

The Manor House and Other Poems

Ada Cambridge

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THE OLD MANOR HOUSE.

AN old house, crumbling half away, all barnacled and lichen-grown,
Of saddest, mellowest, softest grey, with a grand history of its own
Grand with the work and strife and tears of more than half a thousand years.

Such delicate, tender, russet tones of colour on its gables slept,
With streaks of gold betwixt the stones, where wind-sown flowers and mosses crept:
Wild grasses waved in sun and shade o'er terrace slab and balustrade.

Around the clustered chimneys clung the ivy's wreathed and braided threads,
And dappled lights and shadows flung across the sombre browns and reds;
Where'er the graver's hand had been, it spread its tendrils bright and green.

Far-stretching branches shadowed deep the blazoned windows and broad eaves,
And rocked the faithful rooks asleep, and strewed the terraces with leaves.
A broken dial marked the hours amid damp lawns and garden bowers.

An old house, silent, sad, forlorn, yet proud and stately to the last;
Of all its power and splendour shorn, but rich with memories of the past;
And pitying, from its own decay, the gilded piles of yesterday.

Pitying the new race that passed by, with slighting note of its grey walls,
And entertaining tenderly the shades of dead knights in its halls,
Whose blood, that soaked these hallowed sods, came down from Scandinavian gods.

I saw it first in summer-time. The warm air hummed and buzzed with bees,
Where now the pale green hop-vines climb about the sere trunks of the trees,
And waves of roses on the ground scented the tangled glades around.

Some long fern-plumes drooped there below; the heaven above was still and blue;
Just here between the gloom and glow a cedar and an aged yew
Parted their dusky arms, to let the glory fall on Margaret.

The Manor House and Other Poems

She leaned on that old balustrade, her white dress tinged with golden air,
Her small hands loosely clasped, and laid amongst the moss and maidenhair:
I watched her, hearing, as I stood, a turtle cooing in the wood

Hearing a mavis far away, piping his dreamy interludes,
While gusts of soft wind, sweet with hay, swept through those garden solitudes,
And thinking she was lovelier e'en than my young ideal love had been.

Tall, with that subtle, sensitive grace, which made so plainly manifest
That she was born of noble race, a cool, hushed presence, bringing rest,
Of one who felt and understood the dignity of womanhood.

Tall, with a slow, proud step and air; with skin half marble and half milk;
With twisted coils of raven hair, blue-tinged, and fine and soft as silk;
With haughty, clear-cut chin and cheek, and broad brows exquisitely Greek;

With still, calm mouth, whose dreamy smile possessed me like a haunting pain,
So rare, so sweet, so free from guile, with that slight accent of disdain;
With level, liquid tones that fell like chimings of a vesper bell;

With large, grave stag-eyes, soft, yet keen with slumbering passion, hazel-brown,
Long-lashed and dark, whose limpid sheen my thirsty spirit swallowed down;
O poor, pale words, wherewith to paint my queen, my goddess, and my saint!

You see that oriel, ivy-grown, with the blurred sculpture underneath?
Her sweet head, like the Clytie's own, with a white stephanotis wreath
Inwoven with its coiling hair, first bent to me in greeting there.

I shall remember till I die that night when we were introduced!
The great Sir Hildebrand stood by her cousin scowling as he used
To scowl if e'en a poor dumb cur ventured to lift his eyes to her.

I cared not. Well I knew her grace was not for him. I watched them dance,
And knew it by her locked-up face, and her slow, haughty utterance.
I knew he chafed and raged to see how kind and sweet she was to me.

O dear old window! nevermore the red and purple lights, that stray
Through your dim panes upon the floor on sunny summer-night, will lay
Soft rainbows on her glossy hair and the white dress she used to wear!

Those panes the ivy used to scratch I hear it now when I'm alone!

The Manor House and Other Poems

A pair of martlets used to hatch their young ones in the sculptured stone;
Those warm slabs were the bloodhound's bed, with fine yew-needles carpeted.

The missel-thrushes used to search there for the berries as they fell;
On that high twig, at morn, would perch a shy and shivering locustelle,
From yon low sweep of furzy brake, we used to watch it thrill and shake.

The banksia roses twined a wreath all round that ancient coat and crest,
And trailed the time-worn steps beneath, and almost touched the martin's nest;
The honey bees swarm in and out, and little lizards flashed about.

And when we flung the casement wide, the wind would play about her brow,
As she sat, etching, by my side, I see the bright locks lifted now!
And such a view would meet our eyes of crimson woods and azure skies!

'Twas there, when fell the twilight hush, I used to feed her wistful ears,
And make her cheek and forehead flush, and her dark eyes fill full of tears,
With tales of my wild, fighting life our bitter, brave Crimean strife.

We had, too, little concerts in that dear recess, I used to play
Accompaniments on my violin, and she would sing "Old Robin Gray,"
And simple, tender Scottish songs of loyal love and royal wrongs.

My violin is dead for me, the dust lies thick upon the case;
And she is dead, yet I can see e'en now the rapt and listening face;
And all about the garden floats the echo of those crying notes!

'Tis a sweet garden, is it not? So wild and tangled, nothing prim;
No quaint-cut bed, no shaven plot, no stunted bushes, stiff and trim;
Its flowers and shrubs all overblown, its long paths moss and lichen-grown.

'Twas on that terrace that we read the "Idylls," sauntering up and down
With gentle, musing, measured tread, while leaves kept falling, gold and brown,
And mists kept rising, silver-grey, one still and peaceful autumn-day.

In those long glades we roamed apart, and studied Spanish, and the tales
Of Chaucer, there we talked of art, and listened to the nightingales;
E'en now, when summer daylight dies, I hear their bubbling melodies.

You see that bower, half-hidden, made by the low-branching willow-tree?
We used to lounge there in the shade, and laugh, and gossip, and drink tea:

THE OLD MANOR HOUSE.

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I wreathed her head with ferns, one night, and little rose-buds sweet and white.

It grew my habit, by-and-by, to gather all the flowers she wore;
She used to take them silently, or I would leave them at her door,
And wait about till she was drest, to see them nestling on her breast.

In that green nook she used to sit, and I would watch her as she worked.
Her face had such a spell in it, and such a subtle glamour lurked
In even motion of her hand! why, I could never understand.

'Twas there I tied the little strap that held her netting down, one day,
And kissed the soft palm in her lap, which she so gently drew away.
Ay me, we held our tongues for hours! and I plucked off and ate the flowers.

She would not look at me at first I recollect it all so well!
Her delicate, downcast features, erst so pale, were tinted like a shell
Then like the petals that enclose the inmost heart of a moss rose.

The others came and chatted round, but we could laugh and chat no more;
I propped my elbow on the ground, and watched her count her stitches o'er;
Their talk I did not comprehend, she was too busy to attend.

The days passed on, and still we sat in our old place; but things were changed.
We were so silent after that! so oddly formal so estranged!
No more we met to worship art, our little pathways branched apart.

All day I kept her face in view scarce one low tone I failed to hear;
And, though she would not see, I knew she felt when I was far or near.
Yet brief and seldom was the chance that gave me word, or smile, or glance.

One night I came home in the gloom. The other guests were mostly gone.
A light was burning in her room, and from the lawn it shone upon
I plucked a flower for her to wear a white rose, fringed with maidenhair.

I passed through that long corridor those are its windows, to the west
That I might leave it at her door, and saw her cross her threshold, drest.
No lamps were lit, the twilight shed a grey mist on her shiny head.

Her garments swept the oaken stairs; I stood below her, hushed and dumb;
She started, seeing me unawares, and stopped. "Come down," I whispered; "come!"
She waited, but I waited too; and she had nothing else to do.

THE OLD MANOR HOUSE.

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She came down, slowly, haughtily, with sweet pretence of carelessness.
I watched each step as she drew nigh, each brighter gleam on her white dress.
I did not speak, I did not stir, but all my heart went out to her.

She would have passed me, shy and still, she would not suffer herself to mark
That I was grown so bold, until I took her dear hands in the dark.
And then and then Well! she was good and patient, and she understood.

My arms were strong, and rude, and rough because my love was so intense;
She knew the reason well enough, and so she would not take offence;
Though 'twas by force I made her stay, she did not try to get away.

Ah, then we had some happy hours some blessed days of peace and rest!
This garden, full of shady bowers and lonely pathways, from whose breast
A thousand blending perfumes rise, became a very Paradise.

'Twas fair as the first Eden, then; and Adam had no fairer mate!
Nor grieved he more than I grieved, when the angel drove him from the gate.
When God cursed **him** from His high throne, He did not cast him out alone!

'Twas on that broken step we sat, where the yew branch is fall'n and bent,
And read the Colonel's letter, that recalled me to my regiment.
'Twas there, on such a night as this, I stood to give my parting kiss.

'Twas there I hugged the small Greek head upon my bosom, damp with dew;
'Twas there she soothed my grief, and said, "But I shall still belong to you."
O my sweet Eve, with your pure eyes! you're mine now, in God's Paradise.

I sailed, you know, within a week, *en route* for Malta's heat and blaze;
And tender letters came, to speak of love, and comfort, and bright days.
I tried to think it was not hard of what was coming afterward.

I used to dream, and dream, and dream, from night till morn, from morn till night;
My future life just then did seem so full, so beautiful, so bright!
I could not see, I could not feel, the sorrow dogging at my heel.

At length it touched me. By—and—by the letters ceased. I looked in vain;
I roamed the streets dejectedly, and gnawed my long moustache in pain.
I wrote twice thrice; no answer still. Surely, I thought, she must be ill.

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Until one evening Eyre came in, to lounge and gossip, drink and smoke,
I gave him leisure to begin; and, when his pipe was lit, he spoke,
Through curling vapour, soft and blue "Guy, I've a piece of news for you.

"One of the girls you met last year at that poor tumble-down old place
The dark-haired one she with the clear white skin and sweet Madonna face,
She's married now, I understand, to her rich cousin Hildebrand."

I felt my limbs grow stark and stiff; I felt my heart grow cold as lead;
I heard Eyre's quiet, musing whiff the noise swam round and round my head.
I veiled my eyes, lest he should see their passionate, mute misery.

