

Could have tried it, — O, the lute
 For that wondrous song were mute,
 And the bird would do her part,
 Falter, fail, and break her heart, —
 Break her heart, and furl her wings,
 On the unexpressive strings.

GLADYS AND HER ISLAND.

(*On the Advantages of the Poetical Temperament.*)

AN IMPERFECT FABLE WITH A DOUBTFUL MORAL.

O HAPPY Gladys! I rejoice with her,
 For Gladys saw the island.

It was thus:

They gave a day for pleasure in the school
 Where Gladys taught; and all the other girls
 Were taken out to picnic in a wood.
 But it was said, "We think it were not well
 That little Gladys should acquire a taste
 For pleasure, going about, and needless change.
 It would not suit her station: discontent
 Might come of it; and all her duties now
 She does so pleasantly, that we were best
 To keep her humble." So they said to her,
 "Gladys, we shall not want you, all to-day.
 Look, you are free; you need not sit at work:
 No, you may take a long and pleasant walk
 Over the sea-cliff, or upon the beach
 Among the visitors."

Then Gladys blushed
 For joy, and thanked them. What! a holiday,
 A whole one, for herself! How good, how kind!
 With that the marshalled carriages drove off;

And Gladys, sobered with her weight of joy,
 Stole out beyond the groups upon the beach —
 The children with their wooden spades, the band
 That played for lovers, and the sunny stir
 Of cheerful life and leisure — to the rocks,
 For these she wanted most, and there was time
 To mark them; how like ruined organs prone
 They lay, or leaned their giant fluted pipes,
 And let the great white-crested reckless wave
 Beat out their booming melody.

The sea
 Was filled with light; in clear blue caverns curled
 The breakers, and they ran, and seemed to romp,
 As playing at some rough and dangerous game,
 While all the nearer waves rushed in to help,
 And all the farther heaved their heads to peep,
 And tossed the fishing-boats. Then Gladys laughed,
 And said, "O happy tide, to be so lost
 In sunshine, that one dare not look at it;
 And lucky cliffs, to be so brown and warm;
 And yet how lucky are the shadows, too,
 That lurk beneath their ledges. It is strange,
 That in remembrance though I lay them up,
 They are forever, when I come to them,
 Better than I had thought. O, something yet
 I had forgotten. Oft I say, 'At least
 This picture is imprinted; thus and thus,
 The sharpened serried jags run up, run out,
 Layer on layer.' And I look — up — up —
 High, higher up again, till far aloft
 They cut into their ether — brown, and clear,
 And perfect. And I, saying, 'This is mine,
 To keep,' retire; but shortly come again,
 And they confound me with a glorious change.
 The low sun out of rain-clouds stares at them;
 They redden, and their edges drip with — what?

I know not, but 'tis red. It leaves no stain,
For the next morning they stand up like ghosts
In a sea-shroud, and fifty thousand mews
Sit there, in long white files, and chatter on,
Like silly school-girls in their silliest mood.

“There is the boulder where we always turn.
O, I have longed to pass it; now I will.
What would they say? for one must slip and spring;
'Young ladies! Gladys! I am shocked. My dears,
Decorum, if you please: turn back at once.
Gladys, we blame you most; you should have looked
Before you.' Then they sigh, — how kind they are! —
'What will become of you, if all your life
You look a long way off? — look anywhere,
And everywhere, instead of at your feet,
And where they carry you!' Ah, well, I know
It is a pity,” Gladys said; “but then
We cannot all be wise: happy for me
That other people are.

“And yet I wish, —
For sometimes very right and serious thoughts
Come to me, — I do wish that they would come
When they are wanted! — when I teach the sums
On rainy days, and when the practising
I count to, and the din goes on and on,
Still the same tune and still the same mistake,
Then I am wise enough: sometimes I feel
Quite old. I think that it will last, and say,
'Now my reflections do me credit! now
I am a woman!' and I wish they knew
How serious all my duties look to me,
And how my heart hushed down and shaded lies,
Just like the sea, when low, convenient clouds
Come over, and drink all its sparkles up.
But does it last? Perhaps, that very day,

The front door opens: out we walk in pairs;
And I am so delighted with this world,
That suddenly has grown, being new washed,
To such a smiling, clean, and thankful world,
And with a tender face shining through tears,
Looks up into the sometime lowering sky,
That has been angry, but is reconciled,
And just forgiving her, that I, — that I, —
O, I forget myself: what matters how!
And then I hear (but always kindly said)
Some words that pain me so, — but just, but true:
'For if your place in this establishment
Be but subordinate, and if your birth
Be lowly, it the more behooves — Well, well,
No more. We see that you are sorry.' Yes!
I am always sorry THEN; but now, — O, now,
Here is a bight more beautiful than all.”

