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JEAN INGELOW'S  
POETICAL  
WORKS

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*Mrs G. Trevino.  
from her friend  
R. L. J.*



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JEAN INGELOW

1894

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	—♦—	
	TO	
	GEORGE K. INGELOW,	
	YOUR LOVING SISTER	
	OFFERS YOU THESE POEMS, PARTLY AS	
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	PLEASURE OF CONNECTING HER EFFORT	
	WITH YOUR NAME.	
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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

JEAN INGELOW was born in 1830, at Boston, Lincolnshire, at the mouth of the river Witham. She was one of eleven children. Her father was a well-to-do banker at Suffolk; her mother's family came originally from Aberdeenshire in Scotland; her great-grandfather was Primus of Scotland,—in other words, Bishop of Aberdeen. Jean Ingelow in several places speaks of her childhood:—

"As a child," she writes to a friend, "I was very happy at times, and generally wondering at something. . . . I was uncommonly like other children. . . . I remember seeing a star, and that my mother told me of God, who lived up there and made the star. This was on a summer evening. It was my first hearing of God, and made a great impression on my mind. I remember better than anything that certain ecstatic sensations of joy used to get hold of me, and that I used to creep into corners to think out my thoughts by myself. I was, however, extremely timid, and easily overawed by fear. We had a lofty nursery with a bow-window that overlooked the river. My brother and I were constantly wondering at this river. The coming up of the tides, and the ships and the jolly-gangs of towers ragging them on with a monotonous song, made a daily delight for us. The washing of the water, the sunshine upon it, and the reflec-

tions of the waves on our nursery ceiling, supplied hours of talk to us and days of pleasure."

She learned to read when she was about three years old, but she was never sent to school. Her parents, having abundant means, spared her all hardships, and bestowed great care upon her education at home. Her mother, a clever woman of poetic nature, took the general charge of the education of her large family. A succession of private teachers and governesses labored to communicate the usual inoculation of learning, but Jean Ingelow regretfully confesses that she was too much inclined to make game of them. She writes:—

"It was a happy, bright, joyous childhood; there was an originality about us; some of my brothers and sisters were remarkably clever, but all were droll, full of mirth, and could caricature well. We each had a most keen sense of the ridiculous. Two of the boys used to go to a clergyman near by for instruction, where there was a small printing-machine. We got up a little periodical of our own, and used all to write in it, my brothers' school-fellows setting up the type."

Jean Ingelow was a rather shy and reserved nature. She was gifted with the poetic temperament. She began to write verses when very young. She slept in a large upper room, the windows of which had old-fashioned folding shutters. On the flat backs of these shutters she wrote verses and songs, and then folded them in. One day her mother discovered this new form of Sibylline leaves and was much surprised. Some of the poetry of that day has been preserved.

During a visit to friends in Essex, she, and several young companions, wrote some short stories and sent them to *The Youth's Magazine*. Hers were signed "Orris." They were accepted and she was asked to write some more.

"The Tales of Orris" were collected and published in 1860. Previously, in 1850, she had published anony-

mously "A Rhyming Chronicle of Incidents and Feelings," and, the following year, a novel, entitled "Allerton and Dreux."

After the death of her father the Ingelows moved to Upper Kensington and thence to Kensington. In 1863 Miss Ingelow and her mother took a selection of her poems to Mr. Longman, who was at first doubtful, but after examining the work decided to bring them out. The first year four thousand copies were sold, and more than an edition a year has since appeared. Considerably over a hundred thousand copies have been sold in America alone. The English Press was unanimous in its praise. One paper called her the most gifted poetess of England since Mrs. Browning and Adelaide Procter. Among the most popular lyrics in this volume, and those by which her fame as a poet will be secured, are "Divided," "Songs of Seven," "Supper at the Mill," "Looking over a Gate at a Mill," "The Wedding Song," "Honors," "The High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire," "Brothers and a Sermon," "Winstanley," and "The Long White Seam." Mr. Stedman says of them:—

"They sprang up suddenly and tunefully, as skylarks from the daisy-spangled, hawthorn-bordered meadows of Old England, with a blitheness then unknown, and in their idyllic underflights moved with the tenderest currents of human life."