"I only heard," he said, "to-day. It's out in all the papers, though.
She did not care for him, they say. But the old house was falling low
Her father's name and fame at stake. She would do anything for his sake.

"Some mortgages foreclosed the price of years and centuries of debt;
The manor doomed for sacrifice or else the Lady Margaret.
Doubtless for Hildebrand's red gold the rare Madonna face was sold.

"I fancy that's the history," he ended, in a bitter tone.
"It's not a new one, by-the-bye." And when he went, I sat alone,
And tried to ease me with a prayer, but ground my teeth in despair.

Then I grew stupid, numb, and tired. A fever crept through all my veins,
And wearied out my heart, and fired my dazed, tumultuous, teeming brains.
I hung suspended by a breath, for weeks and months, 'twixt life and death.

Then I recovered, and had leave to go to England where she dwelt;
In my home climate to retrieve my broken health and strength. I felt
Twice ten years older than before. I knew I should come back no more.

Soon as I touched my native land, my feet turned toward the manor house.
They told me that Sir Hildebrand was in the Highlands, shooting grouse;
That she was in her father's care. That night I found her, sitting there,

On that third step, just where the trees cast down their greenest, coolest shade;
Her weary hands about her knees, her head against the balustrade;
And such dumb woe in her sweet eyes, uplifted to the fading skies.

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She did not see me till I burst through the rose-thickets round about.
She sprang up with a cry at first and then her arms were half stretched out
And then caught backward, for **his** sake. I felt as if my heart would break.

I knew the truth. I did not care. I did not think. I flung me down,
And kissed her hands, her wrists, her hair, the very fringes of her gown;
While she sat cowering in a heap, and moaned, and shook, but could not weep.

It was soon over. O good God, forgive me! I was sorely tried.
'Twas a dark pathway that I trod; I could not see Thee at my side.
It was soon over. "I shall die," she whispered, "if you stay here, Guy!

"O Guy! Guy! you were kind to me in our old days, be kinder now,
Be kind, and go, and let me be!" And then I felt on my hot brow
The brush of her cold finger-tips the last soft contact of her lips.

And I obeyed her will and went, and vowed to tempt her nevermore.
I tried hard, too, to be content, and think of that which lay before.
I knew my dream of love was past, yet strove to serve her to the last.

I left my comrades I had lost all taste for glory and for mirth
And, without hopes or aims, I cross'd the seas and wander'd o'er the earth.
Without a light, without a guide, I drifted with the wind and tide.

My heart was broken when 'twas struck that bitter blow, and joy ran out!
Only a few stray treasures stuck a few gleams flickered round about.
My old art-love still lingered there, I think that kept me from despair.

With strange companions did I dwell, one scorching summer, on the heights
Of Tangiers' Moorish citadel, and mused away the days and nights.
With loose white garments and long gun, I roamed the deserts in the sun.

I painted Atlas, capped with snow, and lifted, cool, and still, and fair,
Out of the burning heat and glow, into the solemn upper air;
And Tetuan's gleaming walls I drew on fields of Mediterranean blue.

I haunted Cairo's crowded ways, and sketched carved doors and gilded grates,
Mosque-domes and minarets ablaze, and sweet dark heads with shining plaits;
And now a grave old Arab sheikh, and then a slim, straight-featured Greek.

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In a swift wing-sailed boat I slid across the stream where Libya looms,
And from King Cheop's pyramid saw Pharaoh-cities, Pharaoh-tombs;
And, stretching off for many a mile, the sacred waters of the Nile.

I saw the graves of mighty states, I saw Thebes' temple, overturned
The City of the Hundred Gates, where Moses and Greek sages learned,
Where hungry lions prowl at noon, and hyænas snarl at the bright moon.

I roamed through Nubian desert flats, where vultures sailed o'er burning seas;
And forests where the yellow bats hung, cloaked and hooded, from the trees;
And marshy wastes, where crocodiles slept on the shores of sandy isles.

I followed, through long days and nights, where, with their little ones and flocks,
Had passed the wandering Israelites; I read the writing on the rocks;
And e'en these restless feet of mine tracked holy feet in Palestine.

Roaming through India's burning plains, I chased wild boars and antelopes;
Swam brawling nullahs in the rains, and haunted dew-wet mango-topes;
Shot bears and tigers in the gloom of the dense forests of Beerbhoom.

Through swathing-nets I watched at night the clear moon gild a palm-tree ledge;
And, through the flood of silver light, heard jackals at the compound-hedge;
While punkahs waved above my head, and faint airs hovered round my bed.

I mused by many a sacred tank, where lonely temples fell away,
Where the fat alligators drank, and scarlet lotus-flowers lay;
Smoked curling pipes 'neath roof and tree, the while dark nautch-girls danced to me.

I trod the creeper-netted ground of deadly, beautiful, bright woods,
Where birds and monkeys chattered round, and serpents reared their crimson hoods.
I dwelt 'neath breathless desert-glow, and Simla's Himalayan snows.

From the hot glades of garden reach, I wandered upward to Cabool
From the bright Hooghly's flowering beach to the wild mountains, calm and cool.
I wept at Cawnpore's fatal well, and where our heroes fought and fell.

I roamed through Lucknow's battered gate thick-thronged with memories so intense!
And Delhi's ruins of wild state and old Mogul magnificence.
I pressed the rank, blood-nurtured grass that creeps along the Khyber Pass.

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I sailed the Irrawaddy's stream, 'mid dense teak forests; saw the moon
Light up with broad and glittering gleam the golden Dagon of Rangoon
The delicate, fretted temple-shells, whose roofs were rimmed with swaying bells.

In his gold palace, all alone, with square, hard face and eyes aslant,
I saw upon his royal throne the Lord of the White Elephant.
I mixed in wild, barbaric feasts with Buddha's yellow-robèd priests.

I crept with curious feet within imperial China's sacred bounds;
I saw the Palace of Peking, and all its fairy garden-grounds;
The green rice-fields, the tremulous rills, the white azaleas on the hills;

The tea-groves climbing mountain backs; the girls' rich robes of blue and white;
The cattle 'neath the paddy-stacks; the gilt pagodas, tall and bright;
And in a merchant-junk I ran across the waters to Japan.

I saw, where silk-fringed mats were spread, within his laquered, bare saloon,
With his curled roofs above his head, on muffled heels, the great Tycoon.
Familiar things they were to me the pipes, and betel-nuts, and tea.

I dug in Californian ground, at Sacramento's golden brim,
With hunger, murder, all around, and fever shaking every limb;
Saw, in lush forests and rude sheds, the Dyaks roasting pirates' heads.

I shot white condors on the brows of snowy Andes; and I chased
Wild horses, and wild bulls and cows, o'er the wide Pampas' jungle-waste;
And saw, while wandering to and fro, the silver mines of Mexico.

In Caffre waggons I was drawn up lone Cape gorges, green and steep,
And camped by river-grove and lawn, where nightly tryst the wild things keep;
Where glaring eyes without the line of circling watch-fires used to shine.

I chased o'er sandy plains and shot the ostrich, at the reedy brink
Of pools, the lion, on the slot of antelopes that came to drink;
Giraffes, that held their heads aloof 'neath the mimosa's matted roof;

And brindled gnus, and cowardly, striped shard-wolves, and 'mid water-plants
And flags, black hippopotami, and snakes, and shrieking elephants.
From courted sickness, hunger, strife, God spared my weary, reckless life.

The Manor House and Other Poems

In the bright South Seas did I toss through wild blue nights and fainting days,
With the snow-plumaged albatross. I saw Tahiti's peaks ablaze;
And still, palm-fringed lagoons asleep o'er coral grottoes, cool and deep.

I built an Australian hut of logs, and lived alone with just a noose,
A trap, a gun, my horse and dogs; I hunted long-legged kangaroos;
And oft I spent the calm night-hours beneath the gum-trees' forest-bowers.

I threaded miles and miles and miles, where Lena's sad, slow waters flow,
'Mid silent rocks, and woods, and isles, and drear Siberian steppes of snow;
Where pines and larches, set alight, blaze in the dark and windless night.

I shot a wild fowl on the shore of a still, lonely mountain lake,
And, o'er the sheer white torrents' roar, heard long-drawn, plaintive echoes wake;
Caught squirrels in their leafy huts, munching the little cedar-nuts.

I trapped the small, soft sables, stripped the bloomy fur from off their backs,
And hunted grey wolves as they slipped and snuffed and snarled down reindeer tracks;
I brought the brown, bald eagle down from the white sea-hill's rugged crown.

I saw the oil-lamp shining through the small and dim ice window-pane;
And the near sky, so deeply blue, spangled with sparks, like golden rain;
While dogs lay tethered, left and right, howling across the arctic night.

I saw when, in my flying sledge, I swept the frozen tundra-slopes,
The white bears on some craggy ledge, far-off, where ocean blindly gropes
In her dim caves where bones lie furled, the tokens of a vanished world.

I saw across the dread blue sky, spanning blue ice and bluer mist
(That shows where open waters lie), the bright Aurora keep her tryst,
That arch of tinted flame so fair! lighting the crystals in the air.

Then, all at once I know not why I felt I could no longer roam;
A voice seemed calling to my heart Return to England and thy home;
I found my thoughts were yearning yet, for one more glimpse of Margaret.

So on a sudden I returned. I reached the village in the night.
At one small inn a candle burned with feeble, pale, unsteady light:
The hostess curtseyed, grave and strange. She did not know me for the change.

The Manor House and Other Poems

My broad white brows were bronzed, and scarred with lines of trouble, thought, and care;
My young bright eyes were dim and hard the sunshine was no longer there;
My brown moustache was hid away in a great beard of iron–grey.

"The Manor House is habited," to my brief question she replied.
"To–night my lady lies there dead. She's long been ailing, and she died
At noon. A happy thing for her! Were you acquainted with her, sir?"

"A sweeter lady never walked! So kind and good to all the poor!
She ne'er disdained us when she talked ne'er turned a beggar from her door.
Ah, sir, but we may look in vain; we ne'er shall see her likes again.

