

And in the school-room, as of old,
 you meet,
 —Ah, yes! you'll miss a certain
 merry tone,
 A cheerful face, a smile that should
 complete
 The vague place in the household
 picture grown
 To an aspect so familiar, it seems
 strange
 That aught should alter there.
 Mere life, at least,
 Could not have brought the shadow
 of a change
 Across it. Safely the warm years
 increase
 Among us. I have never sought to
 range
 From our small table at earth's
 general feast,
 To higher places: never loved but
 you,
 Dear family of friends, except my
 art:
 Nor any form save those my pencil
 drew
 E'er quivered in the quiet of my
 heart.
 I die a maiden to Madonna true,
 And would have so continued. . . .
 There, the smart,
 The pang, the faintness! . . .

Ever, as I lie
 Here, with the Autumn sunset on
 my face,
 And heavy in my curls (whilst it,
 and I,
 Together, slipping softly from the
 place
 We played in, pensively prepare to
 die),
 A low warm humming simmers in
 my ears,

—Old Summer afternoons! faint
 fragments rise
 Out of my broken life . . . at
 times appears [skies:
 Madonna-like a moon in mellow
 The three Fates with the spindle
 and the shears:
 The Grand Duke Cosmo with the
 Destinies:
 St. Margaret with her dragon: fit-
 ful cheers
 Along the Via Urbana come and go:
 Bologna with her towers! . . .
 Then all grows dim,
 And shapes itself anew, softly and
 slow,
 To cloistered glooms through
 which the silver hymn
 Eludes the sensitive silence; whilst
 below
 The southwest window, just one
 single, slim,
 And sleepy sunbeam, powders with
 waved gold
 A lane of gleamy mist along the
 gloom,
 Whereby to find its way, through
 manifold [tomb,
 Magnificence, to Guido Reni's
 Which, set in steadfast splendor, I
 behold.
 And all the while, I scent the in-
 cense fume,
 Till dizzy grows the brain, and dark
 the eye
 Beneath the eyelid. When the
 end is come,
 There, by his tomb (our master's) let
 me lie,
 Somewhere, not too far off; be-
 neath the dome
 Of our own Lady of the Rosary;
 Safe, where old friends will pass;
 and still near home!

LAST WORDS.

WILL, are you sitting and watching there yet? And I know, by a certain
 skill
 That grows out of utter wakefulness, the night must be far spent, Will:
 For, lying awake so many a night, I have learned at last to catch
 From the crowing cock, and the clanging clock, and the sound of the
 beating watch,
 A misty sense of the measureless march of Time, as he passes here,
 Leaving my life behind him; and I know that the dawn is near.
 But you have been watching three nights, Will, and you look so wan to-
 night,
 I thought, as I saw you sitting there, in the sad monotonous light
 Of the moody night-lamp near you, that I could not choose but close
 My lids as fast, and lie as still, as though I lay in a doze:
 For, I thought, "He will deem I am dreaming, and then he may steal
 away,
 And sleep a little: and this will be well." And truly, I dreamed, as I lay
 Wide awake, but all as quiet, as though, the last office done,
 They had streaked me out for the grave, Will, to which they will bear me
 anon.
 Dreamed; for old things and places came dancing about my brain,
 Like ghosts that dance in an empty house; and my thoughts went slipping
 again
 By green back-ways forgotten to a stiller circle of time,
 Where violets, faded forever, seemed blowing as once in their prime:
 And I fancied that you and I, Will, were boys again as of old.
 At dawn on the hill-top together, at eve in the field by the fold;
 Till the thought of this was growing too wildly sweet to be borne,
 And I opened my eyes, and turned me round, and there, in the light for-
 lorn,
 I find you sitting beside me. But the dawn is at hand, I know.
 Sleep a little. I shall not die to-night. You may leave me. Go.
 Eh! is it time for the drink? must you mix it? it does me no good.
 But thanks, old friend, true friend! I would live for your sake, if I could.
 Ay, there are some good things in life, that fall not away with the rest.
 And, of all best things upon earth, I hold that a faithful friend is the
 best.
 For woman, Will, is a thorny flower: it breaks, and we bleed and smart:
 The blossom falls at the fairest, and the thorn runs into the heart.
 And woman's love is a bitter fruit; and, however he bite it, or sip,
 There's many a man has lived to curse the taste of that fruit on his lip.
 But never was any man yet, as I ween, be he whosoever he may,
 That has known what a true friend is, Will, and wished that knowledge
 away.
 You were proud of my promise, faithful despite of my fall,
 Sad when the world seemed over sweet, sweet when the world turned
 gall:
 When I cloaked myself in the pride of praise from what God grieved to see,

You saw through the glittering lie of it all, and silently mourned for me:
When the world took back what the world had given, and scorn with
praise changed place,

I, from my sackcloth and ashes, looked up, and saw hope glow on your
face:

Therefore, fair weather be yours, Will, whether it shines or pours,
And, if I can slip from out of my grave, my spirit will visit yours.

