

II

MAY-DAY AND OTHER PIECES

MAY-DAY

DAUGHTER of Heaven and Earth, coy Spring,
With sudden passion languishing,
Teaching barren moors to smile,
Painting pictures mile on mile,
Holds a cup with cowslip-wreaths,
Whence a smokeless incense breathes.
The air is full of whistlings bland;
What was that I heard
Out of the hazy land?
Harp of the wind, or song of bird,
Or vagrant booming of the air,
Voice of a meteor lost in day?
Such tidings of the starry sphere
Can this elastic air convey.
Or haply 't was the cannonade
Of the pent and darkened lake,
Cooled by the pendent mountain's shade,
Whose deeps, till beams of noonday break,
Afflicted moan, and latest hold
Even into May the iceberg cold.
Was it a squirrel's pettish bark,
Or clarionet of jay? or hark

Where yon wedged line the Nestor leads,
 Steering north with raucous cry
 Through tracts and provinces of sky,
 Every night alighting down
 In new landscapes of romance,
 Where darkling feed the clamorous clans
 By lonely lakes to men unknown.
 Come the tumult whence it will,
 Voice of sport, or rush of wings,
 It is a sound, it is a token
 That the marble sleep is broken,
 And a change has passed on things.

When late I walked, in earlier days,
 All was stiff and stark;
 Knee-deep snows choked all the ways,
 In the sky no spark;
 Firm-braced I sought my ancient woods,
 Struggling through the drifted roads;
 The whited desert knew me not,
 Snow-ridges masked each darling spot;
 The summer dells, by genius haunted,
 One arctic moon had disenchanted.
 All the sweet secrets therein hid
 By Fancy, ghastly spells undid.
 Eldest mason, Frost, had piled
 Swift cathedrals in the wild;
 The piny hosts were sheeted ghosts
 In the star-lit minster aisled.

I found no joy: the icy wind
 Might rule the forest to his mind.
 Who would freeze on frozen lakes?
 Back to books and sheltered home,
 And wood-fire flickering on the walls,
 To hear, when, 'mid our talk and games,
 Without the baffled North-wind calls.
 But soft! a sultry morning breaks;
 The ground-pines wash their rusty green,
 The maple-tops their crimson tint,
 On the soft path each track is seen,
 The girl's foot leaves its neater print.
 The pebble loosened from the frost
 Asks of the urchin to be tost.
 In flint and marble beats a heart,
 The kind Earth takes her children's part,
 The green lane is the school-boy's friend,
 Low leaves his quarrel apprehend,
 The fresh ground loves his top and ball,
 The air rings jocund to his call,
 The brimming brook invites a leap,
 He dives the hollow, climbs the steep.
 The youth sees omens where he goes,
 And speaks all languages the rose,
 The wood-fly mocks with tiny voice
 The far halloo of human voice;
 The perfumed berry on the spray
 Smacks of faint memories far away.
 A subtle chain of countless rings

The next into the farthest brings,
And, striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form.

The caged linnet in the Spring
Hearkens for the choral glee,
When his fellows on the wing
Migrate from the Southern Sea ;
When trellised grapes their flowers unmask,
And the new-born tendrils twine,
The old wine darkling in the cask
Feels the bloom on the living vine,
And bursts the hoops at hint of Spring :
And so, perchance, in Adam's race,
Of Eden's bower some dream-like trace
Survived the Flight and swam the Flood,
And wakes the wish in youngest blood
To tread the forfeit Paradise,
And feed once more the exile's eyes ;
And ever when the happy child
In May beholds the blooming wild,
And hears in heaven the bluebird sing,
'Onward,' he cries, 'your baskets bring, —
In the next field is air more mild,
And o'er yon hazy crest is Eden's balmier spring.'

Not for a regiment's parade,
Nor evil laws or rulers made,
Blue Walden rolls its cannonade,

But for a lofty sign
Which the Zodiac threw,
That the bondage-days are told,
And waters free as winds shall flow.
Lo! how all the tribes combine
To rout the flying foe.
See, every patriot oak-leaf throws
His elfin length upon the snows,
Not idle, since the leaf all day
Draws to the spot the solar ray,
Ere sunset quarrying inches down,
And halfway to the mosses brown ;
While the grass beneath the rime
Has hints of the propitious time,
And upward pries and perforates
Through the cold slab a thousand gates,
Till green lances peering through
Bend happy in the welkin blue.