"Studies for Stories" came out in 1864. They were professedly written for young girls, but attracted attention by their quiet humor, their gentle satire, and fidelity to nature. *The Athenæum* called them "Prose poems carefully meditated and exquisitely touched in by a teacher ready to sympathize with every joy and sorrow."

In 1865 she published the "Stories told to a Child." Mrs. Black says that, in consequence of the success of her first volume of poems, Mr. Strahan made an immediate application for any other work by the same pen, and accordingly her short tales signed "Orris" were collected



and published under the title of "Stories told to a Child." There seems to be some mistake about this; but Jean Ingelow has been peculiarly unfortunate in regard to her biography; scarcely two accounts agree as to the date of her birth, which may be found placed in 1820, 1825, 1830, and 1832.

One time Jean Ingelow was tempted to set the world right as to her biography and environment. An appreciative article appeared, in which "the Ingelow Mansion" was described vaguely as stationed on the sea-beach and flanked by two lighthouses, "between which the lonely child might have been seen to wander for hours together nursing her poetic dreams, dragging the long trails of seaweed after her, and listening to the voice of the waves." Her friends urged her to "disclaim the solitary wanderings and poetic dreams, and to describe the place correctly." But she decided to let the matter drop. She wrote to a friend:—

"I consider that an author should, during her life, be as much as possible impersonal. I never impart myself into my writings, and am much better pleased that others should feel an interest in me and wish to know something of me than that they should complain of egotism."

She, however, gives a little touch of personal interest in a passage quoted by Mrs. Black: "To a poetic nature expression is a necessity; but once expressed, the thought and feeling that inspired it may often be forgotten. I am sure I could not repeat one of my own poems from beginning to end just as I wrote it. I have a distinct theory, too, that one is not taught, one is born to it. I was never able to make a great effort in my life, but what I can do at all, I can do at once; and having thought a good deal on any subject I know very little more than I did at first. Things come to me without striving; besides I am quite unromantic. I never wrote in a hurry. We might all be laughing and talking together, yet if I went up to my room and sat alone,

I could at once write in a most sad and melancholy strain. I was not studious as a child, though I remember a great epoch in my life was reading 'The Pilgrim's Progress' when I was seven years old, and I was perfectly well able to perceive the deep imaginative powers of it; but I always wanted to study what was not in books."

The Ingelows were evangelical in religion, though not narrow. Miss Ingelow rather prides herself on having never entered a theatre; but her reason may be respected. Her parents never took the children, and she stays away "out of habit and affectionate respect for their memory." Instead of the theatre they had travel.

"We had many pleasures and advantages," she says. "There was no dullness or gloom about our home, and everything seemed to give occasion for mirth. We had many trips abroad, too; indeed, we spent most winters on the Continent. I made an excursion with a brother who is an ecclesiastical architect, and in this way I visited every cathedral in France."

"Poor Mat" was published in 1866, and the next year came the semi-epic "Story of Doom," in which the chief characters are Noah, Japhet, the Giants, and the Arch-Fiend. Among the better known of the "Other Poems," which accompanied "A Story of Doom," are "The Dreams that come True," "Songs on the Voices of Birds," "Songs of the Nightwatches," "Gladys and Her Island," "Laurance," and "Contrasted Songs."

In the two years following she published "A Sister's Bye-Hours" and "Mopsa the Fairy," which has been called "A poem in prose for the use of children."

"Off the Skelligs," published in 1872, was her first important novel. There are brilliant and beautiful descriptions, and the scenery is painted with a poet's pencil. The episode of the burning ship and the rescue of the passengers is fine. But the work is popular rather than artistic. The same may be said of its more tragic sequel,

"Fated to be Free," which followed three years later. This opens with a picturesque description of an old manor-house, and introduces a family overshadowed by some mysterious misfortune.

