My worthiness is all my doubt,

His merit all my fear,

Contrasting which, my qualities

Do lowlier appear;

Lest I should insufficient prove

For his beloved need,

The chiefest apprehension

Within my loving creed.

So I, the undivine abode

Of his elect content,

Conform my soul as ‘t were a church

Unto her sacrament.

III: LOVE.

Love is anterior to life,

  Posterior to death,

Initial of creation, and

  The exponent of breath.

IV: SATISFIED.

One blessing had I, than the rest
  So larger to my eyes
That I stopped gauging, satisfied,
  For this enchanted size.

It was the limit of my dream,
  The focus of my prayer, —
A perfect, paralyzing bliss
  Contented as despair.

I knew no more of want or cold,
  Phantasms both become,
For this new value in the soul,
  Supremest earthly sum.

The heaven below the heaven above

  Obscured with ruddier hue.

Life’s latitude leant over-full;

  The judgment perished, too.

Why joys so scantily disburse,

  Why Paradise defer,

Why floods are served to us in bowls, —

  I speculate no more.

V: WITH A FLOWER.

When roses cease to bloom, dear,

  And violets are done,

When bumble-bees in solemn flight

  Have passed beyond the sun,

The hand that paused to gather

  Upon this summer’s day

Will idle lie, in Auburn, —

  Then take my flower, pray!

VI: SONG.

Summer for thee grant I may be

When summer days are flown!

Thy music still when whippoorwill

And oriole are done!

For thee to bloom, I’ll skip the tomb

And sow my blossoms o’er!

Pray gather me, Anemone,

Thy flower forevermore!

VII: LOYALTY.

Split the lark and you’ll find the music,

  Bulb after bulb, in silver rolled,

Scantily dealt to the summer morning,

  Saved for your ear when lutes be old.

Loose the flood, you shall find it patent,

  Gush after gush, reserved for you;

Scarlet experiment! sceptic Thomas,

  Now, do you doubt that your bird was true?

VIII:

To lose thee, sweeter than to gain

All other hearts I knew.

‘T is true the drought is destitute,

But then I had the dew!

The Caspian has its realms of sand,

Its other realm of sea;

Without the sterile perquisite

No Caspian could be.

IX.

Poor little heart!

Did they forget thee?

Then dinna care! Then dinna care!

Proud little heart!

Did they forsake thee?

Be debonair! Be debonair!

Frail little heart!

I would not break thee:

Could’st credit me? Could’st credit me?

Gay little heart!

Like morning glory

Thou’ll wilted be; thou’ll wilted be!

X: FORGOTTEN.

There is a word

  Which bears a sword

  Can pierce an armed man.

It hurls its barbed syllables,—

  At once is mute again.

But where it fell

The saved will tell

  On patriotic day,

Some epauletted brother

  Gave his breath away.

Wherever runs the breathless sun,

  Wherever roams the day,

There is its noiseless onset,

There is its victory!

Behold the keenest marksman!

The most accomplished shot!

Time’s sublimest target

Is a soul ‘forgot’!

XI.

I’ve got an arrow here;

Loving the hand that sent it,

I the dart revere.

Fell, they will say, in ‘skirmish’!

Vanquished, my soul will know,

By but a simple arrow

Sped by an archer’s bow.

XII: THE MASTER.

He fumbles at your spirit

  As players at the keys

Before they drop full music on;

  He stuns you by degrees,

Prepares your brittle substance

  For the ethereal blow,

By fainter hammers, further heard,

  Then nearer, then so slow

Your breath has time to straighten,

  Your brain to bubble cool, —

Deals one imperial thunderbolt

  That scalps your naked soul.

XIII.

Heart, we will forget him!

You and I, to-night!

You may forget the warmth he gave,

I will forget the light.

When you have done, pray tell me,

That I my thoughts may dim;

Haste! lest while you’re lagging,

I may remember him!

XIV.

Father, I bring thee not myself, —

That were the little load;

I bring thee the imperial heart

I had not strength to hold.

The heart I cherished in my own

Till mine too heavy grew,

Yet strangest, heavier since it went,

Is it too large for you?

XV.

We outgrow love like other things

And put it in the drawer,

Till it an antique fashion shows

Like costumes grandsires wore.

XVI.

Not with a club the heart is broken,

Nor with a stone;

A whip, so small you could not see it.

I’ve known

To lash the magic creature

Till it fell,

Yet that whip’s name too noble

Then to tell.

