



THE MOTHER
AND OTHER POEMS

WEIR MITCHELL

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Edmund C. Stedman

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Wear Mitchell



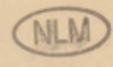
Edmund C. Stedman

THE MOTHER.

Sheliness

In the ~~silence~~ of the death room motionless I kept my place,
 While beneath my eyes a wanness came upon the little face,
 And a cold, blank smile that stung me, as the pallor grew apace.
 Then, as if from some far distance, spoke a voice: "The child is
 dead."
 "Dead?" I cried. "Is God not good? What thing accursed was
 that you said?"
 Swift I searched their eyes of pity, swaying, bowed, and all my soul
 Shrank as though a hand had crushed it, crumpled like a useless
 scroll
 Read and done with, passed from sorrow. By a quiet dream be-
 guiled
 Far was I: myself I saw, as one another sees, and smiled,
 Crooning o'er a baby doll, part a mother, part a child;
 Then half sorry, ceased to wonder why I left my brood,
 Till the lessoning years went by me, and the instinct, love—renewed,
 Stirred again each stronger fibre, and were mine these living
 things;
 Bone of my bone! flesh of my flesh! who on earth a title brings
 Flawless as this mother-title, free from aught of mortal stain,
 Innocent and pure possession, double-born of joy and pain?
 Oh what wonder these could help me, set me laughing, tho' I sobbed
 As they drew my very heart out, and the laden breasts were
 robbed.
 Tender buds of gentle pleasure came as come the buds of May,
 Trivial, wondrous, unexpected, blossoming from day to day.
 Ah! the clutch of tendril-fingers, that with pretty cunning knew
 So to coil in sturdy grapple round the stem from which they grew;
 Shall a man this joy discover? How the heart-wine to the brain
 Rushed with shock of bliss, when, startled, first I won this simple
 gain.
 How I mocked those seeking fingers, eager for their earliest toy,
 Telling none my new-found treasure. Miser of the mother's joy,
 Quick I caught the first faint ripple, answering me with lip and
 eyes,
 As I stooped, with mirthful purpose, keen to capture fresh replies
 When the wondrous living mirror, over which I bent the while,
 Learned the new gay trick of laughter, and was born the art to
 smile.
 Then my vision lost its gladness, and I stood on life's gray strand,
 Watching where a little love-bark drifted slowly from the land;
 For again the bells were ringing Christmas o'er the snow of dawn,
 And my dreaming memory hurt me with a hot face, gray and
 drawn,
 And with small hands locked in anguish. Ah! those days of help-
 less pain.

silence



Mine the mother's wrathful grief. He! O Christ! Had he been
Cain,

Father of the primal murder, black with every hideous thought,
Far too vast the retribution; impotent for good had wrought
This excess of useless torture, that the crushed soul nothing taught.
So with reeling brain I questioned, while the fevered cheek grew
white,

And, at last I seemed to pass with him, released, to outer night.
Seraph voices whispered round me: "God," they said, "hath set
our task,

"Thou to question, we to speak; be fearless; ask what thou wouldst
ask."

Wildly beat my heart. Thought only, regnant, held its sober pace,
Whilst a winged mind I wandered in the bleak domain of space.
Then I sought and saw untroubled all the mystery of time,
Where beneath me rolled the earth-star in its first chaotic slime,
As bewildering ages passing, with their cyclic changes came,
Heaving land and 'whelming waters, ice and fierce volcanic flame,
Sway and shock of tireless atoms, pulsing with the throb of force,
Whilst the planet, rent and shaken, fled upon its mighty course.
Last, with calm of wonder hushed, I saw amid the surging strife
Rise the first faint stir of being, and the tardy morn of life;
Life in countless generations. Speechless, mercilessly dumb,
Swept by ravage of disaster, tribe on tribe in silence come,
Till the yearning sense found voices, and on hill, and shore, and
plain,

Dreary from the battling myriads rose the birth-right wail of pain.
Then the pity of it smote me. Wherefore should a will unseen
Launch on years of needless anguish this great agonized machine?
Was Himself who willed this torment but a slave to law self-made?
Or had some mad angel-demon here, unchecked and undismayed,
Leave to make of earth a Job. Until the cruel game was played
Free to whirl the spinning earth-toy, where his despot forces
wrought,

While he watched each sense grow tender as the lifted creature
bought

With the love-gift added sorrow, and there came to man's estate
Will, the helpless, thought, the bootless, all the deathward war with
fate?