"I heard the squire's great bloodhound's bark; I woke, and shook, and held my breath.
My man, he stirred too in the dark. Said he to me, 'My lady's death
Is not far off. Another night she'll never see.' And he was right.

"'Twas over in twelve hours or less. She lies there, on the golden bed,
In her old confirmation dress, with the small white cap on her head
Which bore the bishop's blessing hand, she asked that of Sir Hildebrand."

You see that window in the shade of those old beeches? 'Twas that room
Wherein my dear dead love was laid. I climbed the ivy in the gloom
And silence just once more to see the face that **had** belonged to me.

I stood beside her. No one heard. On the great rajah's bed, alone
She lay. The night–breeze softly stirred the Cashmere curtains, and the moan
Of my wild kisses seemed to thrill the solitude. All else was still.

In the pale yellow taper light, I gazed upon her till the morn.
I see her now so sweet and white! the fair, pure face so trouble–worn!
The thin hands folded on her breast, in peace at last, and perfect rest!
* * * * *

A DREAM OF VENICE.

NUMB, half asleep, and dazed with whirl of wheels,
And gasp of steam, and measured clank of chains,
I heard a blithe voice break a sudden pause,
Ringing familiarly through the lamp–lit night,
"Wife, here's your Venice!" I was lifted down,
And gazed about in stupid wonderment,

A DREAM OF VENICE.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Holding my little Katie by the hand
My yellow-haired step-daughter. And again
Two strong arms led me to the water-brink,
And laid me on soft cushions in a boat,
A queer boat, by a queerer boatman manned
Swarthy-faced, ragged, with a scarlet cap
Whose wild, weird note smote shrilly through the dark.
Oh yes, it was my Venice! Beautiful,
With melancholy, ghostly beauty old,
And sorrowful, and weary yet so fair,
So like a queen still, with her royal robes,
Full of harmonious colour, rent and worn!
I only saw her shadow in the stream,
By flickering lamplight, only saw, as yet,
White, misty palace-portals here and there,
Pillars, and marble steps, and balconies,
Along the broad line of the Grand Canal;
And, in the smaller water-ways, a patch
Of wall, or dim bridge arching overhead.
But I could **feel** the rest. 'Twas Venice! ay,
The veritable Venice of my dreams.

I saw the grey dawn shimmer down the stream,
And all the city rise, new bathed in light,
With rose-red blooms on her decaying walls,
And gold tints quivering up her domes and spires
Sharp-drawn, with delicate pencillings, on a sky
Blue as forget-me-nots in June. I saw
The broad day staring in her palace-fronts,
Pointing to yawning gap and crumbling boss,
And colonnades, time-stained and broken, flecked
With soft, sad, dying colours sculpture-wreathed,
And gloriously proportioned; saw the glow
Light up her bright, harmonious, fountain'd squares,
And spread out on her marble steps, and pass
Down silent courts and secret passages,
Gathering up motley treasures on its way;
Groups of rich fruit from the Rialto mart,
Scarlet and brown and purple, with green leaves
Fragments of exquisite carving, lichen-grown,
Found, 'mid pathetic squalor, in some niche
Where wild, half-naked urchins lived and played
A bright robe, crowned with a pale, dark-eyed face
A red-striped awning 'gainst and old grey wall
A delicate opal gleam upon the tide.
I looked out from my window, and I saw
Venice, my Venice, naked in the sun
Sad, faded, and unutterably forlorn!
But still unutterably beautiful.

The Manor House and Other Poems

For days and days I wandered up and down
Holding my breath in awe and ecstasy,
Following my husband to familiar haunts,
Making acquaintance with his well-loved friends,
Whose faces I had only seen in dreams
And books and photographs and his careless talk.
For days and days with sunny hours of rest
And musing chat, in that cool room of ours,
Paved with white marble, on the Grand Canal;
For days and days with happy nights between,
Half-spent, while little Katie lay asleep
Out on the balcony, with the moon and stars.

O Venice, Venice! with thy water-streets
Thy gardens bathed in sunset, flushing red
Behind San Giorgio Maggiore's dome
Thy glimmering lines of haughty palaces
Shadowing fair arch and column in the stream
Thy most divine cathedral, and its square,
With vagabonds and loungers daily thronged,
Taking their ice, their coffee, and their ease
Thy sunny campo's, with their clamorous din,
Their shrieking vendors of fresh fish and fruit
Thy churches and thy pictures thy sweet bits
Of colour thy grand relics of the dead
Thy gondoliers and water-bearers girls
With dark, soft eyes, and creamy faces, crowned
With braided locks as bright and black as jet
Wild ragamuffins, picturesque in rags,
And swarming beggars and old witch-like crones,
And brown-cloaked contadini, hot and tired,
Sleeping, face-downward, on the sunny steps
Thy fairy islands floating in the sun
Thy poppy-sprinkled, grave-strewn Lido shore
Thy poetry and thy pathos all so strange!
Thou didst bring many a lump into my throat,
And many a passionate thrill into my heart,
And once a tangled dream into my head.

'Twi'xt afternoon and evening. I was tired;
The air was hot and golden not a breath
Of wind until the sunset hot and still.
Our floor was water-sprinkled; our thick walls
And open doors and windows, shadowed deep
With jalousies and awnings, made a cool
And grateful shadow for my little couch.
A subtle perfume stole about the room
From a small table, piled with purple grapes,

A DREAM OF VENICE.

The Manor House and Other Poems

And water—melon slices, pink and wet,
And ripe, sweet figs, and golden apricots,
New—laid on green leaves from our garden leaves
Wherewith an antique torso had been clothed.
My husband read his novel on the floor,
Propped up on cushions and an Indian shawl;
And little Katie slumbered at his feet,
Her yellow curls alight, and delicate tints
Of colour in the white folds of her frock.
I lay, and mused, in comfort and at ease,
Watching them both and playing with my thoughts;
And then I fell into a long, deep sleep,
And dreamed. I saw a water—wilderness
Islands entangled in a net of streams
Cross—threads of rippling channels, woven through
Bare sands, and shallows glimmering blue and broad
A line of white sea—breakers far away.
There came a smoke and crying from the land
Ruin was there, and ashes, and the blood
Of conquered cities, trampled down to death.
But here, methought, amid these lonely gulfs,
There rose up towers and bulwarks, fair and strong,
Lapped in the silver sea—mists; waxing aye
Fairer and stronger till they seemed to mock
The broad—based kingdoms on the mainland shore.
I saw a great fleet sailing in the sun,
Sailing anear the sand—slip, whereon broke
The long white wave—crests of the outer sea,
Pepin of Lombardy, with his warrior hosts
Following the bloody steps of Attila!
I saw the smoke rise when he touched the towns
That lay, outposted, in his ravenous reach;
Then, in their island of deep waters, saw
A gallant band defy him to his face,
And drive him out, with his fair vessels wrecked
And charred with flames, into the sea again.
"Ah, this is Venice!" I said proudly "queen
Whose haughty spirit none shall subjugate."

It was the night. The great stars hung, like globes
Of gold, in purple skies, and cast their light
In palpitating ripples down the flood
That washed and gurgled through the silent streets
White—bordered now with marble palaces.
It was the night. I saw a grey—haired man,
Sitting alone in a dark convent—porch
In beggar's garments, with a kingly face,
And eyes that watched for dawnlight anxiously
A weary man, who could not rest nor sleep.
I heard him muttering prayers beneath his breath,

A DREAM OF VENICE.

The Manor House and Other Poems

And once a malediction while the air
Hummed with the soft, low psalm—chants from within.
And then, as grey gleams yellowed in the east,
I saw him bend his venerable head,
Creep to the door, and knock. Again I saw
The long—drawn billows breaking on the land,
And galleys rocking in the summer noon.
The old man, richly retinued, and clad
In princely robes, stood there, and spread his arms,
And cried, to one low—kneeling at his feet,
"Take thou my blessing with thee, O my son!
And let this sword, wherewith I gird thee, smite
The impious tyrant—king, who hath defied,
Dethroned, and exiled him who is as Christ.
The Lord be good to thee, my son, my son,
For thy most righteous dealing!" And again
'Twas that long slip of land betwixt the sea
And still lagoons of Venice curling waves
Flinging light, foamy spray upon the sand.
The noon was past, and rose—red shadows fell
Across the waters. Lo! the galleys came
To anchorage again and lo! the Duke
Yet once more bent his noble head to earth,
And laid a victory at the old man's feet,
Praying a blessing with exulting heart.
"This day, my well—belovèd, thou art blessed,
And Venice with thee, for St. Peter's sake.
And I will give thee, for thy bride and queen,
The sea which thou has conquered. Take this ring,
As sign of her subjection, and thy right
To be her lord for ever." Once again
I saw that old man, in the vestibule
Of St. Mark's fair cathedral, circled round
With cardinals and priests, ambassadors
And the noblesse of Venice richly robed
In papal vestments, with the triple crown
Gleaming upon his brows. There was a hush:
I saw a glittering train come sweeping on,
From the blue water and across the square,
Thronged with an eager multitude, the Duke,
And with him Barbarossa, humbled now,
And fain to pray for pardon. With bare heads,
They reached the church, and paused. The Emperor knelt,
Casting away his purple mantle knelt,
And crept along the pavement, as to kiss
Those feet, which had been weary twenty years
With his own persecutions. And the Pope
Lifted his white haired, crowned, majestic head,
And trod upon his neck, crying out to Christ,
"Upon the lion and adder shalt thou go
The dragon shalt thou tread beneath thy feet!"

A DREAM OF VENICE.

