

Or water slipping past the cressy shore,
 Or wind that rose in sighs, and sighing fled —
 So quietly, until the alders hoar
 Took him beneath them; till the downward spread
 Of planes engulfed him in their leafy seas
 She stood beneath her rose-flushed apple-trees.

And then she stooped toward the mossy grass,
 And gathered up her work and went her way;
 Straight to that ancient turret she did pass,
 And startle back some fawns that were at play.
 She did not sigh, she never said "Alas!"
 Although he was her friend; but still that day,
 Where elm and hornbeam spread a towering dome
 She crossed the dells to her ancestral home.

And did she love him? — what if she did not?
 Then home was still the home of happiest years;
 Nor thought was exiled to partake his lot,
 Nor heart lost courage through foreboding fears;
 Nor echo did against her secret plot,
 Nor music her betray to painful tears;
 Nor life become a dream, and sunshine dim,
 And riches poverty, because of him.

But did she love him? — what and if she did?
 Love cannot cool the burning Austral sand,
 Nor show the secret waters that lie hid
 In arid valleys of that desert land.
 Love has no spells can scorching winds forbid,
 Or bring the help which tarries near to hand,
 Or spread a cloud for curtaining faded eyes
 That gaze up dying into alien skies.

A DEAD YEAR.

I took a year out of my life and story —
 A dead year, and said, "I will hew thee a tomb!
 'All the kings of the nations lie in glory;'
 Cased in cedar, and shut in a sacred gloom;
 Swathed in linen, and precious unguents old;
 Painted with cinnabar, and rich with gold.

"Silent they rest, in solemn salvatory,
 Sealed from the moth and the owl and the fitter
 mouse —

Each with his name on his brow.
 'All the kings of the nations lie in glory,
 Every one in his own house:'
 Then why not thou?

"Year," I said, "thou shalt not lack
 Bribes to bar thy coming back;
 Doth old Egypt wear her best
 In the chambers of her rest?
 Doth she take to her last bed
 Beaten gold, and glorious red?
 Envy not! for thou wilt wear
 In the dark a shroud as fair;
 Golden with the sunny ray
 Thou withdrawest from my day;
 Wrought upon with colors fine
 Stolen from this life of mine:
 Like the dusty Libyan kings,
 Lie with two wide-open wings
 On thy breast, as if to say,
 On these wings hope flew away;
 And so housed, and thus adorned,
 Not forgotten, but not scorned,
 Let the dark for evermore
 Close thee when I close the door;

And the dust for ages fall
In the creases of thy pall;
And no voice nor visit rude
Break thy sealèd solitude."

I took the year out of my life and story,
The dead year, and said, "I have hewed thee a
tomb!

'All the kings of the nations lie in glory;
Cased in cedar, and shut in a sacred gloom;
But for the sword, and the sceptre, and diadem,
Sure thou didst reign like them."

So I laid her with those tyrants old and hoary,
According to my vow;
For I said, "The kings of the nations lie in glory,
And so shalt thou!"

"Rock," I said, "thy ribs are strong,
That I bring thee guard it long;
Hide the light from buried eyes —
Hide it, lest the dead arise."

"Year," I said, and turned away,
"I am free of thee this day;
All that we two only know,
I forgive and I forego,
So thy face no more I meet
In the field or in the street."

Thus we parted, she and I;
Life hid death, and put it by;
Life hid death, and said, "Be free!
I have no more need of thee."
No more need! O mad mistake,
With repentance in its wake!
Ignorant, and rash, and blind,
Life had left the grave behind;
But had locked within its hold,
With the spices and the gold,

All she had to keep her warm
In the raging of the storm.

Scarce the sunset bloom was gone,
And the little stars outshone,
Ere the dead year, stiff and stark,
Drew me to her in the dark;
Death drew life to come to her,
Beating at her sepulchre,
Crying out, "How can I part
With the best share of my heart?"

Lo, it lies upon the bier,
Captive, with the buried year.
O my heart!" And I fell prone,
Weeping at the sealèd stone;
"Year among the shades," I said,
"Since I live, and thou art dead,
Let my captive heart be free
Like a bird to fly to me."

And I stayed some voice to win,
But none answered from within;
And I kissed the door — and night
Deepened till the stars waxed bright
And I saw them set and wane,
And the world turned green again.

"So," I whispered, "open door,
I must tread this palace floor —
Sealèd palace, rich and dim.
Let a narrow sunbeam swim
After me, and on me spread
While I look upon my dead;
Let a little warmth be free
To come after; let me see
Through the doorway, when I sit
Looking out, the swallows flit,
Settling not till daylight goes;
Let me smell the wild white rose,

Smell the woodbine and the may ;
 Mark, upon a sunny day,
 Sated from their blossoms rise
 Honey-bees and butterflies.
 Let me hear, O ! let me hear,
 Sitting by my buried year,
 Finches chirping to their young,
 And the little noises flung
 Out of clefts where rabbits play,
 Or from falling water-spray ;

And the gracious echoes woke
 By man's work : the woodman's stroke,
 Shout of shepherd, whistling blithe.
 And the whetting of the scythe ;
 Let this be, lest shut and furled
 From the well-belovèd world,
 I forget her yearnings old,
 And her troubles manifold,
 Strivings sore, submissions meet,
 And my pulse no longer beat,
 Keeping time and bearing part
 With the pulse of her great heart.

“ So ! swing open, door, and shade
 Take me : I am not afraid,
 For the time will not be long ;
 Soon I shall have waxen strong —
 Strong enough my own to win
 From the grave it lies within.”