Had the lord of trampled hordes joy or grief, when first the mind,
Awful prize of contests endless, rose its giant foes to bind?
When his puppet tamed the forces that had helped its birth to breed,
And with laughter grown the master, trained them to its growing
need;

Last, upon the monster turning, on the serpent form of pain,
Criéd, "Bring forth no more in anguish;" with the arrows of the
brain

Smote the brute thing that no use had save to teach him to refrain
When earth's baser instincts tempted and the better thought was
vain.

Suddenly one harshly answered, "Thou hast seen the whole of
earth,

All its boundless years of misery, yea, its gladness and its mirth,
Yet thou hast a life created! Hadst thou not a choice? Why
cast

Purity to life's mad chances, where defeat is sure at last?"
 Low I moaned, "My tortured baby," and a gentler voice replied,
 "One alone thy soul can answer—this, this only, is denied.
 Yet take counsel of thy sadness. Should God give thy will a star
 Freight with eternal pleasure, free from agony and war,
 Wouldst thou wish it? Think! Time is not for the souls who
 roam in space;
 Speak. Thy will shall have its way. Be mother of one joyous race.
 Choose! Yon cold, gray world beneath thee thou shalt people free
 from guilt.
 There nor pain nor death shall ruin, never there shall blood be
 spilt."

Then I trembled, hesitating, for I saw its beauty born,
 Saw a Christ-like world of beings where no beast by beast was torn,
 Where the morrows bred no sorrows, and the gentle knew not
 scorn.

Yet, I said, "If life have meaning, and man must be, what shall lift
 These but born for joy's inaction, these who lack no added gift?
 Let the world you bid re-people hurl forever through the gloom,
 Tenantless, a blasted record of some huge funereal doom,
 Sad with unremembered slaughter, but a gray, forgotten tomb."
 Deep and deeper grew the stillness, and I knew how vain my quest.
 Not by God's supremest angel is that awful secret guessed.
 Yet with dull reiteration, like the pendulum's dead throb,
 Beat my heart; a moaning infant, all my body seemed to sob,
 And a cry like to my baby's, called to me across the night
 As the darkness fell asunder, and I saw a wall of light
 Barred with crucifical shadows, whence a weary wind did blow
 Shuddering. I felt it pass me heavy with its freight of woe.

Said a voice, "Behold God's dearest; also these no answer know,
 These be they who paid in sorrow for the right to bid thee hear.
 Had their lives in ease been cradled, had they never known a tear,
 Feebly had their psalms of warning fallen upon the listening ear.
 God the sun is God the shadow; and where pain is, God is near.
 Take again thy life and use it with a sweetened sense of fear;
 God is Father! God is Mother! Regent of a growing soul,
 Free art thou to grant mere pleasure, free to teach it uncontrol.
 Time is childhood! larger manhood bides beyond life's sunset hour,
 Where far other foes are waiting, and with ever gladder power
 Still the lord of awful choice, O striving creature of the sod!
 Thou shalt learn that imperfection is the noblest gift of God.
 For they mock his ample purpose who but dream, beyond the
 skies,
 Of a heaven where will may slumber, and the trained decision dies
 In the competence of answer found in death's immense replies.

Then my vision passed, and weeping, lo! I woke of death bereft,
 At my breast the baby brother, yonder there the dead I left;
 For my heart two worlds divided—his, my lost one's—his, who
 pressed
 Closer, waking all the mother, as he drew the aching breast,
 While twain spirits, joy and sorrow, hovered o'er my plundered
 nest.

Newport, October, 1891.

RESPONSIBILITY.

THUS, lying among the roses in the garden of the Great Inn,
sang Attar El Din of things yet to be, when the angels of affirma-
tion and denial should struggle for the soul of him dead :

“ I Moonkir, the angel, am come
To count of his good deeds the sum,
For this mortal death stricken and dumb.”

“ I Nekkeer, the clerk of ill thought,
Am here to dispute what hath wrought
This maker of song come to naught.

“ Let us call from the valleys of gloom,
From the night graves of sleep and the tomb,
The wretched he lured to their doom.”

Said Moonkir, the angel of light,
“ Life is made of the day and the night,
Let us summon the souls he set right.”

Then parting the dark tents of sleep,
Or stirred from their earth couches deep,
Came souls that were glad or did weep.

Spake a Voice :

“ I sat beside the cistern on the sand,
When this man's song did take me in its hand,
And hurled me helpless, as a sling the stone
That knows not will or pity of its own.
Within my heart was seed of murder sown,
So, once I struck, yea twice, when he did groan.”