The Manor House and Other Poems

The vision changed. Sweet incense—clouds rose up
From the cathedral altar, mix'd with hymns
And solemn chantings, o'er ten thousand heads;
And ebb'd and died away along the aisles.
I saw a train of nobles knights of France
Pass 'neath the glorious arches through the crowd,
And stand, with halo of soft, coloured light
On their fair brows the while their leader's voice
Rang through the throbbing silence like a bell.
"Signiors, we come to Venice, by the will
Of the most high and puissant lords of France,
To pray you look with your compassionate eyes
Upon the Holy City of our Christ
Wherein He lived, and suffered, and was lain
Asleep, to wake in glory, for our sakes
By Paynim dogs dishonoured and defiled!
Signiors, we come to you, for you are strong.
The seas which lie betwixt that land and this
Obey you. O have pity! See, we kneel
Our Masters bid us kneel and bid us stay
Here at your feet until you grant our prayers!"
Wherewith the knights fell down upon their knees,
And lifted up their supplicating hands.
Lo! the ten thousand people rose as one,
And shouted with a shout that shook the domes
And gleaming roofs above them echoing down,
Through marble pavements, to the shrine below,
Where lay the miraculous body of their Saint
(Shed he not heavenly radiance as he heard?
Perfuming the damp air of his secret crypt),
And cried, with an exceeding mighty cry,
"We do consent! We will be pitiful!"
The thunder of their voices reached the sea,
And thrilled through all the netted water—veins
Of their rich city. Silence fell anon,
Slowly, with fluttering wings, upon the crowd;
And then a veil of darkness. And again
The filtered sunlight streamed upon those walls,
Marbled and sculptured with divinest grace;
Again I saw a multitude of heads,
Soft-wreathed with cloudy incense, bent in prayer
The heads of haughty barons, armèd knights
And pilgrims girded with their staff and scrip,
The warriors of the Holy Sepulchre.
The music died away along the roof;
The hush was broken not by him of France
By Enrico Dandolo, whose grey head
Venice had circled with the ducal crown.
The old man looked down, with his dim, wise eyes,
Stretching his hands abroad, and spake. "Seigneurs,
My children, see your vessels lie in port

The Manor House and Other Poems

Freighted for battle. And you, standing here,
Wait but the first fair wind. The bravest hosts
Are with you, and the noblest enterprise
Conceived of man. Behold, I am grey-haired,
And old and feeble. Yet am I your lord.
And, if it be your pleasure, I will trust
My ducal seat in Venice to my son,
And be your guide and leader." When they heard,
They cried aloud, "In God's name, go with us!"
And the old man, with holy weeping, passed
Adown the tribune to the altar-steps;
And, kneeling, fixed the cross upon his cap.
A ray of sudden sunshine lit his face
The grand, grey, furrowed face and lit the cross,
Until it twinkled like a cross of fire.
"We shall be safe with**him**," the people said,
Straining their wet, bright eyes; "and we shall reap
Harvests of glory from our battle-fields!"

Anon there rose a vapour from the sea
A dim white mist, that thickened into fog.
The campanile and columns were blurred out,
Cathedral domes and spires, and colonnades
Of marble palaces on the Grand Canal.
Joy-bells rang sadly and softly far away;
Banners of welcome waved like wind-blown clouds;
Glad shouts were muffled into mournful wails.
A Doge was come to be enthroned and crowned,
Not in the great Bucentaur not in pomp;
The water-ways had wandered in the mist,
And he had tracked them, slowly, painfully,
From San Clemente to Venice, in a frail
And humble gondola. A Doge was come;
But he, alas! had missed his landing-place,
And set his foot upon the blood-stained stones
Betwixt the blood-red columns. Ah, the sea
The bride, the queen she was the first to turn
Against her passionate, proud, ill-fated lord!

Slowly the sea-fog melted, and I saw
Long, limp dead bodies dangling in the sun.
Two granite pillars towered on either side,
And broad blue waters glittered at their feet.
"These are the traitors," said the people; "they
Who, with our Lord the Duke, would overthrow
The government of Venice." And anon,
The doors about the palace were made fast.
A great crowd gathered round them, with hushed breath
And throbbing pulses. And I knew their lord,

A DREAM OF VENICE.

The Manor House and Other Poems

The Duke Faliero, knelt upon his knees,
On the broad landing of the marble stairs
Where he had sworn the oath he could not keep
Vexed with the tyrannous oligarchic rule
That held his haughty spirit netted in,
And cut so keenly that he writhed and chafed
Until he burst the meshes could not keep!
I watched and waited, feeling sick at heart;
And then I saw a figure, robed in black
One of their dark, ubiquitous, supreme
And fearful tribunal of Ten come forth,
And hold a dripping sword-blade in the air.
"Justice has fallen on the traitor! See,
His blood has paid the forfeit of his crime!"
And all the people, hearing, murmured deep,
Cursing their dead lord, and the council, too,
Whose swift, sure, heavy hand had dealt his death.

Then came the night, all grey and still and sad.
I saw a few red torches flare and flame
Over a little gondola, where lay
The headless body of the traitor Duke,
Stripped of his ducal vestments. Floating down
The quiet waters, it passed out of sight,
Bearing him to unhonoured burial.
And then came mist and darkness. Lo! I heard
The shrill clang of alarm-bells, and the wails
Of men and women in the wakened streets.
A thousand torches flickered up and down,
Lighting their ghastly faces and bare heads;
The while they crowded to the open doors
Of all the churches to confess their sins,
To pray for absolution, and a last
Lord's Supper their viaticum, whose death
Seemed near at hand ay, nearer than the dawn.
"Chioggia is fall'n!" they cried,"and we are lost!"

Anon I saw them hurrying to and fro,
With eager eyes and hearts and blither feet
Grave priests, with warlike weapons in their hands,
And delicate women, with their ornaments
Of gold and jewels for the public fund
Mix'd with the bearded crowd, whose lives were given,
With all they had, to Venice in her need.
No more I heard the wailing of despair,
But great Pisani's blithe word of command,
The dip of oars, and creak of beams and chains,
And ring of hammers in the arsenal.
"Venice shall ne'er be lost!" her people cried

A DREAM OF VENICE.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Whose names were worthy of the Golden Book
"Venice shall ne'er be conquered!" And anon
I saw a scene of triumph saw the Doge,
In his Bucentaur, sailing to the land
Chioggia behind him blackened in the smoke,
Venice before, all banners, bells, and shouts
Of passionate rejoicing! Ten long months
Had Genoa waged that war of life and death;
And now behold the remnant of her host,
Shrunken and hollow-eyed and bound with chains
Trailing their galleys in the conqueror's wake!

Once more the tremulous waters, flaked with light;
A covered vessel, with an armèd guard
A yelling mob on fair San Giorgio's isle,
And ominous whisperings in the city squares.
Carrara's noble head bowed down at last,
Beaten by many storms, his golden spurs
Caught in the meshes of a hidden snare!
"O Venice!" I cried, "where is thy great heart
And honourable soul?" And yet once more
I saw her the gay Sybaris of the world
The rich voluptuous city sunk in sloth.
I heard Napoleon's cannon at her gates,
And her degenerate nobles cry for fear.
I saw at last the great Republic fall
Conquered by her own sickness, and with scarce
A noticeable wound I saw her fall!
And she had stood above a thousand years!
O Carlo Zeno! O Pisani! Sure
Ye turned and groaned for pity in your graves.
I saw the flames devour her Golden Book
Beneath the rootless "Tree of Liberty;"
I saw the Lion's legend blotted out,
For "rights of men" unutterable wrongs!
Dandolo's brazen horses borne away
The venerable Bucentaur, with its wealth
Of glorious recollections, broken up.
I heard the riotous clamour; then the change
To passionate minor cadence then the sad
And hopeless silence settle down; and then
I woke. The flickering water-gleam was gone
From off the ceiling, and white snows of light
Fell softly on the marble walls and floors,
And on the yellow head of little Kate
Musingly bent down from the balcony.
The lapping of the tide the dip of oars
The sad, sweet songs, and sadder city bells,
Mellowly borne along the water-streets:
The swirl and ripple around lumbering keels

A DREAM OF VENICE.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Of heavy, slow, Rialto market-boats,
Adown the broad and misty highway, lit
With moonbeams and the far-strown light of lamps,
Following the track of vanished gondolas:
The flutter of a fig-leaf in the wind,
A faded fig-leaf, flapping faded walls,
With faded, crumbling, delicate sculpture-crusts:
The voice of dreaming Katie crooning out
A snatch of melody that the Austrian band
Played in San Marco's Place some hours ago,
While patriots, 'neath their shadowy colonnades,
Sauntered, and shut their ears, and ate their hearts:
A measured footstep, pacing to and fro
The brush of two strong hands upon my brows
The tenor-music of dear English lips,
Whispering, between two kisses, cheerily,
"Wake up, my wife; Nina has brought our tea:"
These were the sounds that called me back to life.

Rialto (Rivo alto)

THE HANDS THAT HANG DOWN.

O LORD, I am so tired!
My heart is sick and sore.
I work, and work, and do no good
And I can try no more!

I lay my treasures up,
And think they're worth such care;
And the next time I go to look,
There's only rubbish there!

I tug hard at the door
Of knowledge strain and pant;
But, Lord, the more I seem to learn,
The more I'm ignorant!

Sometimes I am so vain
I set myself to teach;
But e'en the first beginnings lie
Utterly out of reach!

I am no use no use!
I thought I might have been;

A DREAM OF VENICE.

The Manor House and Other Poems

But now I know how small I am,
How poor, how false, how mean!

Sunk in the dust and mire
While aiming at the skies,
Only a thing to laugh at, Lord,
To pity and despise!

LEARN.

LEARN, learn, learn,
Our beautiful world is not a field for sheep;
Not just a place wherein to laugh and weep,
To eat and drink, to dance and sigh and sleep.
And then to moulder into senseless dust.

Learn, learn, learn,
Look up and learn you cannot look too high!
Not for the earthly wealth which brains can buy,
Not for the sake of gold and luxury
Treasures corrupted by the moth and rust.

Learn, learn, learn,
As one in whom the Lord has breathed His breath,
And aye redeemed from the power of death
Not as the dumb brute-beast that perisheth,
Not as a soulless, thoughtless, thankless clod.

Learn, learn, learn,
With love and awe and patience not in haste;
Drink deeply, do not pass by with a taste;
O make your land a garden, not a waste!
Your mind bright, to reflect the face of God.

Learn, learn, learn,
The mystic beauty and the truth of life;
Search out the treasures whereof earth is rife.
Search on all sides, with pain and prayer and strife;
Search even into darkness. Do not fear.