“And did they scold her, then, my pretty one?
And did she want to be as wise as they, —
To bear a bucklered heart and priggish mind?
Ay, you may crow; she did! but no, no, no,
The night-time will not let her; all the stars
Say nay to that; the old sea laughs at her.
Why, Gladys is a child; she has not skill
To shut herself within her own small cell,
And build the door up, and to say, 'Poor me!
I am a prisoner;' then to take hewn stones,
And, having built the windows up, to say,
'O, it is dark! there is no sunshine here;
There never has been.'”

Strange! how very strange!
A woman passing Gladys with a babe,
To whom she spoke these words, and only looked
Upon the babe, who crowed and pulled her curls,
And never looked at Gladys, never once.

"A simple child," she added, and went by,
 "To want to change her greater for their less;
 But Gladys shall not do it, no, not she;
 We love her — don't we? — far too well for that."

Then Gladys, flushed with shame and keen surprise,
 "How could she be so near, and I not know?
 And have I spoken out my thought aloud?
 I must have done, forgetting. It is well
 She walks so fast, for I am hungry now,
 And here is water cantering down the cliff,
 And here a shell to catch it with, and here
 The round plump buns they gave me, and the fruit.
 Now she is gone behind the rock. O, rare
 To be alone!" So Gladys sat her down,
 Unpacked her little basket, ate and drank,
 Then pushed her hands into the warm dry sand,
 And thought the earth was happy, and she too
 Was going round with it in happiness,
 That holiday. "What was it that she said?"
 Quoth Gladys, cogitating; "they were kind,
 The words that woman spoke. She does not know!
 'Her greater for their less,' — it makes me laugh, —
 But yet," sighed Gladys, "though it must be good
 To look and to admire, one should not wish
 To steal THEIR virtues, and to put them on,
 Like feathers from another wing; beside,
 That calm, and that grave consciousness of worth,
 When all is said, would little suit with me,
 Who am not worthy. When our thoughts are born,
 Though they be good and humble, one should mind
 How they are reared, or some will go astray
 And shame their mother. Cain and Abel both
 Were only once removed from innocence.
 Why did I envy them? That was not good;
 Yet it began with my humility."

But as she spake, lo, Gladys raised her eyes,
 And right before her, on the horizon's edge,
 Behold, an island! First, she looked away
 Along the solid rocks and steadfast shore,
 For she was all amazed, believing not,
 And then she looked again, and there again
 Behold, an island! And the tide had turned,
 The milky sea had got a purple rim,
 And from the rim that mountain island rose,
 Purple, with two high peaks, the northern peak
 The higher, and with fell and precipice,
 It ran down steeply to the water's brink;
 But all the southern line was long and soft,
 Broken with tender curves, and, as she thought,
 Covered with forest or with sward. But, look!
 The sun was on the island; and he showed
 On either peak a dazzling cap of snow.
 Then Gladys held her breath; she said, "Indeed,
 Indeed it is an island: how is this,
 I never saw it till this fortunate
 Rare holiday?" And while she strained her eyes,
 She thought that it began to fade; but not
 To change as clouds do, only to withdraw
 And melt into its azure; and at last,
 Little by little, from her hungry heart,
 That longed to draw things marvellous to itself,
 And yearned towards the riches and the great
 Abundance of the beauty God hath made,
 It passed away. Tears started in her eyes,
 And when they dropt, the mountain isle was gone.
 The careless sea had quite forgotten it,
 And all was even as it had been before.