“ Ay, that was the song,” said a voice,
“ Which I heard as I lay
'Gainst my camel's broad flanks,
Thinking how to repay
The death debt, ere night fled away.
And I rose as he sang, to rejoice
With a blessing of thanks,
For the song took my slack will and me
As a strong man might lustily throw
The power of hand and of knee
To string up to purpose a bow.
Quick I stole through the dark, but was stayed,
Just to hear, how, with every day phrase,
Such as useth a child or a maid,

From praise of decision to praise
 Of the quiet of evening, he fell,
 As a brook groweth still on the plain
 To picture how come thro' the grain
 The women with jars to the well.
 Near I drew o'er the sands cool and gray
 With my knife in my teeth, swift to slay,
 Felt my hand hot and wet, as I crept,
 Blank-eyed 'neath my eyes the man lay ;
 'This other had struck where he slept."

Then Moonkir, who treasures good deeds,
 To mark how the total exceeds,
 Said, " He soweth of millet and weeds

Who casts forth a song in the night,
 As a pigeon is flung for its flight,
 He knoweth not where 'twill alight."

"Lo, Allah, a wind doth command,
 And the caravan dies in the sand
 And the good ship is sped to the land."

Spake a Voice :

"I lay among the idle on the grass,
 And saw before me come and go, alas !
 This evil rhymer. And he sang how God
 Is but the cruel user of the rod,
 And how the wine cup better is than prayer ;
 Whereon I cursed, and counselled with despair,
 And drank with him, and left my field untilled,
 So all my house with want and woe was filled."

Spake a Voice :

"And I, that took no heed of things divine,
 And ever loved to loiter with the wine,
 Was stirred to think, and straightway sobered went,
 And in the folded stillness of my tent
 Struggled with Allah, and at morning fair
 Beheld this poet like the rest in prayer."

Cried he whose proportion of sin
 These angels considered within,
 Cried the soul of this Attar El Din,

"Lo, weigher of goodness and light,
 Lo, dark clerk of evil and night,
 Between the slow comings and flight

Of the sun and the day-death there lies,
 Ere sleep-time shall cloak a man's eyes,
 Ere the red dawn shall bid him arise,

An hour when the prayer seed is strown ;
 Man tilleth or letteth alone,
 For the ground where it falls is his own."

" Behold at even-time within my tent
 I wailed in song because a death shaft, sent
 From Azrael's bow, had laid again in dust
 My eldest born ; I sang because I must.
 For hate, love, joy, or grief, like Allah's birds,
 I have but song. Man's common use of words
 Fills not the thirsty cup of my desire
 To hurt my brothers with the scorch of fire
 That burns within. Yea, they must share my fate,
 Love with me, hate, with me be desolate ;
 And so I drew my bow-string to the eye,
 And shot my shafts I cared not where or why,
 If but the men indifferent, who lay
 Beneath the palm trees at the fall of day,
 I could make see with me the dead boy's look
 That swayed me like the bent reeds of the brook.
 But one who heard, and through long stress of grief
 Wrestled with agony of loss in vain,
 Into the desert went, and made full brief
 A clearance with the creditor called pain,
 And by a sword thrust gave his heart relief.

One whose dry eyes were as the summer sand,
 Wept as I sang, and said, ' I understand ;'

And one who loved, did also comprehend,
 Because I sang how, to life's bitter end
 The death fear sweetens love, and went his way
 With deepened love to where the dark-eyed lay."

Said Nekkeer, the clerk of man's wrong,
 " Great Solomon's self might be long
 In judging this mad son of song."

Cried the poet, " Shall two men agree ?
 Thou mighty collector of sin,
 Be advised, come with me to the Inn,
 There are friends who shall witness for me,
 Great-bellied, respectable, stanch,
 One arm set a-crook on the haunch,
 They will pour the red wine of advice,
 And behold, ye shall know in a trice
 How hopeless of wisdom to weigh
 The song words a poet may say."

Said Nekkeer, the clerk of ill thought,
 " Ah ! where shall decision be sought ?
 Let us quit the crazed maker of verse,
 A confuser of good and of worse."

" But first," quoth this Attar El Din,
 " I am dry ; leave my soul at the Inn."

Newport, October, 1891.

THE CAMPAGNA.

How gentle here is nature's mood. She lays
A woman-hand upon the troubled heart,
Bidding the world away and time depart,
While the brief minutes swoon to endless days
Filled full of sad, inconstant thoughtfulness.

Behold 'tis evening-tide. Dun cattle stand
Drowsed in the misted grasses. From the hollows deep,
Dim veils adrift, o'er arch and bower, sweep,
Casting a dreary doubt o'er all the land,
Weighting the twilight with some vague distress.

Transient and subtle, not to thought more near
Than spirit is to flesh, about me rise
Phantoms of memory that with fear surprise,
And are as wandering shadows, strange and drear,
That from their natal substance far have strayed.