Magnanimous of bird

By boy descried,

To sing unto the stone

Of which it died.

XVII: WHO?

My friend must be a bird,

Because it flies!

Mortal my friend must be,

Because it dies!

Barbs has it, like a bee.

Ah, curious friend,

Thou puzzlest me!

XVIII.

He touched me, so I live to know

That such a day, permitted so,

I groped upon his breast.

It was a boundless place to me,

And silenced, as the awful sea

Puts minor streams to rest.

And now, I’m different from before,

As if I breathed superior air,

Or brushed a royal gown;

My feet, too, that had wandered so,

My gypsy face transfigured now

To tenderer renown.

XIX: DREAMS.

Let me not mar that perfect dream

  By an auroral stain,

But so adjust my daily night

  That it will come again.

XX: NUMEN LUMEN.

I live with him, I see his face;

I go no more away

For visitor, or sundown;

Death’s single privacy,

The only one forestalling mine,

And that by right that he

Presents a claim invisible,

No wedlock granted me.

I live with him, I hear his voice,

I stand alive to-day

To witness to the certainty

Of immortality

Taught me by Time, — the lower way,

Conviction every day, —

That life like this is endless,

Be judgment what it may.

XXI: LONGING.

I envy seas whereon he rides,

  I envy spokes of wheels

Of chariots that him convey,

  I envy speechless hills

That gaze upon his journey;

  How easy all can see

What is forbidden utterly

  As heaven, unto me!

I envy nests of sparrows

  That dot his distant eaves,

The wealthy fly upon his pane,

  The happy, happy leaves

That just abroad his window

Have summer’s leave to be,

The earrings of Pizarro

Could not obtain for me.

I envy light that wakes him,

And bells that boldly ring

To tell him it is noon abroad, —

Myself his noon could bring,

Yet interdict my blossom

And abrogate my bee,

Lest noon in everlasting night

Drop Gabriel and me.

XXII: WEDDED.

A solemn thing it was, I said,

A woman white to be,

And wear, if God should count me fit,

Her hallowed mystery.

A timid thing to drop a life

Into the purple well,

Too plummetless that it come back

Eternity until.

Part 3: NATURE.

I: NATURE’S CHANGES.

The springtime’s pallid landscape
  Will glow like bright bouquet,
Though drifted deep in parian
  The village lies to-day.

The lilacs, bending many a year,
  With purple load will hang;
The bees will not forget the tune
  Their old forefathers sang.

The rose will redden in the bog,
  The aster on the hill
Her everlasting fashion set,
  And covenant gentians frill,

Till summer folds her miracle

As women do their gown,

Or priests adjust the symbols

When sacrament is done.

II: THE TULIP.

She slept beneath a tree

  Remembered but by me.

I touched her cradle mute;

She recognized the foot,

Put on her carmine suit, —

  And see!

III.

A light exists in spring

Not present on the year

At any other period.

When March is scarcely here

A color stands abroad

On solitary hills

That science cannot overtake,

But human nature feels.

It waits upon the lawn;

It shows the furthest tree

Upon the furthest slope we know;

It almost speaks to me.

Then, as horizons step,

Or noons report away,

Without the formula of sound,

It passes, and we stay:

A quality of loss

Affecting our content,

As trade had suddenly encroached

Upon a sacrament.

IV: THE WAKING YEAR.

A lady red upon the hill

  Her annual secret keeps;

A lady white within the field

  In placid lily sleeps!

The tidy breezes with their brooms

  Sweep vale, and hill, and tree!

Prithee, my pretty housewives!

  Who may expected be?

The neighbors do not yet suspect!

  The woods exchange a smile —

Orchard, and buttercup, and bird —

  In such a little while!

And yet how still the landscape stands,

How nonchalant the wood,

As if the resurrection

Were nothing very odd!

V: TO MARCH.

Dear March, come in!

How glad I am!

I looked for you before.

Put down your hat —

You must have walked —

How out of breath you are!

Dear March, how are you?

And the rest?

Did you leave Nature well?

Oh, March, come right upstairs with me,

I have so much to tell!

I got your letter, and the birds’;

The maples never knew

That you were coming, — I declare,

How red their faces grew!

But, March, forgive me —

And all those hills

You left for me to hue;

There was no purple suitable,

You took it all with you.

Who knocks? That April!

Lock the door!

I will not be pursued!