And Gladys wept, but there was luxury
 In her self-pity, while she softly sobbed,
 "O, what a little while! I am afraid
 I shall forget that purple mountain isle,

The lovely hollows atween her snow-clad peaks,
 The grace of her upheaval where she lay
 Well up against the open. O, my heart,
 Now I remember how this holiday
 Will soon be done, and now my life goes on
 Not fed; and only in the noonday walk
 Let to look silently at what it wants,
 Without the power to wait or pause awhile,
 And understand and draw within itself
 The richness of the earth. A holiday!
 How few I have! I spend the silent time
 At work, while all THEIR pupils are gone home,
 And feel myself remote. They shine apart;
 They are great planets, I a little orb;
 My little orbit far within their own
 Turns, and approaches not. But yet, the more
 I am alone when those I teach return;
 For they, as planets of some other sun,
 Not mine, have paths that can but meet my ring
 Once in a cycle. O, how poor I am!
 I have not got laid up in this blank heart
 Any indulgent kisses given me
 Because I had been good, or, yet more sweet,
 Because my childhood was itself a good
 Attractive thing for kisses, tender praise,
 And comforting. An orphan-school at best
 Is a cold mother in the winter time
 ('Twas mostly winter when new orphans came),
 An unregardful mother in the spring.

“ Yet once a year (I did mine wrong) we went
 To gather cowslips. How we thought on it
 Beforehand, pacing, pacing the dull street,
 To that one tree, the only one we saw
 From April, — if the cowslips were in bloom
 So early; or, if not, from opening May
 Even to September. Then there came the feast

At Epping. If it rained that day, it rained
 For a whole year to us; we could not think
 Of fields and hawthorn hedges, and the leaves
 Fluttering, but still it rained, and ever rained.

“ Ah, well, but I am here; but I have seen
 The gay gorse bushes in their flowering time;
 I know the scent of bean-fields; I have heard
 The satisfying murmur of the main.”

The woman! she came round the rock again
 With her fair baby, and she sat her down
 By Gladys, murmuring, “ Who forbade the grass
 To grow by visitations of the dew?
 Who said in ancient time to the desert pool,
 ‘ Thou shalt not wait for angel visitors
 To trouble thy still water!’ Must we bide
 At home? The lore, beloved, shall fly to us
 On a pair of sumptuous wings. Or may we breathe
 Without? O, we shall draw to us the air
 That times and mystery feed on. This shall lay
 Unhidden hands upon the heart o’ the world,
 And feel it beating. Rivers shall run on,
 Full of sweet language as a lover’s mouth,
 Delivering of a tune to make her youth
 More beautiful than wheat when it is green.

“ What else? — (O, none shall envy her!) The rain
 And the wild weather will be most her own,
 And talk with her o’ nights; and if the winds
 Have seen aught wondrous, they will tell it her
 In a mouthful of strange moans, — will bring from far,
 Her ears being keen, the lowing and the mad,
 Masterful tramping of the bison herds,
 Tearing down headlong with their bloodshot eyes,
 In savage rifts of hair; the crack and creak
 Of ice-floes in the frozen sea, the cry

Of the white bears, all in a dim blue world
 Mumbling their meals by twilight; or the rock
 And majesty of motion, when their heads
 Primeval trees toss in a sunny storm,
 And hail their nuts down on unweeded fields.
 No holidays," quoth she; "drop, drop, O, drop,
 Thou tired skylark, and go up no more;
 You lime-trees, cover not your head with bees,
 Nor give out your good smell. She will not look;
 No, Gladys cannot draw your sweetness in,
 For lack of holidays." So Gladys thought,
 "A most strange woman, and she talks of me."
 With that a girl ran up: "Mother," she said,
 "Come out of this brown light, I pray you now,
 It smells of fairies." Gladys thereon thought,
 "The mother will not speak to me, perhaps
 The daughter may," and asked her courteously,
 "What do the fairies smell of?" But the girl
 With peevish pout replied, "You know, you know."
 "Not I," said Gladys; then she answered her,
 "Something like buttercups. But, mother, come,
 And whisper up a porpoise from the foam,
 Because I want to ride."

Full slowly, then,
 The mother rose, and ever kept her eyes
 Upon her little child. "You freakish maid,"
 Said she, "now mark me, if I call you one,
 You shall not scold nor make him take you far."
 "I only want — you know I only want,"
 The girl replied — "to go and play awhile
 Upon the sand by Lagos." Then she turned
 And muttered low, "Mother, is this the girl
 Who saw the island?" But the mother frowned.
 "When may she go to it?" the daughter asked.

And Gladys, following them, gave all her mind
 To hear the answer. "When she wills to go;
 For yonder comes to shore the ferry-boat."
 Then Gladys turned to look, and even so
 It was; a ferry-boat, and far away
 Reared in the offing, lo, the purple peaks
 Of her loved island.

