

Though treaties be treaties, never a throne
Was proffered for cause as fair.
Yet come to me home,
Through the salt sea foam,
For the Greek must ask elsewhere.

“’Tis a pity, my sailor, but who can tell?
Many lands they look to me;
One of these might be wanting a Prince as well,
But that’s as hereafter may be.”
She raised her white head
And laughed; and she said,
“That’s as hereafter may be.”

—♦—

BROTHERS, AND A SERMON.

It was a village built in a green rent,
Between two cliffs that skirt the dangerous bay.

A reef of level rock runs out to sea,
And you may lie on it and look sheer down,
Just where the “Grace of Sunderland” was lost,
And see the elastic banners of the dulse
Rock softly, and the orange star-fish creep
Across the laver, and the mackerel shoot
Over and under it, like silver boats
Turning at will and plying under water.

There on that reef we lay upon our breasts,
My brother and I, and half the village lads,
For an old fisherman had called to us [they?]
With “Sirs, the syle be come.” “And what are
My brother said. “Good lack!” the old man cried,
And shook his head; “to think you gentlefolk
Should ask what syle be! Look you; I can’t say
What syle be called in your fine dictionaries,

Nor what name God Almighty calls them by
When their food’s ready and He sends them south:
But our folk call them syle, and nought but syle,
And when they’re grown, why then we call them
herring.

I tell you, Sir, the water is as full
Of them as pastures be of blades of grass;
You’ll draw a score out in a landing net,
And none of them be longer than a pin.

“Syle! ay, indeed, we should be badly off,
I reckon, and so would God Almighty’s gulls,”
He grumbled on in his quaint piety,
“And all His other birds, if He should say
I will not drive my syle into the south;
The fisher folk may do without my syle,
And do without the shoal of fish it draws
To follow and feed on it.”

This said, we made
Our peace with him by means of two small coins,
And down we ran and lay upon the reef,
And saw the swimming infants, emerald green,
In separate shoals, the scarcely turning ebb
Bringing them in; while sleek, and not intent
On chase, but taking that which came to hand,
The full-fed mackerel and the gurnet swam
Between; and settling on the polished sea,
A thousand snow-white gulls sat lovingly
In social rings, and twittered while they fed.
The village dogs and ours, elate and brave,
Lay looking over, barking at the fish;
Fast, fast the silver creatures took the bait,
And when they heaved and floundered on the rock,
In beauteous misery, a sudden pat
Some shaggy pup would deal, then back away,
At distance eye them with sagacious doubt,
And shrink half frightened from the slippery things.

And so we lay from ebb-tide, till the flow
 Rose high enough to drive us from the reef;
 The fisher lads went home across the sand;
 We climbed the cliff, and sat an hour or more,
 Talking and looking down. It was not talk
 Of much significance, except for this —
 That we had more in common than of old,
 For both were tired, I with overwork,
 He with inaction; I was glad at heart
 To rest, and he was glad to have an ear
 That he could grumble to, and half in jest
 Rail at entails, deplore the fate of heirs,
 And the misfortune of a good estate —
 Misfortune that was sure to pull him down,
 Make him a dreamy, selfish, useless man:
 Indeed he felt himself deteriorate
 Already. Thereupon he sent down showers
 Of clattering stones, to emphasize his words,
 And leap the cliffs and tumble noisily
 Into the seething wave. And as for me,
 I railed at him and at ingratitude,
 While rifling of the basket he had slung
 Across his shoulders; then with right good will
 We fell to work, and feasted like the gods,
 Like laborers, or like eager workhouse folk
 At Yuletide dinner; or, to say the whole
 At once, like tired, hungry, healthy youth,
 Until the meal being o'er, the tilted flask
 Drained of its latest drop, the meat and bread
 And ruddy cherries eaten, and the dogs
 Mumbling the bones, this elder brother of mine—
 This man that never felt an ache or pain
 In his broad, well-knit frame, and never knew
 The trouble of an unforgiven grudge,
 The sting of a regretted meanness, nor
 The desperate struggle of the unendowed
 For place and for possession — he began

To sing a rhyme that he himself had wrought;
 Sending it out with cogitative pause,
 As if the scene where he had shaped it first
 Had rolled it back on him, and meeting it
 Thus unaware, he was of doubtful mind
 Whether his dignity it well beseemed
 To sing of pretty maiden:

Goldilocks sat on the grass,
 Tying up of posies rare;
 Hardly could a sunbeam pass
 Through the cloud that was her hair.
 Purple orchis lasteth long,
 Primrose flowers are pale and clear;
 O the maiden sang a song
 It would do you good to hear!

