

“ Because no natural tie remains,
 On this small thing I spend my gains ;
 God makes me love him for my pains,
 And binds me so to wholesome care :
 I would not lose from my past life
 That happy year, that happy wife !
 Yet now I wage no useless strife
 With feelings blithe and debonair.

“ I have the courage to be gay,
 Although she lieth lapped away
 Under the daisies, for I say,
 ‘ Thou wouldst be glad if thou couldst see :
 My constant thought makes manifest
 I have not what I love the best,
 But I must thank God for the rest
 While I hold heaven a verity.”

He rose ; upon his shoulder set
 The child, and while with vague regret
 We parted, pleased that we had met,
 My heart did with herself confer ;
 With wholesome shame she did repent
 Her reasonings idly eloquent,
 And said, “ I might be more content :
 But God go with the carpenter.”

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THE STAR'S MONUMENT.

IN THE CONCLUDING PART OF A DISCOURSE ON FAME

[*He thinks.*]

If there be memory in the world to come,
 If thought recur to some things silenced here,
 Then shall the deep heart be no longer dumb,
 But find expression in that happier sphere ;

It shall not be denied their utmost sum
 Of love, to speak without or fault or fear,
 But utter to the harp with changes sweet
 Words that, forbidden still, then heaven were incom-
 plete.

[*He speaks.*]

Now let us talk about the ancient days,
 And things which happened long before our birth :
 It is a pity to lament that praise
 Should be no shadow in the train of worth.
 What is it, Madam, that your heart dismays ?
 Why murmur at the course of this vast earth ?
 Think rather of the work than of the praise ;
 Come, we will talk about the ancient days.

There was a Poet, Madam, once (said he) :
 I will relate his story to you now,
 While through the branches of this apple-tree
 Some spots of sunshine flicker on your brow,
 While every flower hath on its breast a bee,
 And every bird in stirring doth endow
 The grass with falling blooms that smoothly glide
 As ships drop down a river with the tide.

For telling of his tale no fitter place
 Than this old orchard, sloping to the west ;
 Through its pink dome of blossom I can trace
 Some overlying azure ; for the rest,
 These flowery branches round us interlace ;
 The ground is hollowed like a mossy nest :
 Who talks of fame while the religious spring
 Offers the incense of her blossoming ?

There was a Poet, Madam, once (said he),
 Who, while he walked at sundown in a lane,
 Took to his heart the hope that destiny
 Had singled him this guerdon to obtain,

That by the power of his sweet minstrelsy
 Some hearts for truth and goodness he should gain
 And charm some grovellers to uplift their eyes
 And suddenly wax conscious of the skies.

“Mastèr, good e’en to ye!” a woodman said,
 Who the low hedge was trimming with his shears
 “This hour is fine” — the Poet bowed his head.
 “More fine,” he thought, “O friend! to me
 appears

The sunset than to you; finer the spread
 Of orange lustre through these azure spheres,
 Where little clouds lie still, like flocks of sheep,
 Or vessels sailing in God’s other deep.

“O finer far! What work so high as mine,
 Interpreter betwixt the world and man,
 Nature’s ungathered pearls to set and shrine,
 The mystery she wraps her in to scan;
 Her unsyllabic voices to combine,
 And serve her with such love as poets can;
 With mortal words, her chant of praise to bind,
 Then die, and leave the poem to mankind?”

“O fair, O fine, O lot to be desired!
 Early and late my heart appeals to me,
 And says, ‘O work, O will — Thou man, be fired
 To earn this lot,’ — she says, ‘I would not be
 A worker for mine own bread, or one hired
 For mine own profit. O, I would be free
 To work for others; love so earned of them
 Should be my wages and my diadem.

‘Then when I died I should not fall,’ says she,
 ‘Like drooping flowers that no man noticeth,
 But like a great branch of some stately tree
 Rent in a tempest, and flung down to death,
 Thick with green leafage — so that piteously
 Each passer by that ruin shuddereth,

And saith, The gap this branch hath left is wide;
 The loss thereof can never be supplied.’”