The witches of the mind possess the time,
And cry, "Behold thy dead!" They come, they pass;
We yearn to give them feature, face; alas!
Love hath no morn for memory's failing prime,
What once was sweet with truth is but a shade.

The ghosts of nameless sorrow, joy, despair,
Emotions that have no remembered source,
Love-waifs from other worlds, hope, dread, remorse
Born of some vision's crime, wail thro' the air,
Crying, we were and are not, that is all.

Yet sweet the indecisive evening hour
That hath of earth the least. Unreal as dreams,
Dreamed within dreams, and ever further seems
The sound of human toil, while grass and flower
Bend where the mercy of the dew doth fall.

Strange mysteries of expectation wait
Above the grave-mounds of the storied space,
Where, buried, lie a nation's strength and grace,
And the sad joys of Rome's imperious state
That perished of its insolent excess.

A dull, gray shroud o'er this vast burial rests,
Is deathly still, or seems to rise and fall,
As on a dear one, dead, the moveless pall
Doth cheat the heart with stir of her white breasts,
Mocking the troubled hour with worse distress.

A deathful languor holds the twilight mist,
 Unearthly colors drape the Alban hills,
 A dull malaria the spirit fills;
 Death and decay all beauty here have kissed,
 Pledging the land to sorrowing loveliness.

Rome, May, 1891.

LINCOLN.

CHAINED by stern duty to the rock of state,
 His spirit armed in mail of rugged mirth,
 Ever above though ever-near to earth,
 Yet felt his heart the vulture beaks that sate
 Base appetites, and foul with slander, wait
 Till the keen lightnings bring the awful hour
 When wounds and suffering shall give them power.
 Most was he like that Luther, gay and great,
 Solemn and mirthful, strong of heart and limb.
 Tender and simple too; he was so near
 To all things human that he cast out fear,
 And, ever simpler, like a little child,
 Lived in unconscious nearness unto Him
 Who always on earth's little ones hath smiled.

Newport, October, 1891.

THE PROTESTANT CEMETERY AT ROME.

THE GRAVE OF KEATS.

“HERE lies one whose name was writ in water.”*

The strong-voiced city's roar of fretful life
Falls comfortless upon this strand of death,
As beats the unrestful sea some ice-clad isle
Set in the sorrowful night of Arctic seas,
Some lorn domain of endless silences.
Rather for me is this a Summer isle,
Where friendly waves the ship-wrecked gently leave ;
For, little city of the pilgrim dead,
Dear are thy marble streets, thy rosy lanes :
Easy it seems and natural here to die,
And death a mother who, with tender care,
Doth lay to sleep her ailing little ones.
Old are these graves, and they who, mournfully,
Saw dust to dust return, themselves are mourned ;
Yet, in green cloisters of the cypress shade,
Full-choired chants the fearless nightingale
Unending liturgies of spring-born hopes,
Ancestral songs learned when the world was young.
Sing on, sing ever in thy breezy homes :
Toss earthward from the white acacia bloom
The mingled joy of fragrance and of song.
Sing in the pure security of bliss ;
These dead concern not thee, nor thee the fear
That is the shadow of our earthly loves.
And me thou canst not comfort ; tender hearts
Inherit here the anguish of the doubt
Writ on this gravestone. He, at last, I trust,
Serenity of confident attainment knows.
The night falls and the darkened greenery starred
With pallid roses shuts the world away.
Sad, wandering souls of song, frail ghosts of thoughts
That voiceless died, the massing shadows, haunt,
Troubling the heart with unfulfilled delight.
The moon is listening in the vault of heaven,
And, like the airy march of mighty wings,
The rhythmic throb of stately cadences
Enthralls the ear with some high-measured verse,
Where ecstasies of passion-nurtured words
For great thoughts find a home, and fill the mind
With echoes of divinely-purposed hopes,
That won on earth the death-pall of despair.

* Inscription placed on the tomb, at Keats' desire.

Night darkens round me. Never more in life
 May I, companioned by the friendly dead,
 Walk in this stately fellowship again ;
 Therefore, thou silent singer, 'neath the grass,
 Sing to me still those sweeter songs unsung,
 "Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone,"
 Caressing thought with wonderments of phrase
 Such as thy Spring-tide rapture knew to win.
 Ay, sing to me thy unborn summer songs,
 And the ripe autumn lays that might have been ;
 Strong wine of fruit mature, whose flowers alone we know.

Rome, May, 1891.

THE LOST PHILOPENA—TO M. G. M.