"I am told," she writes in her introduction, "that 'Of the Skelligs' and 'Fated to be Free' are peculiar; and I feel that they must be so, for most stories of human life are, or at least aim at being, works of art, — selections of interesting portions of life, and fitting incidents, put together and presented as a picture is; and I have not aimed at producing a work of art at all, but a piece of nature."

"Sarah de Berenger" followed in 1879, and "Don John" appeared anonymously in the "No Name Series" in 1881.

Jean Ingelow's poems, as collected, leave a distinct impression upon the mind. They are not faultless. She is fond of cloudy obscurities, both of language and thought; she affects archaic and obsolete words; her lines often halt and her rhymes are too frequently imperfect; but after the severest criticism the reader is almost certain to be left under the spell of a vigorous vitality, a sweet and wholesome imagination, a sense of completeness, swallowing up and atoning for the faults which might have been noticed here and there in detail. One may be even annoyed by these perverse blindings of simplicity, but the poem is apt to challenge attention and compel one to read to the end. And the end generally starts a sympathetic tear. Though pathetic, and often sad, Miss Ingelow's poems are not morbid. Their popularity is perhaps due to their homely naturalness. They are also marked by decided originality and quaintness; merits that tend to degenerate into extravagance and obscurity unless kept strictly in hand.

It is by her lyrics, however, that Jean Ingelow is sure of immortality. If she had written nothing but the "Songs of Seven" and "The High Tide," that would have been assured her. And when we take into consideration

how few poems — in some cases only one — keep alive the fame of past poets, it will be found that Jean Ingelow has contributed an unusual number of deathless lyrics to the song-treasures of our common English tongue.

Jean Ingelow's health is never very robust, and she works only two or three hours in the morning. She generally spends her winters in the south of Europe. Her mother died fourteen or fifteen years ago, and she keeps house for two of her brothers in a handsome, square, two-and-a-half-story stone house, cream colored, and standing by itself in Kensington. In front there are handsome grounds, — a garden filled with shrubs and graced by chestnut and almond trees; and in the rear a comfortable lawn bordered with flowers and conservatories.

The entrance-hall, says a recent visitor, "opens into a spacious, old-fashioned drawing-room of Italian style on the right. Large and lofty is this bright, cheerful room. A harp, on which Miss Ingelow, and her mother before her, played right well, stands in one corner. There is a grand pianoforte opposite, for she was a good musician and had a remarkably fine voice in earlier years. On the round table in the deep bay-windows in front are many books, various specimens of Tangiers pottery, and some tall plants of arum-lilies in flower. The great glass doors, draped with curtains at the further end, open into a large conservatory, where Miss Ingelow often sits in summer. It is laid down with matting and rugs, and standing here and there are flowering plants and two fine araucarias. The verandah-steps on the left lead into a large and well-kept garden with bright green lawn, at the end of which, through the trees, may be discerned a large stretch of greenhouses and a view beyond of the great trees in the grounds of Holland Park. On the corresponding side of the house at the back is the billiard-room, which is Mr. Ingelow's study, leading into

an ante-room, and in the front is the dining-room, where the author's literary labors are carried on."

Miss Ingelow is extremely charitable and fond of children. Her life, like her writings, is devoted to doing good. Viewed from every standpoint hers has been an admirable career, pleasant to contemplate, and instructive to study.

N. H. D.

Boston, 1894.

## POEMS.

### DIVIDED.

#### I.

An empty sky, a world of heather,  
Purple of foxglove, yellow of broom;  
We two among them wading together,  
Shaking out honey, treading perfume.

Crowds of bees are giddy with clover,  
Crowds of grasshoppers skip at our feet,  
Crowds of larks at their matins hang over  
Thanking the Lord for a life so sweet.

Flusheth the rise with her purple favor,  
Gloweth the cleft with her golden ring,  
'Twi'x the two brown butterflies waver,  
Lightly settle, and sleepily swing.

We two walk till the purple dieth  
And short dry grass under foot is brown,  
But one little streak at a distance lieth  
Green like a ribbon to prank the down.

#### II.

Over the grass we stepped unto it,  
And God He knoweth how blithe we were!  
Never a voice to bid us eschew it:  
Hey the green ribbon that showed so fair!