But, Madam, while the Poet pondered so,
 Toward the leafy hedge he turned his eye,
 And saw two slender branches that did grow,
 And from it rising spring and flourish high;
 Their tops were twined together fast, and, lo,
 Their shadow crossed the path as he went by —
 The shadow of a wild rose and a briar,
 And it was shaped in semblance like a lyre.

In sooth, a lyre! and as the soft air played,
 Those branches stirred, but did not disunite.
 “O emblem meet for me!” the Poet said;
 “Ay, I accept and own thee for my right;
 The shadowy lyre across my feet is laid,
 Distinct though frail, and clear with crimson light:
 Fast is it twined to bear the windy strain,
 And, supple, it will bend and rise again.

“This lyre is cast across the dusty way,
 The common path that common men pursue;
 I crave like blessing for my shadowy lay,
 Life’s trodden paths with beauty to renew,
 And cheer the eve of many a toil-stained day.
 Light it, old sun, wet it, thou common dew,
 That ’neath men’s feet its image still may be
 While yet it waves about them, living lyre, like thee!”

But even as the Poet spoke, behold
 He lifted up his face toward the sky;
 The ruddy sun dipt under the gray wold,
 His shadowy lyre was gone; and, passing by
 The woodman lifting up his shears, was bold
 Their temper on those branches twain to try,
 And all their loveliness and leafage sweet
 Fell in the pathway, at the Poet’s feet.

"Ah! my fair emblem that I chose," quoth he,
 "That for myself I coveted but now,
 Too soon, methinks, thou hast been false to me;
 The lyre from pathway fades, the light from brow."
 Then straightway turned he from it hastily,
 As dream that waking sense will disallow;
 And while the highway heavenward paled apace,
 He went on westward to his dwelling-place.
 He went on steadily, while far and fast
 The summer darkness dropped upon the world,
 A gentle air among the cloudlets passed
 And fanned away their crimson; then it curled
 The yellow poppies in the field, and cast
 A dimness on the grasses, for it furled
 Their daisies, and swept out the purple stain
 That eve had left upon the pastoral plain.
 He reached his city. Lo! the darkened street
 Where he abode was full of gazing crowds;
 He heard the muffled tread of many feet;
 A multitude stood gazing at the clouds.
 "What mark ye there," said he, "and wherefore
 meet?
 Only a passing mist the heaven o'ershrouds;
 It breaks, it parts, it drifts like scattered spars —
 What lies behind it but the nightly stars?"
 Then did the gazing crowd to him aver
 They sought a lamp in heaven whose light was hid;
 For that in sooth an old Astronomer
 Down from his roof had rushed into their mid,
 Frighted, and fain with others to confer,
 That he had cried, "O sirs!" — and upward bid
 Them gaze — "O sirs, a light is quenched afar;
 Look up, my masters, we have lost a star!"
 The people pointed, and the Poet's eyes
 Flew upward, where a gleaming sisterhood

Swam in the dewy heaven. The very skies
 Were mutable; for all-amazed he stood
 To see that truly not in any wise
 He could behold them as of old, nor could
 His eyes receive the whole whereof he wot,
 But when he told them over, one WAS NOT.
 While yet he gazed and pondered reverently,
 The fickle folk began to move away.
 "It is but one star less for us to see;
 And what does one star signify?" quoth they;
 "The heavens are full of them." "But ah!" said he,
 "That star was bright while yet she lasted."
 "Ay!"
 They answered: "praise her, Poet, an' ye will:
 Some are now shining that are brighter still."
 "Poor star! to be disparaged so soon
 On her withdrawal," thus the Poet sighed;
 "That men should miss and straight deny her noon
 Its brightness!" But the people in their pride
 Said, "How are we beholden? 'twas no boon
 She gave. Her nature 'twas to shine so wide
 She could not choose but shine, nor could we know
 Such star had ever dwelt in heaven but so."
 The Poet answered sadly, "That is true!"
 And then he thought upon unthankfulness;
 While some went homeward; and the residue,
 Reflecting that the stars are numberless,
 Mourned that man's daylight hours should be so few.
 So short the shining that his path may bless:
 To nearer themes then tuned their willing lips,
 And thought no more upon the star's eclipse.
 But he, the Poet, could not rest content
 Till he had found that old Astronomer;
 Therefore at midnight to his house he went
 And prayed him be his tale's interpreter.