As we thaw frozen flesh with snow,
So Spring will not her time forerun,
Mix polar night with tropic glow,
Nor cloy us with unshaded sun,
Nor wanton skip with bacchic dance,
But she has the temperance
Of the gods, whereof she is one, —
Masks her treasury of heat
Under east winds crossed with sleet.
Plants and birds and humble creatures

Well accept her rule austere ;
 Titan-born, to hardy natures
 Cold is genial and dear.
 As Southern wrath to Northern right
 Is but straw to anthracite ;
 As in the day of sacrifice,
 When heroes piled the pyre,
 The dismal Massachusetts ice
 Burned more than others' fire,
 So Spring guards with surface cold
 The garnered heat of ages old.
 Hers to sow the seed of bread,
 That man and all the kinds be fed ;
 And, when the sunlight fills the hours,
 Dissolves the crust, displays the flowers.

Beneath the calm, within the light,
 A hid unruly appetite
 Of swifter life, a surer hope,
 Strains every sense to larger scope,
 Impatient to anticipate
 The halting steps of aged Fate.
 Slow grows the palm, too slow the pearl :
 When Nature falters, fain would zeal
 Grasp the feloes of her wheel,
 And grasping give the orbs another whirl.
 Turn swiftlier round, O tardy ball !
 And sun this frozen side.
 Bring hither back the robin's call,
 Bring back the tulip's pride.

Why chidest thou the tardy Spring ?
 The hardy bunting does not chide ;
 The blackbirds make the maples ring
 With social cheer and jubilee ;
 The redwing flutes his *o-ka-lee*,
 The robins know the melting snow ;
 The sparrow meek, prophetic-eyed,
 Her nest beside the snow-drift weaves,
 Secure the osier yet will hide
 Her callow brood in mantling leaves, —
 And thou, by science all undone,
 Why only must thy reason fail
 To see the southing of the sun ?

The world rolls round, — mistrust it not, —
 Befalls again what once befell ;
 All things return, both sphere and mote,
 And I shall hear my bluebird's note,
 And dream the dream of Auburn dell.

April cold with dropping rain
 Willows and lilacs brings again,
 The whistle of returning birds,
 And trumpet-lowing of the herds.
 The scarlet maple-keys betray
 What potent blood hath modest May,
 What fiery force the earth renews,
 The wealth of forms, the flush of hues ;
 What joy in rosy waves outpoured
 Flows from the heart of Love, the Lord.

Hither rolls the storm of heat ;
 I feel its finer billows beat
 Like a sea which me infolds ;
 Heat with viewless fingers moulds,
 Swells, and mellows, and matures,
 Paints, and flavors, and allures,
 Bird and brier inly warms,
 Still enriches and transforms,
 Gives the reed and lily length,
 Adds to oak and oxen strength,
 Transforming what it doth infold,
 Life out of death, new out of old,
 Painting fawns' and leopards' fells,
 Seethes the gulf-encrimsoning shells,
 Fires gardens with a joyful blaze
 Of tulips, in the morning's rays.
 The dead log touched bursts into leaf,
 The wheat-blade whispers of the sheaf.
 What god is this imperial Heat,
 Earth's prime secret, sculpture's seat ?
 Doth it bear hidden in its heart
 Water-line patterns of all art ?
 Is it Dædalus ? is it Love ?
 Or walks in mask almighty Jove,
 And drops from Power's redundant horn
 All seeds of beauty to be born ?

Where shall we keep the holiday,
 And duly greet the entering May ?

Too strait and low our cottage doors,
 And all unmeet our carpet floors ;
 Nor spacious court, nor monarch's hall,
 Suffice to hold the festival.
 Up and away ! where haughty woods
 Front the liberated floods :
 We will climb the broad-backed hills,
 Hear the uproar of their joy ;
 We will mark the leaps and gleams
 Of the new-delivered streams,
 And the murmuring rivers of sap
 Mount in the pipes of the trees,
 Giddy with day, to the topmost spire,
 Which for a spike of tender green
 Bartered its powdery cap ;
 And the colors of joy in the bird,
 And the love in its carol heard,
 Frog and lizard in holiday coats,
 And turtle brave in his golden spots ;
 While cheerful cries of crag and plain
 Reply to the thunder of river and main.

As poured the flood of the ancient sea
 Spilling over mountain chains,
 Bending forests as bends the sedge,
 Faster flowing o'er the plains, —
 A world-wide wave with a foaming edge
 That rims the running silver sheet, —
 So pours the deluge of the heat

Broad northward o'er the land,
 Painting artless paradises,
 Drugging herbs with Syrian spices,
 Fanning secret fires which glow
 In columbine and clover-blow,
 Climbing the northern zones,
 Where a thousand pallid towns
 Lie like cockles by the main,
 Or tented armies on a plain.
 The million-handed sculptor moulds
 Quaintest bud and blossom folds,
 The million-handed painter pours
 Opal hues and purple dye;
 Azaleas flush the island floors,
 And the tints of heaven reply.