Learn, learn, learn,
With a true, steadfast heart, lay up your hoard;
God will sort out the treasures you have stored,

LEARN.

The Manor House and Other Poems

And set them in His bright light, afterward.
He will make all your difficulties clear.

Learn, learn, learn,
Death is no breaking at a certain place;
We only pause there for a little space.
And then you would not shame Him to His face?
You, in His Image and own Likeness made!

Learn, learn, learn,
Walk with wide-open eyes and reverent heart.
Worship as God the beautiful in art.
Though you see now but dimly, and in part,
All shall be clear in time. Be not afraid.

DAWNLIGHT ON THE SEA.

WHEN I kneel down the dawn is only breaking;
Sleep fetters still the brown wings of the lark;
The wind blows pure and cool, for day is waking,
But stars are scattered still about the dark.

With open lattice, looking out and praying,
Ere yet the toil and trouble must be faced,
I see a silvery glimmer straying, straying,
To where the faint grey sky-line can be traced:

I see it slowly deepen, broaden, brighten,
With soft snow-fringes sweeping to the land;
The sheeny distance clear, and gleam, and whiten;
The cool cliff-shadows sharpen on the sand.

Some other sea the sunlight is adorning,
But mine is fair 'neath waning stars and moon.
O friendly face! O smile that comes at morning,
To shine through all the frowns that come at noon!

A beautiful wet opal pale tints filling
A thousand shifting shallows day at length.
The sweet, salt breeze, like richest wine, is thrilling
My drowsy heart and brain with life and strength.

The Manor House and Other Poems

I hear the voice of waters strong waves dashing
Their white crests on the brown weed—sprinkled sod;
I hear the soft, continuous, measured plashing
The pulse that vibrates from the heart of God,

The long wash of the tide upon the shingle,
The rippling ebb of breakers on the shore,
Wherewith my prayers are fain to blend and mingle
Whereto I set my dreams for evermore.

I hear the lap and swirl, I hear the thunder
In the dark grotto where the children play,
Where walls to keep the sea and cave asunder,
And frail shell towers, were reared but yesterday.

The flood has filled my soul, and it is sweeping
My foolish stones and pebbles out to sea,
And floating in strange riches for my keeping,
O friend! O God! I owe my best to Thee.

The best of every day, its peace and beauty,
From Thy mysterious treasure—house is drawn;
Thou teachest me the grace of life and duty,
When we two walk together in the dawn.

EMPTY.

CAN this be my poem? this poor fragment
Of bald thought in meanest language dressed!
Can this string of rhymes be my sweep poem?
All its poetry wholly unexpressed!

Does it tell me of the dreams that wandered,
In the silent night—time, through my brain?
Of the woven web of wondrous fancies,
Half of keenest joy and half of pain?

Does it tell me of the awful beauty
That came down to hide this sordid earth?
Does it tell me of the inward crying?
Of the glory whence it had its birth?

EMPTY.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Only as the lamp, all dull and rusted,
Tells me of the flame that is put out,
Of the shiny hair and happy faces
Lighted, when its radiance streamed about?

Only as this piece of glass, now lying
In the shade beside me, as I sit,
Tells me of the soft hues of the rainbow,
That the morning sunshine gave to it!

Only as this little flask, now smelling
Of the dust and mould with which 'tis lined,
Tells me of the lovely subtle fragrance
Of the perfume that it once enshrined!

Only as a picture, blurred and faded,
Tells me of the bloom of colour there,
When the painter's soul was with his canvas,
And his paint was bright, and fresh, and fair!

Only as the wires and keys notes broken,
Odd and scattered tell me of a strain
That once filled my very soul with rapture,
But can never be spelled out again!

Only as a bare brown flower–stalk tells me
Of the delicate blossom that it wore;
Of the humming bees in silken petals,
And the downy butterflies it bore!

Only as a crazy boat, sun–blistered,
Drawn up high and dry upon the sands,
Tells me of the blue and buoyant billows
Bearing breezy sails to foreign lands!

Only as a little dead lark, lying
With bedraggled wings and withered throat,
Tells me of the songs it heard in heaven
Trying to teach me, here and there, a note!

Oh no! oh no! this is not my treasure
This is but the shell where it has lain;
It is gone the life, and light, and glory,

EMPTY.

And 'twill never come to me again!

THE SEASON.

AND must I wear a silken life,
Hemmed in by city walls?
And must I give my garden up
For theatres and balls?

Nay, though the cage be made of gold,
'Tis better to be free;
The green of the green meadows, love,
Is quite enough for me.

I'd rather ramble through the lanes
Than drive about in town;
I'd rather muse or dream than dance,
When the stars are shining down.

I do not care for diamonds, dear,
But I care a deal for flowers;
And thousands are just creeping out
For the sunshine and the showers.

I like to hear the Household band,
But I love the bird-songs best;
And hark! how they are twittering now
Round each half-hidden nest!

The wind is whispering in the leaves,
And the downy bees begin
To hum in the blossoming sycamores,
And the brook is chiming in.

There is such melody in the woods,
Such music in the air!
The streets are full of life and sound,
And yet 'tis silent there.

I like to see the pictures ay,
But I am hard to please!
I never saw a picture yet

The Manor House and Other Poems

As great and grand as these;

Such tones of colour as transform
The tender green and brown,
When the pink dawn is flushing up,
Or the red sun sinking down;

Such painting as the chestnut bud
Shows in its opening heart;
Such lights as shine 'twixt earth and sky
When rain—clouds break apart;

Such soft, warm, subtle tints, as lie
In every mossy patch
On the blue—brown trunks, now filled with life,
And the humble roof of thatch,

In the purple hollows of the hills,
In the lichen on the wall,
In the orchard and the feathery woods,
And the sun—lit waterfall.

I like my humble country ways,
My simple, early meals;
I like to potter about the yard,
With my chickens at my heels.

I'd rather climb this brambly steep,
Where freshest sea—winds blow,
With my old straw hat hanging down my back.
Than canter along the Row.

To me (it's vulgar, dear, I know)
No fête is half so gay
As a cricket—match on the village green,
Or a picnic in the hay.

Ah, yes! I'm happier as I am,
I'm ignorant, you see;
And the life of fashion that you love
Would never do for me.

"THIS ENLIGHTENED AGE."

A Meditation in the British Museum.

I SAY it to myself in meekest awe
Of Progress, electricity and steam,
Of this almighty age this liberal age,
That has no time to breathe, or think, or dream,

I ask it of myself, with bated breath,
Casting a furtive glance about the hall,
Our fathers, were their times so **very** dark?
Were they benighted heathens after all?

Had they not their Galileo Newton too
And men as great, though not a Stephenson?
Had they not passable scholars in fair Greece,
Who traced the paths we deign to walk upon

Had they not poets in those dismal days
Homer and Shakespeare, and a few between?
Had they not rulers in their barbarous states,
Who scattered laws for our wise hands to glean?

Had they not painters, who knew how to paint
Raphael, to take an instance well as we,
With near four hundred years of light the less?
Is Phidias matched in our great century?

And architects? Sure Egypt, and old Rome,
And ruined Athens tell of fair reposes!
The Pyramids, and temples of the Greeks,
May vie with our town-halls and institutes.

Their marble Venice, with her dappled tints,
Their grey old minsters, strong as chiselled rocks,
Their Tyrolean castles, lifted high,
May outlast all our brick-and-mortar blocks.

And were there not refinements in those days,

The Manor House and Other Poems

And elegant luxuries of domestic life?
I read the answer in the precious things
Whereof these clustering cabinets are rife.

What can we show so beautiful in art?
What new of ours can match their wondrous old?
This fragile porcelain this Venetian glass
This delicate necklace of Etruscan gold.

And was there not religion when the Church
Was one a common mother loved and feared?
When haughty souls rejoiced to bear her yoke?
When all those grand monastic piles were reared?

And were there not some preachers Chrysostoms,
Whose golden words still linger, like a chime
Of falling echoes in lone alpine glens,
Amongst the sonorous voices of our time?

And soldiers heroes? Do we shame them much?
Have men more courage than in days of yore?
Are they more jealous for their manhood now?
Do they respect and honour women more?

Are they more noble than those good old knights,
Who scorned to strike a foe save in the face
Who reckoned gold as dross to gallant deeds,
And counted death far happier than disgrace?

Is life more grand with us, who bask at ease,
And count that only excellent which pays,
Than 'twas to the stout hearts that wore the steel
In those dark, turbulent, fearless, fighting days?

* * * * *

O nineteenth century! God has given you light;
The morning has been spreading that is all.
O liberal age! stoop your conceited head,
And gather up the crumbs that they let fall.

* * * * *

A STORY AT DUSK

AN evening all aglow with summer light
And autumn colour fairest of the year.

The wheat-fields, crowned with shocks of tawny gold,
All interspersed with rough sowthistle roots,
And interlaced with white convolvulus,
Lay, flecked with purple shadows, in the sun.
The shouts of little children, gleaning there
The scattered ears and wild blue-bottle flowers
Mixed with the corn-crake's crying, and the song
Of lone wood birds whose mother-cares were o'er,
And with the whispering rustle of red leaves
Scarce stirred the stillness. And the gossamer sheen
Was spread on upland meadows, silver bright
In low red sunshine and soft kissing wind
Showing where angels in the night had trailed
Their garments on the turf. Tall arrow-heads,
With flag and rush and fringing grasses, dropped
Their seeds and blossoms in the sleepy pool.
The water-lily lay on her green leaf,
White, fair, and stately; while an amorous branch
Of silver willow, drooping in the stream,
Sent soft, low-babbling ripples towards her:
And oh, the woods! erst haunted with the song
Of nightingales and tender coo of doves
They stood all flushed and kindling 'neath the touch
Of death kind death! fair, fond, reluctant death!
A dappled mass of glory! Harvest-time;
With russet wood-fruit thick upon the ground,
'Mid crumpled ferns and delicate blue harebells.
The orchard-apples rolled in seedy grass
Apples of gold, and violet-velvet plums;
And all the tangled hedgerows bore a crop
Of scarlet hips, blue sloes, and blackberries,
And orange clusters of the mountain ash.
The crimson fungus and soft mosses clung
To old decaying trunks; the summer bine
Drooped, shivering, in the glossy ivy's grasp.
By day the blue air bore upon its wings
Wide-wandering seeds, pale drifts of thistle-down;
By night the fog crept low upon the earth,
All white and cool, and calmed its feverishness.
And veiled it over with a veil of tears.
The curlew and the plover were come back
To still, bleak shores; the little summer birds
Were gone to Persian gardens, and the groves

The Manor House and Other Poems

Of Greece and Italy, and the palmy lands.