And yet upon the heaven his eyes he bent,
 Hearing the marvel; yet he sought for her
 That was awaiting, in the hope her face
 Once more might fill its reft abiding-place.
 Then said the old Astronomer: "My son,
 I sat upon my roof to-night;
 I saw the stars come forth, and scarcely shun
 To fringe the edges of the western light;
 I marked those ancient clusters one by one,
 The same that blessed our old forefather's sight;
 For God alone is older — none but He
 Can charge the stars with mutability:

"The elders of the night, the steadfast stars,
 The old, old stars which God has let us see,
 That they might be our soul's auxiliars,
 And help us to the truth how young we be —
 God's youngest, latest born, as if, some spars
 And a little clay being over of them — He
 Had made our world and us thereof, yet given,
 To humble us, the sight of His great heaven.

"But ah! my son, to-night mine eyes have seen
 The death of light, the end of old renown;
 A shrinking back of glory that had been,
 A dread eclipse before the Eternal's frown.
 How soon a little grass will grow between
 These eyes and those appointed to look down
 Upon a world that was not made on high
 Till the last scenes of their long empyr!

"To-night that shining cluster now despoiled
 Lay in day's wake a perfect sisterhood;
 Sweet was its light to me that long had toiled,
 It gleamed and trembled o'er the distant wood;
 Blown in a pile the clouds from it recoiled,
 Cool twilight up the sky her way made good;

I saw, but not believed — it was so strange —
 That one of those same stars had suffered change.

"The darkness gathered, and methought she spread,
 Wrapped in a reddish haze that waxed and waned;
 But notwithstanding to myself I said —

'The stars are changeless; sure some mote hath
 stained

Mine eyes, and her fair glory minishèd.'

Of age and failing vision I complained,
 And thought 'some vapor in the heavens doth swim,
 That makes her look so large and yet so dim.'

"But I gazed round, and all her lustrous peers
 In her red presence showed but wan and white;
 For like a living coal beheld through tears
 She glowed and quivered with a gloomy light;
 Methought she trembled, as all sick through fears,
 Helpless, appalled, appealing to the night;
 Like one who throws his arms up to the sky
 And bows down suffering, hopeless of reply.

"At length, as if an everlasting Hand
 Had taken hold upon her in her place,
 And swiftly, like a golden grain of sand,
 Through all the deep infinitudes of space
 Was drawing her — God's truth as here I stand —
 Backward and inward to itself; her face
 Fast lessened, lessened, till it looked no more
 Than smallest atom on a boundless shore.

"And she that was so fair, I saw her lie,
 The smallest thing in God's great firmament,
 Till night was at the darkest, and on high
 Her sisters glittered, though her light was spent;
 I strained to follow her, each aching eye,
 So swiftly at her Maker's will she went;

I looked again—I looked—the star was gone,
And nothing marked in heaven where she had shone."

"Gone!" said the Poet, "and about to be
Forgotten: O, how sad a fate is hers!"

"How is it sad, my son?" all reverently
The old man answered; "though she ministers
No longer with her lamp to me and thee,

She has fulfilled her mission. God transfers
Or dims her ray; yet was she blest as bright,
For all her life was spent in giving light."

"Her mission she fulfilled assuredly,"

The poet cried: "but, O unhappy star!
None praise and few will bear in memory

The name she went by. O, from far, from far
Comes down, methinks, her mournful voice to me,
Full of regrets that men so thankless are."

So said, he told that old Astronomer
All that the gazing crowd had said of her.

And he went on to speak in bitter wise,
As one who seems to tell another's fate,
But feels that nearer meaning underlies,

And points its sadness to his own estate:
"If such be the reward," he said with sighs,
"Envy to earn for love, for goodness hate—

If such be thy reward, hard case is thine!
It had been better for thee not to shine.

"If to reflect a light that is divine
Makes that which doth reflect it better seen,
And if to see is to condemn the shrine,

'Twere surely better it had never been:
It had been better for her NOT TO SHINE,

And for me NOT TO SING. Better, I ween,
For us to yield no more that radiance bright,
For them, to lack the light than scorn the light."