Sad before her leaned the boy,
 "Goldilocks that I love well,
 Happy creature fair and coy,
 Think o' me, Sweet Amabel,"
 Goldilocks she shook apart,
 Looked with doubtful, doubtful eyes;
 Like a blossom on her heart
 Opened out her first surprise.

As a gloriol sign o' grace,
 Goldilocks, ah, fall and flow
 On the blooming childlike face,
 Dimple, dimple, come and go.
 Give her time; on grass and sky
 Let her gaze if she be fain:
 As they looked ere he drew nigh,
 They will never look again.

Ah! the playtime she has known,
 While her goldilocks grew long,
 Is it like a nestling flown,

Childhood over like a song?
 Yes, the boy may clear his brow,
 Though she thinks to say him nay,
 When she sighs, "I cannot now —
 Come again some other day."

"Hold there!" he cried, half angry with himself;
 "That ending goes amiss:" then turned again
 To the old argument that we had held —
 "Now look you!" said my brother, "You may talk
 Till, weary of the talk, I answer 'Ay,
 There's reason in your words;' and you may talk
 Till I go on to say, 'This should be so;'
 And you may talk till I shall further own
 'It *is* so; yes, I am a lucky dog!'
 Yet not the less shall I next morning wake,
 And with a natural and fervent sigh,
 Such as you never heaved, I shall exclaim
 'What an unlucky dog I am!'" And here
 He broke into a laugh. "But as for you —
 You! on all hands you have the best of me;
 Men have not robbed you of your birthright — work,
 Nor ravaged in old days a peaceful field,
 Nor wedded heiresses against their will,
 Nor sinned, nor slaved, nor stooped, nor overreached,
 That you might drone a useless life away
 'Mid half a score of bleak and barren farms
 And half a dozen bogs."

"O rare!" I cried;
 "His wrongs go nigh to make him eloquent:
 Now we behold how far bad actions reach!
 Because five hundred years ago a Knight
 Drove geese and beeves out from a Franklin's yard;
 Because three hundred years ago a squire —
 Against her will, and for her fair estate —
 Married a very ugly, red-haired maid,
 The blest inheritor of all their self.

While in the full enjoyment of the same,
 Sighs on his own confession every day.
 He cracks no egg without a moral sigh,
 Nor eats of beef but thinking on that wrong;
 Then, yet the more to be revenged on them,
 And shame their ancient pride, if they should know,
 Works hard as any horse for his degree,
 And takes to writing verses."

"Ay," he said,
 Half laughing at himself. "Yet you and I,
 But for those tresses which enrich us yet
 With somewhat of the hue that partial fame
 Calls auburn when it shines on heads of heirs,
 But when it flames round brows of younger sons,
 Just red — mere red; why, but for this, I say,
 And but for selfish getting of the land,
 And beggarly entailing it, we two,
 To-day well fed, well grown, well dressed, well read,
 We might have been two horny-handed boors —
 Lean, clumsy, ignorant, and ragged boors —
 Planning for moonlight nights a poaching scheme,
 Or soiling our dull souls and consciences
 With plans for pilfering a cottage roost."

"What chorus! are you dumb? you should have
 cried,
 'So good comes out of evil;'" and with that,
 As if all pauses it was natural
 To seize for songs, his voice broke out again:

Coo, dove, to thy unmarried mate —
 She has two warm eggs in her nest:
 Tell her the hours are few to wait
 Ere life shall dawn on their rest;
 And thy young shall peck at the shells, elate
 With a dream of her brooding breast.

Coo, dove, for she counts the hours,
 Her fair wings ache for flight:
 By day the apple has grown in the flowers,
 And the moon has grown by night,
 And the white drift settled from hawthorn bowers,
 Yet they will not seek the light.