And I entered. On her bier
 Quiet lay the buried year ;
 I sat down where I could see
 Life without and sunshine free,
 Death within. And I between,
 Waited my own heart to wean

From the shroud that shaded her
 In the rock-hewn sepulchre —
 Waited till the dead should say,
 “ Heart, be free of me this day.”
 Waited with a patient will —
 AND I WAIT BETWEEN THEM STILL.

I take the year back to my life and story,
 The dead year and say, “ I will share in thy tomb,
 ‘ All the kings of the nations lie in glory ;’
 Cased in cedar, and shut in a sacred gloom !
 They reigned in their lifetime with sceptre and
 diadem.
 But thou excellest them ;
 For life doth make thy grave her oratory.
 And the crown is still on thy brow ;
 ‘ All the kings of the nations lie in glory,’
 And so dost thou.”

REFLECTIONS.

Written for the Portfolio Society, July, 1862.

LOOKING OVER A GATE AT A POOL IN A FIELD.

WHAT change has made the pastures sweet
 And reached the daisies at my feet,
 And cloud that wears a golden hem ?
 This lovely world, the hills, the sward —
 They all look fresh, as if our Lord
 But yesterday had finished them.

And here's the field with light aglow ;
 How fresh its boundary lime-trees show,
 And how its wet leaves trembling shine !
 Between their trunks come through to me
 The morning sparkles of the sea
 Below the level browsing line.

I see the pool more clear by half
 Than pools where other waters laugh
 Up at the breasts of coot and rail.
 There, as she passed it on her way,
 I saw reflected yesterday
 A maiden with a milking-pail.

There, neither slowly nor in haste,
 One hand upon her slender waist,
 The other lifted to her pail,
 She, rosy in the morning light,
 Among the water-daisies white,
 Like some fair sloop appeared to sail.

Against her ankles as she trod
 The lucky buttercups did nod.
 I leaned upon the gate to see:
 The sweet thing looked, but did not speak;
 A dimple came in either cheek,
 And all my heart was gone from me.

Then, as I lingered on the gate,
 And she came up like coming fate,
 I saw my picture in her eyes —
 Clear dancing eyes, more black than sloes,
 Cheeks like the mountain pink, that grows
 Among white-headed majesties.

I said, "A tale was made of old
 That I would fain to thee unfold;
 Ah! let me — let me tell the tale."
 But high she held her comely head;
 "I cannot heed it now," she said,
 "For carrying of the milking-pail."

She laughed. What good to make ado?
 I held the gate, and she came through,
 And took her homeward path anon.
 From the clear pool her face had fled:

It rested on my heart instead,
 Reflected when the maid was gone.
 With happy youth, and work content,
 So sweet and stately on she went,
 Right careless of the untold tale.
 Each step she took I loved her more,
 And followed to her dairy door
 The maiden with the milking-pail.

II.

For hearts where wakened love doth lurk,
 How fine, how blest a thing is work!
 For work does good when reasons fail —
 Good; yet the axe at every stroke
 The echo of a name awoke —
 Her name is Mary Martindale.

I'm glad that echo was not heard
 Aright by other men: a bird
 Knows doubtless what his own notes
 And I know not; but I can say
 I felt as shame-faced all that day
 As if folks heard her name right well.

And when the west began to glow
 I went — I could not choose but go —
 To that same dairy on the hill;
 And while sweet Mary moved about
 Within, I came to her without,
 And leaned upon the window-sill.

The garden border where I stood
 Was sweet with pinks and southern-wood
 I spoke — her answer seemed to fail;
 I smelt the pinks — I could not see;
 The dusk came down and sheltered me,
 And in the dusk she heard my tale.

And what is left that I should tell?
 I begged a kiss, I pleaded well:
 The rosebud lips did long decline;
 But yet I think, I think 'tis true,
 That leaned at last into the dew,
 One little instant they were mine.

O life! how dear thou hast become:
 She laughed at dawn, and I was dumb,
 But evening counsels best prevail.
 Fair shine the blue that o'er her spreads,
 Green be the pastures where she treads,
 The maiden with the milking-pail!

—◆—
 THE LETTER L.

ABSENT.

We sat on grassy slopes that meet
 With sudden dip the level strand;
 The trees hung overhead — our feet
 Were on the sand.

Two silent girls, a thoughtful man,
 We sunned ourselves in open light,
 And felt such April airs as fan
 The Isle of Wight;

And smelt the wall-flower in the crag
 Whereon that dainty waft had fed,
 Which made the bell-hung cowslip wag
 Her delicate head;

And let alighting jackdaws fleet
 Adown it open-winged, and pass
 Till they could touch with outstretched feet
 The warmed grass.

The happy wave ran up and rang
 Like service bells a long way off,
 And down a little freshet sprang
 From mossy trough,

And splashed into a rain of spray,
 And fretted on with daylight's loss,
 Because so many blue-bells lay
 Leaning across.

Blue martins gossiped in the sun,
 And pairs of chattering daws flew by,
 And sailing brigs rocked softly on
 In company.

Wild cherry boughs above us spread
 The whitest shade was ever seen,
 And flicker, flicker, came and fled
 Sun-spots between.

Bees murmured in the milk-white bloom
 As babes will sigh for deep content
 When their sweet hearts for peace make room,
 As given, not lent.

And we saw on: we said no word,
 And one was lost in musings rare,
 One buoyant as the waft that stirred
 Her shining hair.

His eyes were bent upon the sand,
 Unfathomed deeps within them lay;
 A slender rod was in his hand—
 A hazel spray.

Her eyes were resting on his face,
 As shyly glad by stealth to glean
 Impressions of his manly grace
 And guarded mien;