Wreaths for the May! for happy Spring
 To-day shall all her dowry bring,
 The love of kind, the joy, the grace,
 Hymen of element and race,
 Knowing well to celebrate
 With song and hue and star and state,
 With tender light and youthful cheer,
 The spousals of the new-born year.

Spring is strong and virtuous,
 Broad-sowing, cheerful, plenteous,
 Quickening underneath the mould
 Grains beyond the price of gold.

So deep and large her bounties are,
 That one broad, long midsummer day
 Shall to the planet overpay
 The ravage of a year of war.

Drug the cup, thou butler sweet,
 And send the nectar round;
 The feet that slid so long on sleet
 Are glad to feel the ground.
 Fill and saturate each kind
 With good according to its mind,
 Fill each kind and saturate
 With good agreeing with its fate,
 And soft perfection of its plan—
 Willow and violet, maiden and man.

The bitter-sweet, the haunting air
 Creepeth, bloweth everywhere;
 It preys on all, all prey on it,
 Blooms in beauty, thinks in wit,
 Stings the strong with enterprise,
 Makes travellers long for Indian skies,
 And where it comes this courier fleet
 Fans in all hearts expectance sweet,
 As if to-morrow should redeem
 The vanished rose of evening's dream.
 By houses lies a fresher green,
 On men and maids a ruddier mien,
 As if Time brought a new relay

Of shining virgins every May,
And Summer came to ripen maids
To a beauty that not fades.

I saw the bud-crowned Spring go forth,
Stepping daily onward north
To greet staid ancient cavaliers
Filing single in stately train.
And who, and who are the travellers?
They were Night and Day, and Day and Night,
Pilgrims wight with step forthright.
I saw the Days deformed and low,
Short and bent by cold and snow;
The merry Spring threw wreaths on them,
Flower-wreaths gay with bud and bell;
Many a flower and many a gem,
They were refreshed by the smell,
They shook the snow from hats and shoon,
They put their April raiment on;
And those eternal forms,
Unhurt by a thousand storms,
Shot up to the height of the sky again,
And danced as merrily as young men.
I saw them mask their awful glance
Sidewise meek in gossamer lids;
And to speak my thought if none forbids
It was as if the eternal gods,
Tired of their starry periods,
Hid their majesty in cloth

Woven of tulips and painted moth.
On carpets green the maskers march
Below May's well-appointed arch,
Each star, each god, each grace amain,
Every joy and virtue speed,
Marching duly in her train,
And fainting Nature at her need
Is made whole again.

'T was the vintage-day of field and wood,
When magic wine for bards is brewed;
Every tree and stem and chink
Gushed with syrup to the brink.
The air stole into the streets of towns,
Refreshed the wise, reformed the clowns,
And betrayed the fund of joy
To the high-school and medalled boy:
On from hall to chamber ran,
From youth to maid, from boy to man,
To babes, and to old eyes as well.
'Once more,' the old man cried, 'ye clouds,
Airy turrets purple-piled,
Which once my infancy beguiled,
Beguile me with the wonted spell.
I know ye skilful to convoy
The total freight of hope and joy
Into rude and homely nooks,
Shed mocking lustres on shelf of books,
On farmer's byre, on pasture rude,

And stony pathway to the wood.
 I care not if the poms you show
 Be what they soothfast appear,
 Or if yon realms in sunset glow
 Be bubbles of the atmosphere.
 And if it be to you allowed
 To fool me with a shining cloud,
 So only new griefs are consoled
 By new delights, as old by old,
 Frankly I will be your guest,
 Count your change and cheer the best.
 The world hath overmuch of pain,—
 If Nature give me joy again,
 Of such deceit I'll not complain.'

Ah! well I mind the calendar,
 Faithful through a thousand years,
 Of the painted race of flowers,
 Exact to days, exact to hours,
 Counted on the spacious dial
 Yon brodered zodiac girds.
 I know the trusty almanac
 Of the punctual coming-back,
 On their due days, of the birds.
 I marked them yestermorn,
 A flock of finches darting
 Beneath the crystal arch,
 Piping, as they flew, a march,—
 Belike the one they used in parting

Last year from yon oak or larch;
 Dusky sparrows in a crowd,
 Diving, darting northward free,
 Suddenly betook them all,
 Every one to his hole in the wall,
 Or to his niche in the apple-tree.
 I greet with joy the choral trains
 Fresh from palms and Cuba's canes.
 Best gems of Nature's cabinet,
 With dews of tropic morning wet,
 Beloved of children, bards and Spring,
 O birds, your perfect virtues bring,
 Your song, your forms, your rhythmic flight,
 Your manners for the heart's delight,
 Nestle in hedge, or barn, or roof,
 Here weave your chamber weather-proof,
 Forgive our harms, and condescend
 To man, as to a lubber friend,
 And, generous, teach his awkward race
 Courage and probity and grace!