MORE blest is he who gives than who receives,
 For he that gives doth always something get :
 Angelic usurers that interest set :
 And what we give is like the cloak of leaves
 Which to the beggared earth the great trees fling,
 Thoughtless of gain in chilly Autumn days :
 The mystic husbandry of nature's ways
 Shall fetch it back in greenery of the Spring.
 One tender gift there is, my little maid,
 That doth the giver and receiver bless,
 And shall with obligation none distress,
 Coin of the heart in God's just balance weighed ;
 Wherefore, sweet spendthrift, still be prodigal,
 And freely squander what thou hast from all.

Lucerne, July, 1891.

ROMA.

RIPE hours there be that do anticipate
The heritage of death, and bid us see,
As from the vantage of eternity,
The shadow symbols of historic fate.

As o'er some Alpine summit's lonely steep,
Blinding and terrible, with spears of light,
Hurling the snows from many a shaken height
The storm-clad spirits of the mountain sweep.

Thus, in the solitude where broodeth thought,
Torn from rent chasms of the soundless past,
Go by me, as if borne upon the blast,
The awful forms which time and man have wrought.

Swift through the gloom each mournful chariot rolls,
Dim shapes of empire urge the flying steeds,
Featured with man's irrevocable deeds,
Robed with the changeful passions of men's souls.

Ethereal visions pass serene in prayer,
Their eyes aglow with sacrificial light;
Phantoms of creeds long dead, their garments bright,
Drip the red blood of torture and despair.

In such an hour my spirit did behold
A woman wonderful. Unnumbered years
Left in her eyes the beauty born of tears,
And full they were of fatal stories old.

The trophies of her immemorial reign
The shadowy great of old beside her bore,
A broidery of ancient song she wore;
And the glad muses held her regal train.

Still hath she kingdom o'er the souls of men;
Dear is she always in her less estate.
The sad, the gay, the thoughtful on her wait,
Praising her evermore with tongue and pen.

Stately her ways and sweet, and all her own;
As one who has forgotten time she lives,
Loves, loses, lures anew, and ever gives,
She who all misery and all joy hath known.

If thou wouldst see her, as the twilight fails
 Go forth along the ancient street of tombs,
 And, when the purple shade divinely glooms
 High o'er the Alban hills and night prevails,

If then she is not with thee while the light
 Glows over roof and column, tower and dome,
 And the dead stir beneath thy feet, and Rome
 Lies in the solemn keeping of the night ;

If then she be not thine, not thine the lot
 Of those some angel rescues for an hour
 From earth's mean limitations, granting power
 To see as man may see when time is not.

Rome, May, 1891.

THE VESTAL'S DREAM.

AH, Venus, white-limbed mother of delight
 Why shouldst thou tease her with a dream so dear ?
 Winged tenderness of kisses, hovering near,
 Her gentle longings cheat. Forbidden sight
 Of eager eyes doth thro' the virgin night
 Perplex her innocence with cherished fear.
 O, cruel thou, with sweets to ripen here
 In wintry cloisters, what can know but blight.
 Wilt leave her now to scorn ? The licitor's blows
 To-morrow shall be merciless. The light
 Dies on the altar. Nay, swift through the night,
 Comes pityful the queen of young desire,
 That reddened in a dream this chaste white rose,
 And lights with silver torch the fallen fire.

Grundelwald, July, 1891.

MY LADY OF THE ROSES.

At Venice while the twilight hour
Yet lit a gray-walled garden space,
I saw a woman fair of face
Pass, as in thought, from flower to flower.
The roses, haply, something said,
For here and there she bent her head
Till, startled from their hidden nest
In the covert of her breast,
Blushes rose, like fluttered birds,
At those naughty rosy words.
One need not wise as Portia be
To guess love held her heart in fee.
Prudently a full-blown rose
For her confidence she chose,
Whispering, she took its breath,
And for what its fragrance saith,
Smiling knelt, and kissed it twice;
Caught it, held it, kissed it thrice.
Ah! her kiss the rose had killed;
Wrecked, in tender disarray
On the ground its petals lay,
All its autumn fate fulfilled.
Swiftly from her paling face
Fell the rosy flush apace.
Had her kiss recalled a bliss
Life forevermore should miss?
Had there been a fatal hour
When false lips had hurt the flower
Of love, and now its sad estate
She saw in that dead rose's fate?
Who may know? A little while
She lingered with a doubtful smile,
Took then a younger rose, whose slips
The garden knew, and with her lips
Its color matched. What gracious words
It said might know the garden birds—
Something, perchance, that liked her well,
But roses kiss, and never tell.