He stayed away a year, to call

When I am occupied.

But trifles look so trivial

As soon as you have come,

That blame is just as dear as praise

And praise as mere as blame.

VI: MARCH.

We like March, his shoes are purple,

He is new and high;

Makes he mud for dog and peddler,

Makes he forest dry;

Knows the adder’s tongue his coming,

And begets her spot.

Stands the sun so close and mighty

That our minds are hot.

News is he of all the others;

Bold it were to die

With the blue-birds buccaneering

On his British sky.

VII: DAWN.

Not knowing when the dawn will come

I open every door;

Or has it feathers like a bird,

Or billows like a shore?

VIII.

A murmur in the trees to note,

Not loud enough for wind;

A star not far enough to seek,

Nor near enough to find;

A long, long yellow on the lawn,

A hubbub as of feet;

Not audible, as ours to us,

But dapperer, more sweet;

A hurrying home of little men

To houses unperceived, —

All this, and more, if I should tell,

Would never be believed.

Of robins in the trundle bed

How many I espy

Whose nightgowns could not hide the wings,

Although I heard them try!

But then I promised ne’er to tell;

How could I break my word?

So go your way and I’ll go mine, —

No fear you’ll miss the road.

IX.

Morning is the place for dew,

Corn is made at noon,

After dinner light for flowers,

Dukes for setting sun!

X.

To my quick ear the leaves conferred;

The bushes they were bells;

I could not find a privacy

From Nature’s sentinels.

In cave if I presumed to hide,

The walls began to tell;

Creation seemed a mighty crack

To make me visible.

XI: A ROSE.

A sepal, petal, and a thorn

Upon a common summer’s morn,

A flash of dew, a bee or two,

A breeze

A caper in the trees, —

And I’m a rose!

XII.

High from the earth I heard a bird;

He trod upon the trees

As he esteemed them trifles,

And then he spied a breeze,

And situated softly

Upon a pile of wind

Which in a perturbation

Nature had left behind.

A joyous-going fellow

I gathered from his talk,

Which both of benediction

And badinage partook,

Without apparent burden,

I learned, in leafy wood

He was the faithful father

Of a dependent brood;

And this untoward transport

His remedy for care, —

A contrast to our respites.

How different we are!

XIII: COBWEBS.

The spider as an artist

  Has never been employed

Though his surpassing merit

  Is freely certified

By every broom and Bridget

  Throughout a Christian land.

Neglected son of genius,

  I take thee by the hand.

XIV: A WELL.

What mystery pervades a well!
  The water lives so far,
Like neighbor from another world
  Residing in a jar.

The grass does not appear afraid;
  I often wonder he
Can stand so close and look so bold
  At what is dread to me.

Related somehow they may be, —
  The sedge stands next the sea,
Where he is floorless, yet of fear
  No evidence gives he.

But nature is a stranger yet;

The ones that cite her most

Have never passed her haunted house,

Nor simplified her ghost.

To pity those that know her not

Is helped by the regret

That those who know her, know her less

The nearer her they get.

XV.

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee, —

One clover, and a bee,

And revery.

The revery alone will do

If bees are few.

XVI: THE WIND.

It’s like the light, —

A fashionless delight

It’s like the bee, —

A dateless melody.

It’s like the woods,

Private like breeze,

Phraseless, yet it stirs

The proudest trees.

It’s like the morning, —

Best when it’s done, —

The everlasting clocks

Chime noon.

XVII.

A dew sufficed itself

  And satisfied a leaf,

And felt, ‘how vast a destiny!

  How trivial is life!’

The sun went out to work,

  The day went out to play,

But not again that dew was seen

  By physiognomy.

Whether by day abducted,

  Or emptied by the sun

Into the sea, in passing,

  Eternally unknown.

XVIII: THE WOODPECKER.

His bill an auger is,

  His head, a cap and frill.

He laboreth at every tree, —

  A worm his utmost goal.

XIX: A SNAKE.

Sweet is the swamp with its secrets,

  Until we meet a snake;

‘T is then we sigh for houses,

  And our departure take

At that enthralling gallop

  That only childhood knows.

A snake is summer’s treason,

  And guile is where it goes.

XX.