Coo, dove; but what of the sky?
 And what if the storm-wind swell,
 And the reeling branch come down from on high
 To the grass where daisies dwell,
 And the brood belovéd should with them lie
 Or ever they break the shell?

Coo, dove; and yet black clouds lower,
 Like fate, on the far-off sea:
 Thunder and wind they bear to thy bower,
 As on wings of destiny.
 Ah, what if they break in an evil hour,
 As they broke over mine and me?

What next? — we started like to girls, for lo!
 The creaking voice, more harsh than rusty crane,
 Of one who stooped behind us, cried aloud,
 “Good lack! how sweet the gentleman does sing —
 So loud and sweet, ’tis like to split his throat.
 Why, Mike’s a child to him, a two-years child —
 A Chrisom child.”

“Who’s Mike?” my brother growled
 A little roughly. Quoth the fisherman —
 “Mike, Sir? he’s just a fisher lad, no more;
 But he can sing, when he takes on to sing,
 So loud there’s not a sparrow in the spire
 But needs must hear. Sir, if I might make bold,
 I’d ask what song that was you sung. My mate,
 As we were shoving off the mackerel boats,
 Said he, ‘I’ll wager that’s the sort o’ song
 They kept their hearts up with in the Crimea.’”

“There, fisherman,” quoth I, “he showed his wit,
 Your mate; he marked the sound of savage war —
 Gunpowder, groans, hot-shot, and bursting shells,
 And ‘murderous messages,’ delivered by
 Spent balls that break the heads of dreaming men.”

“Ay, ay, Sir!” quoth the fisherman. “Have done!”
 My brother. And I — “The gift belongs to few
 Of sending farther than the words can reach
 Their spirit and expression;” still — “Have done!”
 He cried; and then “I rolled the rubbish out
 More loudly than the meaning warranted,
 To air my lungs — I thought not on the words.”

Then said the fisherman, who missed the point,
 “So Mike rolls out the psalm; you’ll hear him, Sir,
 Please God you live till Sunday.”

“Even so:
 And you, too, fisherman; for here, they say,
 You all are church-goers.”

“Surely, Sir,” quoth he,
 Took off his hat, and stroked his old white head
 And wrinkled face; then sitting by us said,
 As one that utters with a quiet mind
 Unchallenged truth — “’Tis lucky for the boats.”

The boats! ’tis lucky for the boats! Our eyes
 Were drawn to him as either fain would say,
 What! do they send the psalm up in the spire,
 And pray because ’tis lucky for the boats?
 But he, the brown old man, the wrinkled man,
 That all his life had been a church-goer,
 Familiar with celestial cadences,
 Informed of all he could receive, and sure
 Of all he understood — he sat content,
 And we kept silence. In his reverend face

There was a simpleness we could not sound ;
 Much truth had passed him overhead ; some error
 He had trod under foot ; — God comfort him !
 He could not learn of us, for we were young
 And he was old, and so we gave it up ;
 And the sun went into the west, and down
 Upon the water stooped an orange cloud,
 And the pale milky reaches flushed, as glad
 To wear its colors ; and the sultry air
 Went out to sea, and puffed the sails of ships
 With thymy wafts, the breath of trodden grass :
 It took moreover music, for across
 The heather belt and over pasture land
 Came the sweet monotone of one slow bell,
 And parted time into divisions rare,
 Whereof each morsel brought its own delight.

“ They ring for service,” quoth the fisherman ;

“ Our parson preaches in the church to-night.”

“ And do the people go ?” my brother asked.

“ Ay, Sir ; they count it mean to stay away,
 He takes it so to heart. He’s a rare man,
 Our parson ; half a head above us all.”

“ That’s a great gift, and notable,” said I.

“ Ay, Sir ; and when he was a younger man
 He went out in the life-boat very oft,
 Before the ‘ Grace of Sunderland ’ was wrecked.
 He’s never been his own man since that hour ;
 For there were thirty men aboard of her,
 Anigh as close as you are now to me,
 And ne’er a one was saved.

They’re lying now,
 With two small children, in a row : the church
 And yard are full of seamen’s graves, and few
 Have any names.