What confession, what dear boon,
Heard that ruddy priest of June?
Was it a mad gypsy-rose
Fortunes eager to disclose,
Gravely whispering predictions
Rich with love's unending fictions,
Saying nonsense good to hear,

Like a pleasant-mannered seer?
 Gypsy palms are crossed with gold,
 But my lady, gayly bold,
 In the antique coin of kisses
 Paid for prophecy of blisses;
 And, to make assurance sure,
 This conspirator demure
 Murmured, in a pretty way,
 What her prophet ought to say.
 Low she laughed, and then was gone;
 My pleasant little play was done.

Alone I sit and muse. Below,
 Black gondolas glide to and fro,
 Like shadows that have stolen away
 From centuried arch and palace gray.
 Then, as if out of memory brought,
 The sequel of my garden masque
 Comes silently, by fancy wrought;
 A gift I had not cared to ask.

Lo! where the terraced marble ends,
 Barred by the sweet-briar's scented bound,
 The lady of my dream descends,
 And day by day the garden ground
 Her footsteps know; with lingering gait,
 She wanders early, wanders late,
 Or, sadly patient, on the lawn
 Each day renews her gentle trust,
 When from the busy highway drawn,
 Float high its curves of sunlit dust.
 The children of her garden greet
 With counsel innocent and sweet,
 The coming of her constant feet.
 She whispers, and their low replies
 Bring gladness to her lips and eyes;
 She will no other company;
 For her the flowers have come to be
 All of life's dimmed reality.
 Purple pansies, gold embossed,
 That in love had once been crossed,
 Murmur, we have loved and lost;
 And the cool blue violets
 Sigh, we wait for life's regrets.
 Thistles gray, beyond the fence,
 Mutter prickly common sense;
 While the lilies, pale and bent,
 Say, we too sinned, are penitent;
 Only that can bring content.

Red generations of the rose
 Unheeded passed to death's repose;
 The peach upon the crumbling wall,
 With Spring-tide bloom and Autumn fall
 No proverb had to foster fear,

No time-born wisdom brought her near.
 The willows o'er two noisy brooks,
 In marriage come to sober mood,
 Were but green slips that eve of May ;
 Now, underneath their shade she looks,
 Or, smiling, says, Time must be rude,
 To keep him thus so many a day.
 They tell her he is dead! Ah! nay,
 She answers, he but rode away,
 And he will come again in May.
 And I can wait, she says ; and stands
 With roses in her thin white hands.
 Child-like, with innocent replies,
 She meets the world. Wide open lies
 Her book of life ; Time turns the leaves,
 Like each to each, because she grieves,
 Nor less, nor more, save when in fear,
 One darkened eye of all the year,
 Dismayed lest love's divine distress
 Be dulled by time's forgetfulness.

Venice, June, 1891.

PISA—THE DUOMO.

Lo, this is like a song writ long ago,
 Born of the easy strength of simpler days,
 Filled with the life of man, his joy, his praise,
 Marriage and childhood, love and sin and woe,
 Defeat and victory, and all men know
 Of passionâte remorse, and the stays
 That help the weary on life's rugged ways.
 A dreaming seraph felt this beauty grow
 In sleep's pure hour, and with joy grown bold
 Set the fair crystal in the thought of man ;
 And Time, with antique tints of ivory wan
 And gentle industries of rain and light,
 Its stones rejoiced, and o'er them crumbled gold
 Won from the boundaries of day and night.

Pisa, June, 1891.

VENICE.

I.

I AM Venezia, that sad Magdalen,
Who with her lovers' arms the turbaned East
Smote, and thro' lusty centuries of gain
Lived a wild queen of battle and of feast.
I netted, in gold meshes of my hair,
The great of soul; Painter and poet, priest,
Bent at my will with picture, song and prayer,
And ever love of me their fame increased,
Till I, a queen, became the slave of slaves,
And, like the ghost-kings of the Umbrian plain,
Saw from my centuries, torn as from their graves,
The priceless jewels of my haughty reign.
Gone are my days of gladness, now in vain
I hurt the tender with my speechless pain.

II.

Now am I one poor corner of a land
That, like Delilah, won with deathful bliss
Each conquering foe who wooed her wanton kiss,
And sheared her lovers' strength with certain hand,
And gave him to Philistia's bonds of vice;
Smiling to see the strong limbs waste away,
The manly vigor crippled by decay,
Usurious years exact the minute's price.
Ah! when *my* great were greatest, ever glad,
I thanked them with the hope of nobler deeds.
Statesman and poet, painter, sculptor, knight—
These my dear lovers were ere days grew sad,
And them I taught how mightily exceeds
All other love the love that holds God's light.

III.