Then she raised her arms,
 And ran toward the boat, crying out, "O rare,
 The island! fair befall the island; let
 Me reach the island." And she sprang on board,
 And after her stepped in the freakish maid
 And the fair mother, brooding o'er her child;
 And this one took the helm, and that let go
 The sail, and off they flew, and furrowed up
 A flaky hill before, and left behind
 A sobbing, snake-like tail of creamy foam;
 And dancing hither, thither, sometimes shot
 Toward the island; then, when Gladys looked,
 Were leaving it to leeward. And the maid
 Whistled a wind to come and rock the craft,
 And would be leaning down her head to mew
 At cat-fish, then lift out into her lap
 And dandle baby-seals, which, having kissed,
 She flung to their sleek mothers, till her own
 Rebuked her in good English, after cried,
 "Luff, luff, we shall be swamped." "I will not luff,"
 Sobbed the fair mischief; "you are cross to me."
 "For shame!" the mother shrieked; "luff, luff
 my dear;
 Kiss and be friends, and thou shalt have the fish
 With the curly tail to ride on." So she did,
 And presently, a dolphin bouncing up,
 She sprang upon his slippery back, — "Farewell,"
 She laughed, was off, and all the sea grew calm.

Then Gladys was much happier, and was 'ware
 In the smooth weather that this woman talked
 Like one in sleep, and murmured certain thoughts
 Which seemed to be like echoes of her own.
 She nodded, "Yes, the girl is going now
 To her own island. Gladys poor? Not she!
 Who thinks so? Once I met a man in white,
 Who said to me, 'The thing that might have been
 Is called, and questioned why it hath not been;
 And can it give good reason, it is set
 Beside the actual, and reckoned in
 To fill the empty gaps of life.' Ah, so
 The possible stands by us ever fresh,
 Fairer than aught which any life hath owned,
 And makes divine amends. Now this was set
 Apart from kin, and not ordained a home;
 An equal; — and not suffered to fence in
 A little plot of earthly good, and say,
 'Tis mine; but in bereavement of the part,
 O, yet to taste the whole, — to understand
 The grandeur of the story, not to feel
 Satiated with good possessed, but evermore
 A healthful hunger for the great idea,
 The beauty and the blessedness of life.
 "Lo, now, the shadow!" quoth she, breaking off,
 "We are in the shadow." Then did Gladys turn.
 And, O, the mountain with the purple peaks
 Was close at hand. It cast a shadow out,
 And they were in it: and she saw the snow,
 And under that the rocks, and under that
 The pines, and then the pasturage; and saw
 Numerous dips, and undulations rare,
 Running down seaward, all astir with lithe
 Long canes, and lofty feathers; for the palms
 And spice trees of the south, nay, every growth,
 Meets in that island.

So that woman ran
 The boat ashore, and Gladys set her foot
 Thereon. Then all at once much laughter rose;
 Invisible folk set up exultant shouts,
 "It all belongs to Gladys;" and she ran
 And hid herself among the nearest trees
 And panted, shedding tears.

So she looked round,
 And saw that she was in a banyan grove,
 Full of wild peacocks, — pecking on the grass,
 A flickering mass of eyes, blue, green, and gold,
 Or reaching out their jewelled necks, where high
 They sat in rows along the boughs. No tree
 Cumbered with creepers let the sunshine through,
 But it was caught in scarlet cups, and poured
 From these on amber tufts of bloom, and dropped
 Lower on azure stars. The air was still,
 As if awaiting somewhat, or asleep,
 And Gladys was the only thing that moved,
 Excepting, — no, they were not birds, — what then?
 Glorified rainbows with a living soul?
 While they passed through a sunbeam they were seen,
 Not elsewhere, but they were present yet
 In shade. They were at work, pomegranate fruit
 That lay about removing, — purple grapes,
 That clustered in the path, clearing aside.
 Through a small spot of light would pass and go,
 The glorious happy mouth and two fair eyes
 Of somewhat that made rustlings where it went;
 But when a beam would strike the ground sheer down,
 Behold them! they had wings, and they would pass
 One after other with the sheeny fans,
 Bearing them slowly, that their hues were seen,
 Tender as russet crimson dropt on snows,
 Or where they turned flashing with gold and dashed
 With purple glooms. And they had feet, but these