A Norman tower, with moss and lichen clothed,
Wherein old bells, on old worm-eaten frames
And rusty wheels, had swung for centuries,
Chiming the same soft chime the lullaby
Of cradled rooks and blinking bats and owls;
Setting the same sweet tune, from year to year,
For generations of true hearts to sing.
A wide churchyard, with grassy slopes and nooks,
And shady corners and meandering paths;
With glimpses of dim windows and grey walls
Just caught at here and there amongst the green
Of flowering shrubs and sweet lime-avenues.
An old house standing near a parsonage-house
With broad thatched roof and overhanging eaves,
O'er run with banksia roses, a low house,
With ivied windows and a latticed porch,
Shut in a tiny Paradise, all sweet
With hum of bees and scent of mignonette.

We lay our lazy length upon the grass
In that same Paradise, my friend and I.
And, as we lay, we talked of college days
Wild, racing, hunting, steeple-chasing days;
Of river reaches, fishing-grounds, and weirs,
Bats, gloves, debates, and in-humanities:
And then of boon-companions of those days,
How lost and scattered, married, changed, and dead;
Until he flung his arm across his face,
And feigned to slumber. He was changed, my friend;
Not like the man the leader of his set
The favourite of the college that I knew.
And more than time had changed him. He had been
"A little wild," the Lady Alice said;
"A little gay, as all young men will be
At first, before they settle down to life
While they have money, health, and no restraint,
Nor any work to do." Ah, yes! But this
Was mystery unexplained that he was sad
And still and thoughtful, like an aged man;
And scarcely thirty. With a winsome flash,
The old bright heart would shine out here and there;
But aye to be o'er shadowed and hushed down,
As he had hushed it now. His dog lay near,
With long, sharp muzzle resting on his paws,
And wistful eyes, half shut, but watching him;
A deerhound of illustrious race, all grey
And grizzled, with soft, wrinkled, velvet ears;

The Manor House and Other Poems

A gaunt, gigantic, wolfish-looking brute,
And worth his weight in gold. "There, there," said he,
And raised him on his elbow, "you have looked
Enough at me; now look at some one else."

"You could not see him, surely, with your arm
Across your face?" "No, but I felt his eyes;
They are such sharp, wise eyes persistent eyes
Perpetually reproachful. Look at them;
Had ever dog such eyes?" "Oh yes," I thought;
But, wondering, turned my talk upon his breed.
And was he of the famed Glengarry stock?
And in what season was he entered? Where,
Pray, did he pick him up? He moved himself
At that last question, with a little writhe
Of sudden pain or restlessness; and sighed.
And then he slowly rose, pushed back the hair
From his broad brows; and, whistling softly, said,
"Come here, old dog, and we will tell him. Come."

"On such a day, and such a time, as this,
Old Tom and I were stalking on the hills,
Near seven years ago. Bad luck was ours;
For we had searched up corrie, glen, and burn,
From earliest daybreak wading to the waist
Peat-rift and purple heather all in vain!
We struck a track nigh every hour, to lose
A noble quarry by ignoble chance
The crowing of a grouse-cock, or the flight
Of startled mallards from a reedy pool,
Or subtle, hair's breadth veering of the wind.
And now 'twas waning sunset rosy soft
On far grey peaks, and the green valley spread
Beneath us. We had climbed a ridge, and lay
Debating in low whispers of our plans
For night and morning. Golden eagles sailed
Above our heads; the wild ducks swam about
Amid the reeds and rushes of the pools;
A lonely heron stood on one long leg
In shallow water, watching for a meal;
And there, to windward, couching in the grass
That fringed the blue edge of a sleeping loch
Waiting for dusk to feed and drink there lay
A herd of deer. "And as we looked and planned,
A mountain storm of sweeping mist and rain
Came down upon us. It passed by, and left
The burnies swollen that we had to cross;
And left us barely light enough to see
The broad, black, branching antlers, clustering still

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Amid the long grass in the valley. "Sir,"
Said Tom, 'there is a shealing down below,
To leeward. We might bivouac there to-night,
And come again at dawn.' "And so we crept
Adown the glen, and stumbled in the dark
Against the doorway of the keeper's home,
And over two big deerhounds ancestors
Of this our old companion. There was light
And warmth, a welcome and a heather bed,
At Colin's cottage; with a meal of eggs
And fresh trout, broiled by dainty little hands,
And sweetest milk and oatcake. There were songs
And Gaelic legends, and long talk of deer
Mixt with a sweet, low laughter, and the whir
Of spinning-wheel. "The dogs lay at her feet
The feet of Colin's daughter with their soft
Dark velvet ears pricked up for every sound
And movement that she made. Right royal brutes,
Whereon I gazed with envy. "What,' I asked,
'Would Colin take for these?' "Eh, sir,' said he,
And shook his head, 'I cannot sell the dogs.
They're priceless, they, and Jeanie's favourites.
But there's a litter in the shed five pups,
As like as peas to this one. You may choose
Amongst them, sir take any that you like.
Get us the lantern, Jeanie. You shall show
The gentleman.' "Ah, she was fair, that girl!
Not like the other lassies cottage folk;
For there was subtle trace of gentle blood
Through all her beauty and in all her ways.
(The mother's race was 'poor and proud,' they said).
Ay, she was fair, my darling! with her shy,
Brown, innocent face and delicate-shapen limbs.
She had the tenderest mouth you ever saw,
And grey, dark eyes, and broad, straight-pencill'd brows;
Dark hair, sun-dappled with a sheeny gold;
Dark chestnut braids that knotted up the light,
As soft as satin. You could scarcely hear
Her step, or hear the rustling of her gown,
Or the soft hovering motion of her hands
At household work. She seemed to bring a spell
Of tender calm and silence where she came.
You **felt** her presence and not by its stir,
But by its restfulness. She was a sight
To be remembered standing in the straw;
A sleepy pup soft-cradled in her arms
Like any Christian baby; standing still,
The while I handled his ungainly limbs.
And Colin blustered of the sport of hounds,
Roe ptarmigan, and trout, and ducal deer
Ne'er lifting up that sweet, unconscious face,

The Manor House and Other Poems

To see why I was silent. Oh, I would
You could have seen her then. She was so fair,
And oh, so young! scarce seventeen at most
So ignorant and so young! "Tell them, my friend
Your flock the restless-hearted they who scorn
The ordered fashion fitted to our race,
And scoff at laws they may not understand
Tell them that they are fools. They cannot mate
With other than their kind, but woe will come
In some shape mostly shame, but always grief
And disappointment. Ah, my love! my love!
But she was different from the common sort;
A peasant, ignorant, simple, undefiled;
The child of rugged peasant-parents, taught
In all their thoughts and ways; yet with that touch
Of tender grace about her, softening all
The rougher evidence of her lowly state
That undefined, unconscious dignity
That delicate instinct for the reading right
The riddles of less simple minds than hers
That sharper, finer, subtler sense of life
That something which does not possess a name,
Which made her beauty beautiful to me
The long-lost legacy of forgotten knights.

"I chose amongst the five fat creeping things
This rare old dog. And Jeanie promised kind
And gentle nurture for its infant days;
And promised she would keep it till I came
Another year. And so we went to rest.
And in the morning, ere the sun was up,
We left our rifles, and went out to run
The browsing red-deer with old Colin's hounds.
Through glen and bog, through brawling mountain streams,
Grey, lichened boulders, furze, and juniper,
And purple wilderness of moor, we toiled,
Ere yet the distant snow-peak was alight.
We chased a hart to water; saw him stand
At bay, with sweeping antlers, in the burn.
His large, wild, wistful eyes despairingly
Turned to the deeper eddies; and we saw
The choking struggle and the bitter end,
And cut his gallant throat upon the grass,
And left him. Then we followed a fresh track
A dozen tracks and hunted till the noon;
Shot cormorants and wild cats in the cliffs,
And snipe and blackcock on the ferny hills;
And set our floating night-lines at the loch;
And then came back to Jeanie. "Well, you know
What follows such commencement: how I found

The Manor House and Other Poems

The woods and corries round about her home
Fruitful of roe and red-deer; how I found
The grouse lay thickest on adjacent moors;
Discovered ptarmigan on rocky peaks,
And rare small game on birch-besprinkled hills,
O'ershadowing that rude shealing; how the pools
Were full of wild-fowl, and the loch of trout;
How vermin harboured in the underwood,
And rocks, and reedy marshes; how I found
The sport aye best in this charmed neighbourhood.
And then I e'en must wander to the door,
To leave a bird for Colin, or to ask
A lodging for some stormy night, or see
How fared my infant deerhound. "And I saw
The creeping dawn unfolding; saw the doubt,
And faith, and longing swaying her sweet heart;
And every flow just distancing the ebb.
I saw her try to bar the golden gates
Whence love demanded egress, calm her eyes,
And still the tender, sensitive, tell-tale lips,
And steal away to corners; saw her face
Grow graver and more wistful, day by day;
And felt the gradual strengthening of my hold.
I did not stay to think of it to ask
What I was doing! "In the early time,
She used to slip away to household work
When I was there, and would not talk to me;
But when I came not, she would climb the glen
In secret, and look out, with shaded brow,
Across the valley. Ay, I caught her once
Like some young helpless doe, amongst the fern
I caught her, and I kissed her mouth and eyes;
And with those kisses signed and sealed our fate
For evermore. Then came our happy days
The bright, brief, shining days without a cloud!
In ferny hollows and deep, rustling woods,
That shut us in and shut out all the world
The far, forgotten world we met, and kissed,
And parted, silent, in the balmy dusk.
We haunted still roe-coverts, hand in hand,
And murmured, under our breath, of love and faith,
And swore great oaths for one of us to keep.
We sat for hours, with sealèd lips, and heard
The sweet wind whispering as it passed us by
And heard our own hearts' music in the hush.
Ah, blessed days! ah, happy, innocent days!
I would I had them back. "Then came the Duke,
And Lady Alice, with her worldly grace
And artificial beauty with the gleam
Of jewels, and the dainty shine of silk,
And perfumed softness of white lace and lawn;