The glowing pageant of my story lies,
A shaft of light across the stormy years,
When 'mid the agony of blood and tears,
Or pope, or kaiser won the mournful prize,
Till I, the fearless child of ocean, heard
The step of doom, and, trembling, to my fall,
Remorseful knew that I had seen unstirred
Proud Freedom's death, the tyrant's festival;
Whilst that Italia which was yet to be,
And is, and shall be, sat a virgin pure,
High over Umbria on the mountain slopes,
And saw the failing fires of liberty
Fade on the chosen shrine she deemed secure,
When died for many a year man's noblest hopes.

Venice, June, 1891.

THE QUAKER LADY.*

BY S. WEIR MITCHELL, M.D.

'MID drab and gray of mouldered leaves,
The spoil of last October,
I see the Quaker lady stand
In dainty garb and sober.

No speech has she for praise or prayer,
No blushes, as I claim
To know what gentle whisper gave
Her prettiness a name.

The wizard stillness of the hour
My fancy aids: again
Return the days of hoop and hood
And tranquil William Penn.

I see a maid amid the wood
Demurely calm and meek,
Or troubled by the mob of curls
That riots on her cheek.

Her eyes are blue, her cheeks are red—
Gay colors for a Friend—
And nature with her mocking rouge
Stands by a blush to lend.

The gown that holds her rosy grace
Is truly of the oddest;
And wildly leaps her tender heart
Beneath the kerchief modest.

It must have been the poet Love
Who, while she slyly listened,
Divined the maiden in the flower,
And thus her semblance christened.

Was he a proper Quaker lad
In suit of simple gray?
What fortune had his venturous speech,
And was it "yea" or "nay"?

And if indeed she murmured "yea,"
And throbbled with worldly bliss,
I wonder if in such a case
Do Quakers really kiss?

* *Oldenlandia cœrulea* (Bluets, Innocence), known in Pennsylvania as the "Quaker ladies."

Or was it some love-wildered beau
 Of old colonial days,
 With clouded cane and 'broidered coat,
 And very artful ways?

And did he whisper through her curls
 Some wicked, pleasant vow,
 And swear no courtly dame had words
 As sweet as "thee" and "thou?"

Or did he praise her dimpled chin
 In eager song or sonnet,
 And find a merry way to cheat
 Her kiss-defying bonnet?

And sang he then in verses gay
 Amid this forest shady,
 The dainty flower at her feet
 Was like his Quaker lady?

And did she pine in English fogs,
 Or was his love enough?
 And did she learn to sport the fan,
 And use the patch and puff?

Alas! perhaps she played quadrille,
 And, naughty grown and older,
 Was pleased to show a dainty neck
 Above a snowy shoulder.

But sometimes in the Spring, I think,
 She saw, as in a dream,
 The meeting-house, the home sedate,
 The Schuylkill's quiet stream:

And sometimes in the minuet's pause,
 Her heart went wide afield
 To where, amid the woods of May,
 A blush its love revealed.

Till far away from court and king
 And powder and brocade,
 The Quaker ladies at her feet
 Their quaint obeisance made.

Newport, 1889.

THE WRECK OF THE EMMELINE.*

THIS tack might fetch Absecom bar,
The wind lies fair for the Dancing Jane;
She's good on a wind. If we keep this way,
You might talk with folk in the land of Spain.

A tidy snack of a breeze it be;
Just hear it whistle among them dunes;
It ain't no more nor a gal for strong—
Sakes! but it hollers a lot of toones.

Ye'd ought to hear it October-time
A-fiddlin' 'mong them cat-tails tall;
Our Bill can fiddle, but 'gainst that wind
He ain't no kind of a show at all.

Regardin' the wrack you want to see,
It's yon away, set hard and fast
On the outer bar. When tides is low
You kin see a mawsel of rib an' mast.

Four there was on us, wrackers all,
Born and bred to foller the sea,
And Dad beside; that's him you seed
Las' night a-mendin' them nets with me.

Waal, sir, it wasn't no night for talk;
The pipes went out, and we stood, we four,
A-starin' dumb thro' the rattlin' panes,
And says Joe, "I'd as lief be here ashore."

The wust wind ever I knowed
Was swoopin' across the deep,
And the waves was humpin' as white as snow,
And gallopin' in like frightened sheep.

It didn't seem nat'ral, that big moon
Ed be so quiet, them stars that bright,
A-p'intin' down from the big old roof,
As they might be icicles tipt with light.

Lord! sich a wind. It tuk that sand,
And flung it squar' on the winder-sash,
And howled and mumbled among the scrub,
An' yelled like a hurt thing cross the mash.

* A true story.