Could I but ride indefinite,
  As doth the meadow-bee,
And visit only where I liked,
  And no man visit me,

And flirt all day with buttercups,
  And marry whom I may,
And dwell a little everywhere,
  Or better, run away

With no police to follow,
  Or chase me if I do,
Till I should jump peninsulas
  To get away from you, —

I said, but just to be a bee

  Upon a raft of air,

And row in nowhere all day long,

  And anchor off the bar,—

What liberty! So captives deem

  Who tight in dungeons are.

XXI: THE MOON.

The moon was but a chin of gold

A night or two ago,

And now she turns her perfect face

Upon the world below.

Her forehead is of amplest blond;

Her cheek like beryl stone;

Her eye unto the summer dew

The likest I have known.

Her lips of amber never part;

But what must be the smile

Upon her friend she could bestow

Were such her silver will!

And what a privilege to be

But the remotest star!

For certainly her way might pass

Beside your twinkling door.

Her bonnet is the firmament,

The universe her shoe,

The stars the trinkets at her belt,

Her dimities of blue.

XXII: THE BAT.

The bat is dun with wrinkled wings
  Like fallow article,
And not a song pervades his lips,
  Or none perceptible.

His small umbrella, quaintly halved,
  Describing in the air
An arc alike inscrutable, —
  Elate philosopher!

Deputed from what firmament
  Of what astute abode,
Empowered with what malevolence
  Auspiciously withheld.

To his adroit Creator

Ascribe no less the praise;

Beneficent, believe me,

His eccentricities.

XXIII: THE BALLOON.

You’ve seen balloons set, haven’t you?

So stately they ascend

It is as swans discarded you

For duties diamond.

Their liquid feet go softly out

Upon a sea of blond;

They spurn the air as ‘t were too mean

For creatures so renowned.

Their ribbons just beyond the eye,

They struggle some for breath,

And yet the crowd applauds below;

They would not encore death.

The gilded creature strains and spins,

Trips frantic in a tree,

Tears open her imperial veins

And tumbles in the sea.

The crowd retire with an oath

The dust in streets goes down,

And clerks in counting-rooms observe,

‘’T was only a balloon.’

XXIV: EVENING.

The cricket sang,

And set the sun,

And workmen finished, one by one,

Their seam the day upon.

The low grass loaded with the dew,

The twilight stood as strangers do

With hat in hand, polite and new,

To stay as if, or go.

A vastness, as a neighbor, came, —

A wisdom without face or name,

A peace, as hemispheres at home, —

And so the night became.

XXV: COCOON.

Drab habitation of whom?

Tabernacle or tomb,

Or dome of worm,

Or porch of gnome,

Or some elf’s catacomb?

XXVI: SUNSET.

A sloop of amber slips away

  Upon an ether sea,

And wrecks in peace a purple tar,

  The son of ecstasy.

XXVII: AURORA.

Of bronze and blaze

  The north, to-night!

  So adequate its forms,

So preconcerted with itself,

  So distant to alarms, —

An unconcern so sovereign

  To universe, or me,

It paints my simple spirit

  With tints of majesty,

Till I take vaster attitudes,

  And strut upon my stem,

Disdaining men and oxygen,

  For arrogance of them.

My splendors are menagerie;

But their competeless show

Will entertain the centuries

When I am, long ago,

An island in dishonored grass,

Whom none but daisies know.

XXVIII: THE COMING OF NIGHT.

How the old mountains drip with sunset,

And the brake of dun!

How the hemlocks are tipped in tinsel

By the wizard sun!

How the old steeples hand the scarlet,

Till the ball is full, —

Have I the lip of the flamingo

That I dare to tell?

Then, how the fire ebbs like billows,

Touching all the grass

With a departing, sapphire feature,

As if a duchess pass!

How a small dusk crawls on the village

  Till the houses blot;

And the odd flambeaux no men carry

  Glimmer on the spot!

Now it is night in nest and kennel,

  And where was the wood,

Just a dome of abyss is nodding

  Into solitude! —

These are the visions baffled Guido;

  Titian never told;

Domenichino dropped the pencil,

  Powerless to unfold.

XXIX: AFTERMATH.

The murmuring of bees has ceased;

But murmuring of some

Posterior, prophetic,

Has simultaneous come, —

The lower metres of the year,

When nature’s laugh is done, —

The Revelations of the book

Whose Genesis is June.

Part 4: TIME AND ETERNITY.

I.

This world is not conclusion;

A sequel stands beyond,

Invisible, as music,

But positive, as sound.

It beckons and it baffles;

Philosophies don’t know,

And through a riddle, at the last,

Sagacity must go.