The Manor House and Other Poems

With all the glamour of her courtly ways,
Her talk of art and fashion, and the world
We both belonged to. Ah, she hardened me!
I lost the sweetness of the heathery moors
And hills and quiet woodlands, in that scent
Of London clubs and royal drawing-rooms;
I lost the tender chivalry of my love,
The keen sense of its sacredness, the clear
Perception of mine honour, by degrees,
Brought face to face with customs of my kind.
I was no more a "man;" nor she, my love,
A delicate lily of womanhood ah, no!
I was the heir of an illustrious house,
And she a simple homespun cottage-girl.
"And now I stole at rarer intervals
To those dim trysting woods; and when I came
I brought my cunning worldly wisdom talked
Of empty forms and marriages in heaven
To stain that simple soul, God pardon me!
And she would shiver in the stillness, scared
And shocked, with her pathetic eyes aye proof
Against the fatal, false philosophy.
But my will was the strongest, and my love
The weakest; and she knew it. "Well, well, well,
I need not talk of that. There came the day
Of our last parting in the ferny glen
A bitter parting, parting from my life,
Its light and peace for ever! And I turned
To balls and billiards, politics and wine;
Was wooed by Lady Alice, and half won;
And passed a feverous winter in the world.
Ah, do not frown! You do not understand.
You never knew that hopeless thirst for peace
That gnawing hunger, gnawing at your life;
The passion, born too late! I tell you, friend,
The ruth, and love, and longing for my child,
It broke my heart at last. "In the hot days
Of August, I went back; I went alone.
And on old garrulous Margery relict she
Of some departed seneschal I rained
My eager questions. 'Had the poaching been
As ruinous and as audacious as of old?
Were the dogs well? and had she felt the heat?
And I supposed the keeper, Colin, still
Was somewhere on the place?' "Nay, sir,' said she,
'But he has left the neighbourhood. He ne'er
Has held his head up since he lost his child,
Poor soul, a month ago.' "I heard I heard!
His child he had but one my little one,
Whom I had meant to marry in a week!
"Ah, sir, she turned out badly after all,

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The girl we thought a pattern for all girls.
We know not how it happened, for she named
No names. And, sir, it preyed upon her mind,
And weakened it; and she forgot us all,
And seemed as one aye walking in her sleep
She noticed no one no one but the dog,
A young deerhound that followed her about;
Though him she hugged and kissed in a strange way
When none was by. And Colin, he was hard
Upon the girl; and when she sat so still,
And pale and passive, while he raved and stormed,
Looking beyond him, as it were, he grew
The harder and more harsh. He did not know
That she was not herself. Men are so blind!
But when he saw her floating in the loch,
The moonlight on her face, and her long hair
All tangled in the rushes; saw the hound
Whining and crying, tugging at her plaid
Ah, sir, it was a death-stroke!" "This was all.
This was the end of her sweet life the end
Of all worth having of mine own! At night
I crept across the moors to find her grave,
And kiss the wet earth covering it and found
The deerhound lying there asleep. Ay me!
It was the bitterest darkness, nevermore
To break out into dawn and day again!

"And Lady Alice shakes her dainty head,
Lifts her arch eyebrows, smiles, and whispers, 'Once
He was a little wild!'" With that he laughed;
Then suddenly flung his face upon the grass,
Crying, "Leave me for a little let me be!"
And in the dusky stillness hugged his woe,
And wept away his passion by himself.

A SERMON.

Midsummer, 1867.

WE have heard many sermons, you and I,
And many more may hear,
When sitting quiet in cathedral nave,
With folded palms and faces meek and grave;
But few like this one, dear.

A SERMON.

The Manor House and Other Poems

We oftentimes watch together 'fore the veil,
With reverent, gleaming eyes,
While priestly hands are busy with the folds,
And pant to see the holy place, which holds
Life's dreadest mysteries.

We watch weak, foolish fingers straying o'er
The broidered boss, to grasp
Vaguely at some small end of thread, and twist
And shake the glorious pattern into mist,
And leave **us** nought to clasp.

We watch, with eyes dilated, some strong hand
Of nerve and muscle, trace
The grand, faint outlines, erewhile undefined
To our slow earth-enfolded sense, and find
The great design the shadow from behind
Dawning before our face.

But seldom do we see, dear, you and I,
The pattern melt in light,
And all the shine flow out on us, uncheck'd
With eyes of soul and not of intellect
As we did see that night.

It was a summer-night the sun was low,
But overlaid the sea,
And made gold-crystals of the wet sea-sand,
And drew our shadows short upon the strand
That stretched out shallowly.

It was a Sunday night far off we heard
The solemn vesper-chime
From some grey wind-swept steeple by the shore,
Chanting "For ev-er-more! for ev-er-more!"
While the deep sea beat time.

We wandered far that night, dear, you and I,
We wandered out of reach,
Until the golden distances grew grey,
And narrowed in the glory, as it lay
Mid horizon and beach.

We wandered far along the lonely waste,

A SERMON.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Where seldom foot had trod;
The world behind us dared not to intrude
The summer silence and the solitude
Were only filled with God.

We sat down on the sand there, you and I,
We sat down awed and dumb,
And watched the fiery circle fall and fall
Through solemn folds of purple, and the small
Soft ripples go and come.

There was not wind enough to stir the reeds
Around us, nor to curl
The sheeny, dimpled surface of the deep;
The waters murmured low, as half in sleep,
With measured swish and swirl.

Two sea-birds came and dabbled in the pools,
And cried their plaintive cry,
As their strong wings swept o'er us as we sat
(No profanation of the stillness that,
But added sanctity).

They flecked the crimson shallows with black streaks,
Low-wheeling to and fro,
Crying their bold, sweet cry, as knowing well
It was a place where God, not man, did dwell
A father, not a foe.

* * * * *

Ah, we hear many sermons, you and I
The poor words fall and drown;
But this, whose speech was silence, this has stirred
The stream of years, and aye it will be heard
As when that sun went down!

THE LAST BATTLE OF THE CID.

LOW he lay upon his dying couch, the knight without a stain,
The unconquered Cid Campeador, the bright breastplate of Spain,
The incarnate honour of Castille, of Aragon and Navarre,
Very crown of Spanish chivalry, Rodrigo of Bivar!

* * * * *

The Manor House and Other Poems

Sick he lay, and grieved in spirit, for that Paynim dogs should dare
Camp around his knightly citadel, Valencia the fair!
For that he no more should face them, in his beauteous armour dight,
To whom God and Santiago aye gave victory in the fight.

Faintly rising o'er the ramparts came the murmur of the siege,
And he could but pray for Christendom, his country and his liege;
For his well-belovèd city, granite-girdled, pennon-starred,
And the royal wealth of treasure that its stately portals barred.

"Santiago, at whose altar I did watch mine armour bright,
And was girt with golden spur and brand, a consecrated knight!
Santiago, by my vow redeemed at Compostela's shrine,
Let the Paynim life-blood only touch these blessed walls of mine!

"Santiago, warrior saintly, who with Don Fernando's host
Stormed and won the gates of Coimbra, guard my fortress on the coast!
Keep the holy leper's blessing, though the snow is on my hair;
Strike the base-born unbelievers! save Valencia the fair!"

Lo, a sudden cloud of glory filled his chamber as he prayed!
Lo, San Pedro stood beside him, all in shining robes arrayed!
"For thy love, Rodrigo Diaz, to Cardeña's house," said he,
"I have offered intercessions, and the Lord hath answered me.

"Thou must die, O well-beloved! thirty days, and thou must die!
Yet in death shall Santiago grant thee still a victory.
Thou shalt ride forth to the battle Santiago shall be there
For the Faith and Don Alfonso and Valencia the fair."

Silence reigned within the chamber; none stood near the hero's bed;
All that dazzling flood of glory slowly, softly vanishèd.
He could only hear the murmur from the ramparts rise and fall;
He could only see the cross-bars stretching dimly on the wall.

In San Pedro's chapel lay the Cid, his eyes with rapture dim,
And proclaimed the wondrous favour that the Lord had granted him.
Then he parted from his vassals, and went humbly to confess;
And the warrior-bishop clothed his soul in its baptismal dress.

'Twas the holy day of Pentecost that saw Ruy Diaz die
Evermore the spotless mirror of Castillian chivalry!

* * * * *

The Manor House and Other Poems

They, in whom his will was shrinèd, Alvar Fanez and his knights,
Stood to watch the hero vanquished who had won a thousand fights.

Doña Ximena, the faithful, with her tears bedewed his feet,
And anointed all his body with pure incense, rich and sweet.
Then in silence and in sorrow the twelve days of waiting fled;
And the warders on the ramparts dared not whisper, "He is dead."

In the midnight, dark and quiet, fell the torches' lurid glare
On the palaces and portals of Valencia the fair;
And a solemn, slow procession, mounted all in royal state,
Like the spectre of an army, passed beneath the city gate.

In the van was borne the ensign, known and dreaded far and wide,
With four hundred noblest knights ranged proudly by its side.
Toward Castille and Cardeña were those haughty faces set,
And that banner never more did crown Valencia's parapet.

Then came mules, with treasure laden, stepping softly on before,
Compassed round with knights in armour to the full four hundred more.
Then a band of belted nobles, stern and silent; and amid
Their levelled lances, he of Bivar the Campeador the Cid.

On his milk-white steed, Babiaca, whom none else did e'er bestride,
Clad in all his princely trappings, did the lifeless warrior ride;
Girt with helm and spur and blazoned shield, and grasping in his hand
The bright crosslet of Tizona, his thrice-consecrated brand.