O woman eyes that have smiled and smiled, O woman lips that have kist
The life-blood out of my heart, why thus forever do you persist,
Pressing out of the dark all round, to bewilder my dying hours
With your ghostly sorceries brewed from the breath of your poison-
flowers?

Still, though the idol be broken, I see at their ancient revels,
The riven altar around, come dancing the self-same devils.

Lente currite, lente currite, noctis equi!

Linger a little, O Time, and let me be saved ere I die.

How many a night 'neath her window have I walked in the wind and
rain,

Only to look at her shadow fleet over the lighted pane.

Alas! 'twas the shadow that rested, 'twas herself that fled, you see,

And now I am dying, I know it:—dying, and where is she!

Dancing divinely, perchance, or, over her soft harp strings,

Using the past to give pathos to the little new song that she sings.

Bitter? I dare not be bitter in the few last hours left to live.

Needing so much forgiveness, God grant me at least to forgive.

There can be no space for the ghost of her face down in the narrow
room,

And the mole is blind, and the worm is mute, and there must be rest in
the tomb.

And just one failure more or less to a life that seems to be

(Whilst I lie looking upon it, as a bird on the broken tree

She hovers about, ere making wing for a land of lovelier growth,

Brighter blossom, and purer air, somewhere far off in the south,)

Failure, crowning failure, failure from end to end,

Just one more or less, what matter, to the many no grief can mend?

Not to know vice is virtue, not fate, however men rave:

And, next to this I hold that man to be but a coward and slave

Who bears the plague-spot about him, and, knowing it, shrinks or fears

To brand it out, though the burning knife should hiss in his heart's hot
tears.

But I have caught the contagion of a world that I never loved,

Pleased myself with approval of those that I never approved,

Paltered with pleasures that pleased not, and fame where no fame could
be,

And how shall I look, do you think, Will, when the angels are looking
on me?

Yet oh! the confident spirit once mine, to dare and to do!

Take the world into my hand, and shape it, and make it anew:

Gather all men in my purpose, men in their darkness and dearth,

Men in their meanness and misery, made of the dust of the earth,

Mould them afresh, and make out of them Man, with his spirit sublime,
Man, the great heir of Eternity, dragging the conquests of Time!

Therefore I mingled among them, deeming the poet should hold

All natures saved in his own, as the world in the ark was of old;

All natures saved in his own to be types of a nobler race,

When the old world passeth away, and the new world taketh his place.

Triple fool in my folly! purblind and impotent worm,

Thinking to move the world, who could not myself stand firm!

Cheat of a worn-out trick, as one that on shipboard roves

Wherever the wind may blow, still deeming the continent moves!

Blowing the frothy bubble of life's brittle purpose away;

Child, ever chasing the morrow, who now cannot ransom a day:

Still I called Fame to lead onward, forgetting she follows behind

Those who know whither they walk through the praise or dispraise of
mankind.

All my life (looking back on it) shows like the broken stair

That winds round a ruined tower, and never will lead anywhere.

Friend, lay your hand in my own, and swear to me, when you have seen
My body borne out from the door, ere the grass on my grave shall be

green,

You will burn every book I have written. And so perish, one and all,

Each trace of the struggle that failed with the life that I cannot recall.

Dust and ashes, earth's dross, which the mattock may give to the mole!

Something, though stained and defaced, survives, as I trust, with the
soul.

Something? . . . Ay, something comes back to me . . . Think! that I
might have been . . . what?

Almost, I fancy at times, what I meant to have been, and am not.

Where was the fault? Was it strength fell short? And yet (I can speak
of it now!)

How my spirit sung like the resonant nerve of a warrior's battle-bow

When the shaft has leapt from the string, what time, her first bright ban-
ner unfurled,

Song aimed her arrowy purpose in me sharp at the heart of the world.

Was it the hand that faltered, unskilled? or was it the eye that deceived?

However I reason it out, there remains a failure time has not retrieved.

I said I would live in all lives that beat, and love in all loves that be:

I would crown me lord of all passions; and the passions were lords of
me.

I would compass every circle, I would enter at every door,

In the starry spiral of science, and the labyrinth of lore,

Only to follow the flying foot of love to his last retreat.

Fool! that with man's all-imperfect would circumscribe God's all-com-
plete!

Arrogant error! whereby I starved like the fool in the fable of old,

Whom the gods destroyed by the gift he craved, turning all things to gold.

Be wise: know what to leave unknown. The flowers bloom on the brink,

But black death lurks at the bottom. Help men to enjoy, not to think,

O poet to whom I give place! cull the latest effect, leave the cause.

Few that dive for the pearl of the deep but are crushed in the kraken's jaws.