Poets praise that hidden wine
 Hid in milk we drew
 At the barrier of Time,
 When our life was new.
 We had eaten fairy fruit,
 We were quick from head to foot,
 All the forms we looked on shone
 As with diamond dews thereon.

What cared we for costly joys,
 The Museum's far-fetched toys?
 Gleam of sunshine on the wall
 Poured a deeper cheer than all
 The revels of the Carnival.
 We a pine-grove did prefer
 To a marble theatre,
 Could with gods on mallows dine,
 Nor cared for spices or for wine.
 Wreaths of mist and rainbow spanned,
 Arch on arch, the grimmest land;
 Whistle of a woodland bird
 Made the pulses dance,
 Note of horn in valleys heard
 Filled the region with romance.

None can tell how sweet,
 How virtuous, the morning air;
 Every accent vibrates well;
 Not alone the wood-bird's call,
 Or shouting boys that chase their ball,
 Pass the height of minstrel skill,
 But the ploughman's thoughtless cry,
 Lowing oxen, sheep that bleat,
 And the joiner's hammer-beat,
 Softened are above their will,
 Take tones from groves they wandered through
 Or flutes which passing angels blew.
 All grating discords melt,

No dissonant note is dealt,
 And though thy voice be shrill
 Like rasping file on steel,
 Such is the temper of the air,
 Echo waits with art and care,
 And will the faults of song repair.

So by remote Superior Lake,
 And by resounding Mackinac,
 When northern storms the forest shake,
 And billows on the long beach break,
 The artful Air will separate
 Note by note all sounds that grate,
 Smothering in her ample breast
 All but godlike words,
 Reporting to the happy ear
 Only purified accords.
 Strangely wrought from barking waves,
 Soft music daunts the Indian braves,—
 Convent-chanting which the child
 Hears pealing from the panther's cave
 And the impenetrable wild.

Soft on the South-wind sleeps the haze:
 So on thy broad mystic van
 Lie the opal-colored days,
 And waft the miracle to man.
 Soothsayer of the eldest gods,
 Repairer of what harms betide,

Revealer of the inmost powers
 Prometheus proffered, Jove denied;
 Disclosing treasures more than true,
 Or in what far to-morrow due;
 Speaking by the tongues of flowers,
 By the ten-tongued laurel speaking,
 Singing by the oriole songs,
 Heart of bird the man's heart seeking;
 Whispering hints of treasure hid
 Under Morn's unlifted lid,
 Islands looming just beyond
 The dim horizon's utmost bound; —
 Who can, like thee, our rags upbraid,
 Or taunt us with our hope decayed?
 Or who like thee persuade,
 Making the splendor of the air,
 The morn and sparkling dew, a snare?
 Or who resent
 Thy genius, wiles and blandishment?

There is no orator prevails
 To beckon or persuade
 Like thee the youth or maid:
 Thy birds, thy songs, thy brooks, thy gales,
 Thy blooms, thy kinds,
 Thy echoes in the wilderness,
 Soothe pain, and age, and love's distress,
 Fire fainting will, and build heroic minds.

For thou, O Spring! canst renovate
 All that high God did first create.
 Be still his arm and architect,
 Rebuild the ruin, mend defect;
 Chemist to vamp old worlds with new,
 Coat sea and sky with heavenlier blue,
 New tint the plumage of the birds,
 And slough decay from grazing herds,
 Sweep ruins from the scarp'd mountain,
 Cleanse the torrent at the fountain,
 Purge alpine air by towns defiled,
 Bring to fair mother fairer child,
 Not less renew the heart and brain,
 Scatter the sloth, wash out the stain,
 Make the aged eye sun-clear,
 To parting soul bring grandeur near.
 Under gentle types, my Spring
 Masks the might of Nature's king,
 An energy that searches thorough
 From Chaos to the dawning morrow;
 Into all our human plight,
 The soul's pilgrimage and flight;
 In city or in solitude,
 Step by step, lifts bad to good,
 Without halting, without rest,
 Lifting Better up to Best;
 Planting seeds of knowledge pure,
 Through earth to ripen, through heaven endure.