Old Dad as was sittin' 'side the fire ;
 Jus' now an' agin he riz his head,
 An' says he, "God help all folks at sea—
 God help 'em livin' and bury 'em dead.

"God help them in smacks as sail,
 An' men as v'yage in cruisers tall—
 God help all as goes by water,
 Big ship and little—help 'em all."

"Amen!" says Bill, jus' like it was church ;
 An' all of a sudden says Joe to me,
 "Hallo!" and thar' was a flash of light,
 And the roar of a gun away to sea.

"An' it's each for all," cries Dad to me ;
 "The night ain't much of a choice for sweet."
 So up he jumps an' stamps aroun',
 Jus' for to waken his sleepy feet.

"An' it's into ilers and on with boots."
 Sings Dad, "Thar' be'ant no time to spar' ;"
 "Pull in y'r waist-straps. Hurry a bit ;
 The shortest time 'll be long out thar'."

I didn't like it, nor them no more,
 But roun' we scuttles for oar and ropes,
 And out we plunged in the old man's wake,
 For we knowed as we was thar' only hopes.

The door druv' in ; the cinders flew ;
 The house, it shook ; out went the light ;
 The air was thick with squandered sand,
 As nipt like the sting of a blue-fly bite.

We passed yon belt of holly and pine,
 An' in among them cedar an' oak
 We stood a bit on the upper shore,
 And stared and listened, but no man spoke.

"Whar' lies she, Bill?" roars Dad to me,
 As down we bended. Then broke a roar
 As follered a lane of dancin' light
 That flashed and fluttered along the shore.

"She's thar'," says Joe ; "I'd sight of her then ;
 She's hard and high on the outer bar.
 Nary a light, and fast enough,
 And nary a mawsel of mast or spar."

Groans Dad, "Good Lord, it's got to be."
 Says Tom, "It ain't to be done I fear."
 Shouts Joe, a-lafin' (he allus lafed),
 "It ain't to be done by standin' here."

Waal, in she went, third time of tryin'—
 "In with a will," lafs Joe, in a roar.
 Wind a-cussin' and Dad a-prayin',
 But spry enough with the steerin' oar.

Four hours—an' cold. I was clean played out.
 "Give way," shouts Dad, "give way thar' now."
 "Hurray!" lafs Joe. And we slung her along,
 With a prayer to aft and a laf in the bow.

There was five men glad when we swept her in
 Under the lea, and none too soon.
 "Aboard thar', mates," shouts Dad, and the wind
 Jus' howled like a dog at full of moon.

"Up with you, Bill," sung Dad. So I—
 I grabbed for a broken rope as hung.
 Gosh! it was stiff as an anchor-stock,
 But up I swarmed, and over I swung.

Ice? She was ice from stem to starn.
 I gripped the rail an' sarched the wrack,
 And cleared my eyes, and sarched agin
 For livin' sign on that slidin' deck.

Four dead men in the scuppers lay
 Stiff as steel, they was froze that fast;
 An' one old man was hangin' awry,
 Tied to the stump of the brokin mast.

Ice-bound he were. But he kinder smiled,
 A-lookin' up. I was sort of skeered.
 Lord! thinks I, thar' was many a prayer
 Froze in the snow of that awrful beard.

Thar' was one man lashed to the wheel,
 An' his eyes was a-starin' wild,
 An' thar' close-snuggled up in his arms,
 O Lord, sir, the pity! a little child.

Now that jus' done for me. Down I fell,
 Jus' fell on my knees—I dasn't stand—
 And I says, O Lord! the wicked wind,
 It has killed at sea and cussed on land.

Then a leap to the boat. "Dead all," says I;
 "Give way," and we bent to the springin' oar;
 And never no word says boy or Dad,
 Till we crashed full high on the upper shore.

Then Dad, he dropped for to pray,
 But I stood all a shake on the sand;
 An' the old man says, "I could wish them souls
 Was fetched ashore to the joyful land."

But Joe, he lafs. Says Dad, right mad,
 "Shut up. Ye'd grin if ye went to heaven."
 "Why not?" says Joe. "As for this here earth,
 It takes lots of lafin' to keep things even."

Ready about and mind for the boom;
 Ef ye keer for to hold that far,
 You may see the Emmeline, keel and rib,
 Stuck fast and firm on the outer bar.

Newport, October, 1891.

THE RISING TIDE.

I STROLL an idle man at eve,
 Where move the waters to and fro;
 Full soon their added gains will leave
 Small space for me to come and go.

Already in the clogging sand,
 I walk with dull, retarded feet;
 Yet still is sweet the lessening strand,
 And still the lessening light is sweet.

Newport, October, 1891.