To guess it puzzles scholars;

To gain it, men have shown

Contempt of generations,

And crucifixion known.

II.

We learn in the retreating

How vast an one

Was recently among us.

A perished sun

Endears in the departure

How doubly more

Than all the golden presence

It was before!

III.

They say that ‘time assuages,’ —

Time never did assuage;

An actual suffering strengthens,

As sinews do, with age.

Time is a test of trouble,

But not a remedy.

If such it prove, it prove too

There was no malady.

IV.

We cover thee, sweet face.

Not that we tire of thee,

But that thyself fatigue of us;

Remember, as thou flee,

We follow thee until

Thou notice us no more,

And then, reluctant, turn away

To con thee o’er and o’er,

And blame the scanty love

We were content to show,

Augmented, sweet, a hundred fold

If thou would’st take it now.

V: ENDING.

That is solemn we have ended, —

Be it but a play,

Or a glee among the garrets,

Or a holiday,

Or a leaving home; or later,

Parting with a world

We have understood, for better

Still it be unfurled.

VI.

The stimulus, beyond the grave
His countenance to see,
Supports me like imperial drams
Afforded royally.

VII.

Given in marriage unto thee,

Oh, thou celestial host!

Bride of the Father and the Son,

Bride of the Holy Ghost!

Other betrothal shall dissolve,

Wedlock of will decay;

Only the keeper of this seal

Conquers mortality.

VIII.

That such have died enables us

The tranquiller to die;

That such have lived, certificate

For immortality.

IX.

They won’t frown always, — some sweet day

  When I forget to tease,

They’ll recollect how cold I looked,

  And how I just said ‘please.’

Then they will hasten to the door

  To call the little child,

Who cannot thank them, for the ice

  That on her lisping piled.

X: IMMORTALITY.

It is an honorable thought,

  And makes one lift one’s hat,

As one encountered gentlefolk

  Upon a daily street,

That we’ve immortal place,

  Though pyramids decay,

And kingdoms, like the orchard,

  Flit russetly away.

XI.

The distance that the dead have gone
  Does not at first appear;
Their coming back seems possible
  For many an ardent year.

And then, that we have followed them
  We more than half suspect,
So intimate have we become
  With their dear retrospect.

XII.

How dare the robins sing,
  When men and women hear
Who since they went to their account
  Have settled with the year! —
Paid all that life had earned
  In one consummate bill,
And now, what life or death can do
  Is immaterial.
Insulting is the sun
  To him whose mortal light,
Beguiled of immortality,
  Bequeaths him to the night.
In deference to him

Extinct be every hum,

Whose garden wrestles with the dew,

At daybreak overcome!

XIII: DEATH.

Death is like the insect

  Menacing the tree,

Competent to kill it,

  But decoyed may be.

Bait it with the balsam,

  Seek it with the knife,

Baffle, if it cost you

  Everything in life.

Then, if it have burrowed

  Out of reach of skill,

Ring the tree and leave it, —

  ‘T is the vermin’s will.

XIV: UNWARNED.

‘T is sunrise, little maid, hast thou

No station in the day?

‘T was not thy wont to hinder so, —

Retrieve thine industry.

‘T is noon, my little maid, alas!

And art thou sleeping yet?

The lily waiting to be wed,

The bee, dost thou forget?

My little maid, ‘t is night; alas,

That night should be to thee

Instead of morning! Hadst thou broached

Thy little plan to me,

Dissuade thee if I could not, sweet,

I might have aided thee.

XV.

Each that we lose takes part of us;

A crescent still abides,

Which like the moon, some turbid night,

Is summoned by the tides.

XVI.

Not any higher stands the grave
For heroes than for men;
Not any nearer for the child
Than numb three-score and ten.

This latest leisure equal lulls
The beggar and his queen;
Propitiate this democrat
By summer’s gracious mien.

XVII: ASLEEP.

As far from pity as complaint,

As cool to speech as stone,

As numb to revelation

As if my trade were bone.

As far from time as history,

As near yourself to-day

As children to the rainbow’s scarf,

Or sunset’s yellow play

To eyelids in the sepulchre.

How still the dancer lies,

While color’s revelations break,

And blaze the butterflies!

XVIII: THE SPIRIT.

‘T is whiter than an Indian pipe,

‘T is dimmer than a lace;

No stature has it, like a fog,

When you approach the place.