While the harp of Arion is heard at eve over the glimmering ocean :
 He floats in the foam, on the dauphin's back, gliding with gentle motion,
 Over the rolling water, under the light of the beaming star,
 And the nymphs, half asleep on the surface, sail moving his musical car.
 A little knowledge will turn youth gray. And I stood, chill in the sun,
 Naming you each of the roses ; blest by the beauty of none.
 My song had an after-savor of the salt of many tears,
 Or it burned with a bitter foretaste of the end as it now appears :
 And the world that had paused to listen awhile, because the first notes
 were gay,

Passed on its way with a sneer and a smile : " Has he nothing fresher to say ?
 This poet's mind was a weedy flower that presently comes to naught !"
 For the world was not so sad but what my song was sadder, it thought.
 Comfort me not. For if aught be worse than failure from over-stress
 Of a life's prime purpose, it is to sit down content with a little success.
 Talk not of genius baffled. Genius is master of man.
 Genius does what it must, and talent does what it can.
 Blot out my name, that the spirits of Shakespeare and Milton and Burns
 Look not down on the praises of fools with a pity my soul yet spurns.
 And yet, had I only the trick of an aptitude shrewd of its kind,
 I should have lived longer, I think, more merry of heart and of mind.
 Surely I knew (who better ?) the innermost secret of each
 Bird, and beast, and flower. Failed I to give to them speech ?
 All the pale spirits of storm, that sail down streams of the wind,
 Cleaving the thunder-cloud, with wild hair blowing behind ;
 All the soft seraphs that float in the light of the crimson eve,
 When Hesper begins to glitter, and the heavy woodland to heave :
 All the white nymphs of the water that dwell 'mid the lilies alone :
 And the buskined maids for the love of whom the hoary oak-trees groan ;
 They came to my call in the forest ; they crept to my feet from the river :
 They softly looked out of the sky when I sung, and their wings beat with
 breathless endeavor

The blocks of the broken thunder piling their stormy lattices,
 Over the moaning mountain walls, and over the sobbing seas.
 So many more reproachful faces around my bed !
 Voices moaning about me : " Ah ! couldst thou not heed what we said ?"
 Peace to the past ! it skills not now : these thoughts that vex it in vain
 Are but the dust of a broken purpose blown about the brain
 Which presently will be tenantless, when the wanton worms carouse,
 And the mole builds over my bones his little windowless house.
 It is growing darker and stranger, Will, and colder,—dark and cold,
 Dark and cold ! Is the lamp gone out ? Give me thy hand to hold.
 No : 'tis life's brief candle burning down. Tears ? tears, Will ! Why,
 This which we call dying is only ceasing to die.
 It is but the giving over a game all lose. Fear life, not death.
 The hard thing was to live, Will. To whatever bourn this breath
 Is going, the way is easy now. With flowers and music, life,
 Like a pagan sacrifice, leads us along to this dark High Priest with the
 knife
 I have been too peevish at mere mischance. For whether we build it,
 friend,

Of brick or jasper, life's large base dwindles into this point at the end,
 A kind of nothing ! Who knows whether 'tis fittest to weep or laugh
 At those thin curtains the spider spins o'er each dusty epitaph ?
 I talk wildly. But this I know, that not even the best and first,
 When all is done, can claim by desert what even to the last and worst
 Of us weak workmen, God from the depth of his infinite mercy giveth.
 These bones shall rest in peace, for I know that my Redeemer liveth.
 Doubtful images come and go ; and I seem to be passing them by.
 Bubbles these be of the mind, which show that the stream is hurrying nigh
 To the home of waters. Already I feel, in a sort of still sweet awe,
 The great main current of all that I am beginning to draw and draw
 Into perfect peace. I attain at last ! life's a long, long reaching out
 Of the soul to something beyond her. Now comes the end of all doubt.
 The vanishing point in the picture ! I have uttered weak words to-night,
 And foolish. A thousand failures, what are these in the sight
 Of the One All-Perfect who, whether man fails in his work, or succeeds,
 Builds surely, solemnly up from our broken days and deeds
 The infinite purpose of time. We are but day-laborers all,
 Early or late, or first or last at the gate in the vineyard wall.
 Lord ! if, in love, though fainting oft, I have tended thy gracious Vine,
 O, quench the thirst on these dying lips, Thou, who pourest the wine !
 Hush ! I am in the way to study a long, long silence now.
 I know at last what I cannot tell : I see what I may not show.
 Pray awhile for my soul. Then sleep. There is nothing in this to fear.
 I shall sleep into death. Night sleeps. The hoarse wolf howls not near,
 No dull owl beats the casement, and no rough bearded star
 Stares on my mild departure from yon dark window bar.
 Nature takes no notice of those that are coming or going.
 To-morrow make ready my grave, Will. To-morrow new flowers will be
 blowing.

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