Strange words were those from Poet lips (said he);
And then he paused, and sighed, and turned to
look

Upon the lady's downcast eyes, and see
How fast the honey bees in settling shook
Those apple blossoms on her from the tree;

He watched her busy fingers as they took
And slipped the knotted thread, and thought how
much

He would have given that hand to hold -- to touch.
At length, as suddenly become aware

Of this long pause, she lifted up her face,
And he withdrew his eyes — she looked so fair
And cold, he thought, in her unconscious grace.

"Ah! little dreams she of the restless care,"

He thought, "that makes my heart to throb apace.
Though we this morning part, the knowledge sends
No thrill to her calm pulse — we are but FRIENDS."

Ah! turret clock (he thought), I would thy hand
Were hid behind yon towering maple-trees!

Ah! tell-tale shadow, but one moment stand —
Dark shadow — fast advancing to my knees;

Ah! foolish heart (he thought), that vainly planned
By feigning gladness to arrive at ease;

Ah! painful hour, yet pain to think it ends;
I must remember that we are but friends.

And while the knotted thread moved to and fro,
In sweet regretful tones that lady said:

"It seemeth that the fame you would forego
The Poet whom you tell of coveted;

But I would fain, methinks, his story know.
And was he loved?" said she, "or was he wed?

And had he friends?" "One friend, perhaps," said
he;

"But for the rest, I pray you let it be."

Ah! little bird (he thought), most patient bird,
Breasting thy speckled eggs the long day through,
By so much as my reason is preferred

Above thine instinct, I my work would do
Better than thou dost thine. Thou hast not stirred

This hour thy wing. Ah! russet bird, I sue
For a like patience to wear through these hours —
Bird on thy nest among the apple-flowers.

I will not speak — I will not speak to thee,

My star! and soon to be my lost, lost star.
The sweetest, first, that ever shone on me,

So high above me and beyond so far;
I can forego thee, but not bear to see

My love, like rising mist, thy lustre mar:
That were a base return for thy sweet light.
Shine, though I never more shall see that thou art
bright.

Never! 'Tis certain that no hope is — none?

No hope for me, and yet for thee no fear.
The hardest part of my hard task is done;

Thy calm assures me that I am not dear;
Though far and fast the rapid moments run,

Thy bosom heaveth not, thine eyes are clear;
Silent, perhaps a little sad at heart

She is. I am her friend, and I depart.

Silent she had been, but she raised her face;

“And will you end,” said she, “this half-told
tale?”

“Yes, it were best,” he answered her. “The place

Where I left off was where he felt to fail
His courage, Madam, through the fancy base

That they who love, endure, or work, may rail
And cease — if all their love, the works they wrought,
And their endurance, men have set at naught.”

“It had been better for me not to sing,”

My Poet said, “and for her not to shine;”
But him the old man answered, sorrowing,

“My son, did God who made her, the Divine
Lighter of suns, when down to yon bright ring

He cast her like some gleaming almandine,
And set her in her place, begirt with rays,
Say unto her ‘Give light,’ or say ‘Earn praise’?”

The Poet said, “He made her to give light.”

“My son,” the old man answered, “blest are such
A blessed lot is theirs; but if each night

Mankind had praised her radiance — inasmuch
As praise had never made it wax more bright,

And cannot now rekindle with its touch
Her lost effulgence, it is naught. I wot
That praise was not her blessing nor her lot.”

“Ay,” said the Poet, “I my words abjure,

And I repent me that I uttered them;
But by her light and by its forfeiture

She shall not pass without her requiem.
Though my name perish, yet shall hers endure;

Though I should be forgotten, she, lost gem,
Shall be remembered; though she sought not fame,
It shall be busy with her beauteous name.

“For I will raise in her bright memory,

Lost now on earth, a lasting monument,
And graven on it shall recorded be

That all her rays to light mankind were spent,
And I will sing albeit none heedeth me,

On her exemplar being still intent:
While in men’s sight shall stand the record thus —
‘So long as she did last she lighted us.’”

So said, he raised, according to his vow,

On the green grass, where oft his townfolks met.