Not any voice denotes it here,

Or intimates it there;

A spirit, how doth it accost?

What customs hath the air?

This limitless hyperbole

Each one of us shall be;

‘T is drama, if (hypothesis)

It be not tragedy!

XIX: THE MONUMENT.

She laid her docile crescent down,

  And this mechanic stone

Still states, to dates that have forgot,

  The news that she is gone.

So constant to its stolid trust,

  The shaft that never knew,

It shames the constancy that fled

  Before its emblem flew.

XX.

Bless God, he went as soldiers,

  His musket on his breast;

Grant, God, he charge the bravest

  Of all the martial blest.

Please God, might I behold him

  In epauletted white,

I should not fear the foe then,

  I should not fear the fight.

XXI.

Immortal is an ample word

When what we need is by,

But when it leaves us for a time,

‘T is a necessity.

Of heaven above the firmest proof

We fundamental know,

Except for its marauding hand,

It had been heaven below.

XXII.

Where every bird is bold to go,

And bees abashless play,

The foreigner before he knocks

Must thrust the tears away.

XXIII.

The grave my little cottage is,

Where, keeping house for thee,

I make my parlor orderly,

And lay the marble tea,

For two divided, briefly,

A cycle, it may be,

Till everlasting life unite

In strong society.

XXIV.

This was in the white of the year,

That was in the green,

Drifts were as difficult then to think

As daisies now to be seen.

Looking back is best that is left,

Or if it be before,

Retrospection is prospect’s half,

Sometimes almost more.

XXV.

Sweet hours have perished here;

This is a mighty room;

Within its precincts hopes have played, —

Now shadows in the tomb.

XXVI.

Me! Come! My dazzled face

In such a shining place!

Me! Hear! My foreign ear

The sounds of welcome near!

The saints shall meet

Our bashful feet.

My holiday shall be

That they remember me;

My paradise, the fame

That they pronounce my name.

XXVII: INVISIBLE.

From us she wandered now a year,

  Her tarrying unknown;

If wilderness prevent her feet,

  Or that ethereal zone

No eye hath seen and lived,

  We ignorant must be.

We only know what time of year

  We took the mystery.

XXVIII.

I wish I knew that woman’s name,
So, when she comes this way,
To hold my life, and hold my ears,
For fear I hear her say

She’s ‘sorry I am dead,’ again,
Just when the grave and I
Have sobbed ourselves almost to sleep, —
Our only lullaby.

XXIX: TRYING TO FORGET.

Bereaved of all, I went abroad,
  No less bereaved to be
Upon a new peninsula, —
  The grave preceded me,

Obtained my lodgings ere myself,
  And when I sought my bed,
The grave it was, reposed upon
  The pillow for my head.

I waked, to find it first awake,
  I rose, — it followed me;
I tried to drop it in the crowd,
  To lose it in the sea,

In cups of artificial drowse

To sleep its shape away, —

The grave was finished, but the spade

Remained in memory.

XXX.

I felt a funeral in my brain,

And mourners, to and fro,

Kept treading, treading, till it seemed

That sense was breaking through.

And when they all were seated,

A service like a drum

Kept beating, beating, till I thought

My mind was going numb.

And then I heard them lift a box,

And creak across my soul

With those same boots of lead, again.

Then space began to toll

As all the heavens were a bell,

And Being but an ear,

And I and silence some strange race,

Wrecked, solitary, here.

XXXI.

I meant to find her when I came;
  Death had the same design;
But the success was his, it seems,
  And the discomfit mine.

I meant to tell her how I longed
  For just this single time;
But Death had told her so the first,
  And she had hearkened him.

To wander now is my abode;
  To rest, — to rest would be
A privilege of hurricane
  To memory and me.

XXXII: WAITING.

I sing to use the waiting,

  My bonnet but to tie,

And shut the door unto my house;

  No more to do have I,

Till, his best step approaching,

  We journey to the day,

And tell each other how we sang

  To keep the dark away.

XXXIII.

A sickness of this world it most occasions

When best men die;

A wishfulness their far condition

To occupy.

A chief indifference, as foreign

A world must be

Themselves forsake contented,

For Deity.

XXXIV.

Superfluous were the sun
  When excellence is dead;
He were superfluous every day,
  For every day is said

That syllable whose faith
  Just saves it from despair,
And whose ‘I’ll meet you’ hesitates
  If love inquire, ‘Where?’