She bumped upon the reef ;
 Our parson, my young son, and several more
 Were lashed together with a two-inch rope,
 And crept along to her ; their mates ashore
 Ready to haul them in. The gale was high,
 The sea was all a boiling, seething froth,
 And God Almighty’s guns were going off,
 And the land trembled.

“ When she took the ground,
 She went to pieces like a lock of hay
 Tossed from a pitchfork. Ere it came to that,
 The captain reeled on deck with two small things,
 One in each arm — his little lad and lass.
 Their hair was long, and blew before his face,
 Or else we thought he had been saved ; he fell,
 But held them fast. The crew, poor luckless souls !
 The breakers licked them off ; and some were crushed.
 Some swallowed in the yeast, some flung up dead,
 The dear breath beaten out of them : not one
 Jumped from the wreck upon the reef to catch
 The hands that strained to reach, but tumbled back
 With eyes wide open. But the captain lay
 And clung — the only man alive. They prayed —
 ‘ For God’s sake, captain, throw the children here !’
 ‘ Throw them !’ our parson cried ; and then she struck :
 And he threw one, a pretty two-years child ;
 But the gale dashed him on the slippery verge,
 And down he went. They say they heard him cry.

“ Then he rose up and took the other one,
 And all our men reached out their hungry arms,
 And cried out, ‘ Throw her, throw her !’ and he did.
 He threw her right against the parson’s breast,
 And all at once a sea broke over them,
 And they that saw it from the shore have said
 It struck the wreck, and piecemeal scattered it.

Just as a woman might the lump of salt
That 'twixt her hands into the kneading-pan
She breaks and crumbles on her rising bread.

"We hauled our men in: two of them were dead—
The sea had beaten them, their heads hung down;
Our parson's arms were empty, for the wave
Had torn away the pretty, pretty lamb;
We often see him stand beside her grave:
But 'twas no fault of his, no fault of his.

"I ask your pardon, Sirs; I prate and prate,
And never have I said what brought me here.
Sirs, if you want a boat to-morrow morn,
I'm bold to say there's ne'er a boat like mine."
"Ay, that was what we wanted," we replied;
"A boat, his boat;" and off he went, well pleased.

We, too, rose up (the crimson in the sky
Flushing our faces), and went sauntering on,
And thought to reach our lodging, by the cliff.
And up and down among the heather beds,
And up and down between the sheaves, we sped.
Doubling and winding; for a long ravine
Ran up into the land and cut us off,
Pushing out slippery iedges for the birds,
And rent with many a crevice, where the wind
Had laid up drifts of empty egg-shells, swept
From the bare berths of gulls and guillemots.

So as it chanced we lighted on a path
That led into a nutwood; and our talk
Was louder than beseemed, if we had known,
With argument and laughter; for the path,
As we sped onward, took a sudden turn
Abrupt, and we came out on churchyard grass,
And close upon a porch, and face to face
Within those within, and with the thirty graves.

We heard the voice of one who preached within,
And stopped. "Come on," my brother whispered
me;

"It were more decent that we enter now;
Come on! we'll hear this rare old demigod:
I like strong men and large; I like gray heads,
And grand gruff voices, hoarse though this may be
With shouting in the storm."

It was not hoarse,
The voice that preached to those few fishermen,
And women, nursing mothers with the babes
Hushed on their breasts; and yet it held them not:
Their drowsy eyes were drawn to look at us,
Till, having leaned our rods against the wall,
And left the dogs at watch, we entered, sat,
And were apprised that, though he saw us not,
The parson knew that he had lost the eyes
And ears of those before him, for he made
A pause—a long dead pause—and dropped his arms,
And stood awaiting, till I felt the red
Mount to my brow.

And a soft fluttering stir
Passed over all, and every mother hushed
The babe beneath her shawl, and he turned round
And met our eyes, unused to diffidence,
But diffident of his; then with a sigh
Fronted the folk, lifted his grand gray head,
And said, as one that pondered now the words
He had been preaching on with new surprise,
And found fresh marvel in their sound, "Behold!
Behold!" saith He, "I stand at the door and knock."

Then said the parson: "What! and shall He wait,
And must He wait, not only till we say,
'Good Lord, the house is clean, the hearth is swept,
The children sleep, the mackerel-boats are in,
And all the nets are mended; therefore I