Upon his dateless fame
  Our periods may lie,
As stars that drop anonymous
  From an abundant sky.

XXXV.

So proud she was to die

  It made us all ashamed

That what we cherished, so unknown

  To her desire seemed.

So satisfied to go

  Where none of us should be,

Immediately, that anguish stooped

  Almost to jealousy.

XXXVI: FAREWELL.

Tie the strings to my life, my Lord,

  Then I am ready to go!

Just a look at the horses —

  Rapid! That will do!

Put me in on the firmest side,

  So I shall never fall;

For we must ride to the Judgment,

  And it’s partly down hill.

But never I mind the bridges,

  And never I mind the sea;

Held fast in everlasting race

  By my own choice and thee.

Good-by to the life I used to live,

And the world I used to know;

And kiss the hills for me, just once;

Now I am ready to go!

XXXVII.

The dying need but little, dear, —

A glass of water’s all,

A flower’s unobtrusive face

To punctuate the wall,

A fan, perhaps, a friend’s regret,

And certainly that one

No color in the rainbow

Perceives when you are gone.

XXXVIII: DEAD.

There’s something quieter than sleep
  Within this inner room!
It wears a sprig upon its breast,
  And will not tell its name.

Some touch it and some kiss it,
  Some chafe its idle hand;
It has a simple gravity
  I do not understand!

While simple-hearted neighbors
  Chat of the ‘early dead,’
We, prone to periphrasis,
  Remark that birds have fled!

XXXIX.

The soul should always stand ajar,

That if the heaven inquire,

He will not be obliged to wait,

Or shy of troubling her.

Depart, before the host has slid

The bolt upon the door,

To seek for the accomplished guest, —

Her visitor no more.

XL.

Three weeks passed since I had seen her, —

  Some disease had vexed;

‘T was with text and village singing

  I beheld her next,

And a company — our pleasure

  To discourse alone;

Gracious now to me as any,

  Gracious unto none.

Borne, without dissent of either,

  To the parish night;

Of the separated people

  Which are out of sight?

XLI.

I breathed enough to learn the trick,

  And now, removed from air,

I simulate the breath so well,

  That one, to be quite sure

The lungs are stirless, must descend

  Among the cunning cells,

And touch the pantomime himself.

  How cool the bellows feels!

XLII.

I wonder if the sepulchre

  Is not a lonesome way,

When men and boys, and larks and June

  Go down the fields to hay!

XLIII: JOY IN DEATH.

If tolling bell I ask the cause.

‘A soul has gone to God,’

I’m answered in a lonesome tone;

Is heaven then so sad?

That bells should joyful ring to tell

A soul had gone to heaven,

Would seem to me the proper way

A good news should be given.

XLIV.

If I may have it when it’s dead

I will contented be;

If just as soon as breath is out

It shall belong to me,

Until they lock it in the grave,

‘T is bliss I cannot weigh,

For though they lock thee in the grave,

Myself can hold the key.

Think of it, lover! I and thee

Permitted face to face to be;

After a life, a death we’ll say, —

For death was that, and this is thee.

XLV.

Before the ice is in the pools,

  Before the skaters go,

Or any cheek at nightfall

  Is tarnished by the snow,

Before the fields have finished,

  Before the Christmas tree,

Wonder upon wonder

  Will arrive to me!

What we touch the hems of

  On a summer’s day;

What is only walking

  Just a bridge away;

That which sings so, speaks so,

When there’s no one here, —

Will the frock I wept in

Answer me to wear?

XLVI: DYING.

I heard a fly buzz when I died;

  The stillness round my form

Was like the stillness in the air

  Between the heaves of storm.

The eyes beside had wrung them dry,

  And breaths were gathering sure

For that last onset, when the king

  Be witnessed in his power.

I willed my keepsakes, signed away

  What portion of me I

Could make assignable, — and then

  There interposed a fly,

With blue, uncertain, stumbling buzz,

Between the light and me;

And then the windows failed, and then

I could not see to see.

XLVII.

Adrift! A little boat adrift!

  And night is coming down!

Will no one guide a little boat

  Unto the nearest town?

So sailors say, on yesterday,

  Just as the dusk was brown,

One little boat gave up its strife,

  And gurgled down and down.

But angels say, on yesterday,

  Just as the dawn was red,

One little boat o’erspent with gales

Retrimmed its masts, redecked its sails

Exultant, onward sped!

XLVIII.

There’s been a death in the opposite house
  As lately as to-day.
I know it by the numb look
  Such houses have alway.

The neighbors rustle in and out,
  The doctor drives away.
A window opens like a pod,
  Abrupt, mechanically;

Somebody flings a mattress out, —
  The children hurry by;
They wonder if It died on that, —
  I used to when a boy.

The minister goes stiffly in

  As if the house were his,

And he owned all the mourners now,

  And little boys besides;

And then the milliner, and the man

  Of the appalling trade,

To take the measure of the house.

  There’ll be that dark parade

Of tassels and of coaches soon;

  It’s easy as a sign, —

The intuition of the news

  In just a country town.

XLIX.

We never know we go, — when we are going

We jest and shut the door;

Fate following behind us bolts it,

And we accost no more.

L: THE SOUL’S STORM.

It struck me every day

  The lightning was as new

As if the cloud that instant slit

  And let the fire through.

It burned me in the night,

  It blistered in my dream;

It sickened fresh upon my sight

  With every morning’s beam.

I thought that storm was brief, —

  The maddest, quickest by;

But Nature lost the date of this,

  And left it in the sky.

LI.

Water is taught by thirst;

Land, by the oceans passed;

Transport, by throe;

Peace, by its battles told;

Love, by memorial mould;

Birds, by the snow.

LII: THIRST.

We thirst at first, — ‘t is Nature’s act;

  And later, when we die,

A little water supplicate

  Of fingers going by.

It intimates the finer want,

  Whose adequate supply

Is that great water in the west

  Termed immortality.

LIII.

A clock stopped — not the mantel’s;

Geneva’s farthest skill

Can’t put the puppet bowing

That just now dangled still.

An awe came on the trinket!

The figures hunched with pain,

Then quivered out of decimals

Into degreeless noon.

It will not stir for doctors,

This pendulum of snow;

The shopman importunes it,

While cool, concernless No

Nods from the gilded pointers,

Nods from the seconds slim,

Decades of arrogance between

The dial life and him.

LIV: CHARLOTTE BRONTË’S GRAVE.

All overgrown by cunning moss,

All interspersed with weed,

The little cage of ‘Currer Bell,’

In quiet Haworth laid.

This bird, observing others,

When frosts too sharp became,

Retire to other latitudes,

Quietly did the same,

But differed in returning;

Since Yorkshire hills are green,

Yet not in all the nests I meet

Can nightingale be seen.

Gathered from many wanderings,

Gethsemane can tell

Through what transporting anguish

She reached the asphodel!

Soft fall the sounds of Eden

Upon her puzzled ear;

Oh, what an afternoon for heaven,

When ‘Brontë’ entered there!

LV.

A toad can die of light!

Death is the common right

Of toads and men, —

Of earl and midge

The privilege.

Why swagger then?

The gnat’s supremacy

Is large as thine.

LVI.

Far from love the Heavenly Father

  Leads the chosen child;

Oftener through realm of briar

  Than the meadow mild,

Oftener by the claw of dragon

  Than the hand of friend,

Guides the little one predestined

  To the native land.

LVII: SLEEPING.

A long, long sleep, a famous sleep

  That makes no show for dawn

By stretch of limb or stir of lid, —

  An independent one.

Was ever idleness like this?

  Within a hut of stone

To bask the centuries away

  Nor once look up for noon?

LVIII: RETROSPECT.

‘T was just this time last year I died.

I know I heard the corn,

When I was carried by the farms, —

It had the tassels on.

I thought how yellow it would look

When Richard went to mill;

And then I wanted to get out,

But something held my will.

I thought just how red apples wedged

The stubble’s joints between;

And carts went stooping round the fields

To take the pumpkins in.

I wondered which would miss me least,

And when Thanksgiving came,

If father’d multiply the plates

To make an even sum.

And if my stocking hung too high,

Would it blur the Christmas glee,

That not a Santa Claus could reach

The altitude of me?

But this sort grieved myself, and so

I thought how it would be

When just this time, some perfect year,

Themselves should come to me.

LIX: ETERNITY.

On this wondrous sea,

Sailing silently,

  Ho! pilot, ho!

Knowest thou the shore

Where no breakers roar,

  Where the storm is o’er?

In the silent west

Many sails at rest,

  Their anchors fast;

Thither I pilot thee, —

Land, ho! Eternity!

  Ashore at last!

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