Geronymo and Gil Diaz held the slackened bridle-rein
His true bishop and true vassal as they moved on to the plain;
And Ximena and her maidens, 'mid the torchlight weird and dim,
With six hundred knights in harness, followed slowly after him.

In the solemn hush and darkness, with no joyful clarion-cry,
And no clash and clank of weapons, riding all so silently;
Thus they passed out from the city e'er the summer morning broke,
And were found arrayed for battle when the infidels awoke.

Great and mighty was the Moorish host, by thirty monarchs led,
But a greater was the army with Rodrigo at the head;
For behold! came Santiago to the bloody battle-plain
Santiago, with a hundred thousand warriors in his train.

* * * * *

The Manor House and Other Poems

Each in robe of shining whiteness, with a red cross on his breast,
Each with fiery sword uplifted or with golden lance at rest;
Santiago, saintly leader, on a charger white as snow
Sent to aid the Cid Campeador in vanquishing the foe.

All the Paynims looked amazed on the dreadful beautiful sight.
As the tender light of morning softly crept out from the night;
Then they harnessed them in silence, sternly grasping shield and spear,
And pressed on in serried column, full of wonder, full of fear.

There was one loud shock of battle, then they wildly turned to flee,
And the Cid and Santiago swept their hosts into the sea.
Twenty kings and twenty armies in that bloody fight were slain,
And were left, with upturned faces, stiff and stark upon the plain.

Fair and shining came the daylight, all in liquid summer sheen
But no more was Santiago, or his white-robed warriors, seen;
Only one small train of nobles, riding on, with stately pace,
To San Pedro de Cardena and the great Cid's resting-place.

By the altar in the chapel, where the monarch's throne doth stand,
Sat the dead Cid, robed in purple, with his good sword in his hand.
And again the Moorish ensign fluttered proudly in the air,
Lifted high above the ramparts of Valencia the fair.

TIRED.

O FOR wings! that I might soar
A little way above the floor,
A little way beyond the roar

A little nearer to the sky!
To the blue hills, lifted high
Out of all our misery.

Where alone is heard the lark,
Warbling in the infinite arc
From the dawning to the dark;

Where the callow eaglets wink
On the bare and breezy brink,

TIRED.

The Manor House and Other Poems

And slow pinions rise and sink.

Where the dim white breakers beat
Under cloud-drifts at our feet,
Singing, singing, low and sweet;

Where we see the glimmering bay
Greyly melting far away,
On the confines of the day;

Where the green larch-fringes sweep
Rocky defiles, still and steep;
Where the tender lichens creep;

Where the gentian-blossoms blow,
Set in crystal stars of snow;
Where the downward torrents flow

To the plains and yellow leas,
Glancing, twinkling through the trees
Pure, as from celestial seas.

Where the face of heaven has smiled
Aye on freedom, sweet and wild,
Aye on beauty undefiled.

Where no sound of human speech,
And no human passions, reach;
Where the angels sit and teach.

Where no troublous foot has trod;
Where is impressed on the sod
Only hand and heart of God!

LORD NEVIL'S ADVICE.

"**FRIEND**," quoth Lord Nevil, "thou art young
To face the world, and thou art blind
To subtle ways of womankind;
The meshes thou wilt fall among.

LORD NEVIL'S ADVICE.

The Manor House and Other Poems

"Take an old married man's advice;
Use the experience I have earned;
Watch well where women are concerned,
They're not all birds of paradise!

"Be circumspect, or thou mayst fall;
Abjure a blind faith nay, trust none
Till thou hast chosen, proven one;
Then trust **her** truly trust in all.

"Keep a calm brain and quiet eye,
And watch. The doll of powder and paint,
The flirt, the artificial saint,
The loud man–woman pass them by.

"The innocent one, who craves thy cares
To shield her from life's fret and fray;
Lad, watch her maybe she'll betray
Some doubtful knowledge, unawares.

"The pensive one, who droops and sighs
Wait till her dreaming comes to test;
Be gentle, yet be wary, lest
'Tis but a graceful grey disguise.

"The world–wise husband–hunter she
Who knows no love but love of gold,
And lands and titles empty, cold,
Pity her, lad, and let her be.

"And the rich heiress let **her** pass.
Belike she's stupid, drugged with wealth,
And just enjoys her life and health
As some fat cow in clover grass.

"Or insolent with prosperity,
Unsharpened, shallow, unrefined;
And thou art poor, and thou wilt mind
That proud blood cometh down to thee.

"The gushing gossip she who rains
Incessant chatter in thine ears;

LORD NEVIL'S ADVICE.

The Manor House and Other Poems

She may be worth thy keenest fears,
She may be simply lacking brains,

"And lacking grace and modesty.
She will make mischief, at the best;
She may be wily, like the rest;
Keep **thy** tongue still when she is by.

"They that would master thee, if they could,
In brain and muscle flaring lights
The clamorous for false woman's rights;
Snub them, my friend it does them good

"And do not think of them for wives.
Fit mates for such seem somewhat rare;
But when two odd ones make a pair,
They spoil at least four precious lives.

"But shouldst thou chance to meet a girl
With brave, bright eyes, that front thee straight,
A kindly tongue that does not prate,
And quiet lips that cannot curl;

"With fine sense, quick to understand,
With dignity that is not cold,
Sweet, sunny mirth that is not bold,
A ready ear, a willing hand;

"One skilled in household arts, and skilled
In little courteous, graceful ways,
That make no show and win no praise
Wherewith discordant jars are stilled:

"One who will never touch a sore;
One who sheds sunshine round about,
And draws life's hidden comfort out;
One whom the boys and babes adore:

"One with an intellect to reach
The highest range that thou canst rise;
Who will aye help thee, woman-wise,
And yet not set herself to teach:

"One of whom women love to speak,
In honest kindness, and whose name
Men let alone; whose chiefest fame
Lies hidden where men may not seek;

"Friend, woo her, as a good knight can,
And win her. Lay thou at her feet
Faith, love, and honour, true and sweet;
And count thyself a happy man."

A SIGH IN THE NIGHT.

O SWEET darkness, still, and calm, and lonely!
Spread thy downy pinions round about.
Spare me from thy hidden riches only
One dream-face; blot all the others out.

Bring him now, for thou hast power to free him,
From that ugly garb he wears by day;
Bring him now my darling! let me see him
Ere the tender kindness pass away.

O sweet night-winds, wandering in the larches!
Sigh, and croon, and whisper as you creep;
Sing my songs through green cathedral arches,
While the weary workers are asleep.

Snarl and fret not of the grief and passion;
Sing in minor cadence, sweet and low;
Sing of peace and rest, in soft wind-fashion
Of the love and faith I used to know!

THE MIDNIGHT MASS.

An Incident of the French Revolution.

THE light lay trembling in a silver bar
Along the western borders of the sky;
From out the shadowy dome a little star
Stole forth to keep its patient watch on high;
And night came down, with solemn, soft embrace, On storied Brittany.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Another night lay over all the land
The dark of hell, and lurid with its fire.
She heard the roar of fiends; she saw the brand
Flung red and hissing over roof and spire;
She saw her golden spurs and reaping-hooks
Tossed on the funeral pyre.

She stood in calm defiance, while the flood
Swept over her; while everywhere was seen
Her dim, majestic cities drenched in blood;
Ashes and smoke where temple-walls had been;
And high on woodland knoll and market-place,
The ghastly guillotine.

'Twas hard to tear her peasant-souls apart
From priest and liege, and clinging faith of old;
'Twas hard to bend the strong and simple heart
By fear of torture or by love of gold:
For naught those gory hands could offer them
Might consciences be sold.

"No tower or belfry shall be left to stand,"
Saint André swore, and waved his cap of red;
"You shall have naught in all this cursèd land
For sign of your superstition, it is dead!"
A peasant heard, and raised his eyes to heaven; "You'll leave the stars," he said.

True were the priests and people, each to each,
And all alike to their unlettered creed;
No violent force of sophistry could reach
Their rough-hewn faith in bitter time of need.
They died with deaf ears and dumb mouths; and theirs
Was martyrdom indeed!

Night midnight lay beneath her silver lamps;
Her deep sleep broken by the fitful glare
Of bivouac fires in noisy village camps,
And hoarse shouts mellowed through the listening air;
Save only where the sea-waves washed the coast
'Twas still and quiet there:

The heave and swell, and sudden, plunging dash
Against the low rocks lying in their reach;
The hissing shingle, and the sweet, free splash
Of long-drawn breakers on the open beach;
And now and then, in momentary pause,
The curlew's mournful screech:

The soft, low gurgle in the hollowed track

A SIGH IN THE NIGHT.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Through reef and boulder; and the rippling fall
Of idle wandering waters, swirling back
From secret tryst in Naiads' rocky hall;
Only these sounds save that deep monotone
Which held and hushed them all.

Only these sounds? Was nothing to be heard
But voice of breaker as it rose and fell,
The kelpie's song, the wailing of a bird?
Ay, far and faint amid the restless swell,
One other voice stole whispering through the air
The chime of a silver bell.

It came from dim mid-ocean, wild and free,
To listening ears, in silence of the night;
And watchful eyes saw, out upon the sea
And 'neath the stars, a little twinkling light
Now lost behind a waving mountain-top,
Now shining clear and bright.

Softly the fishers' boats began to glide
From shadowy rock and sheltered cave and creek;
Bronzed men and gentle maidens, side by side,
Dipped muffled oars; no woman-hand was weak.
All eyes turned, wistful, to the beacon-lamp;
But no one dared to speak.

The scattered specks, with each its little crowd,
Drew near, converging on the distant bark;
The sweet bell rang out louder and more loud,
The light shone bright and brighter in the dark:
And soon a hundred lips burst forth in praise
For all had reach'd the ark.

There was the priest, with whom they came to sup,
White-hair'd and holy, by his humble board;
There, amid light and darkness lifted up,
The blessed rood, by simple eyes adored.
Each head was bowed, each pious knee was bent
In presence of the Lord.

Ah! 'twas a grand cathedral where they knelt!
Grand was the organ-music vast the crypt
Wherein its wild, mysterious echoes dwelt;
And fresh and pure the incense, as it slipp'd
Down shining floor and down wide altar-steps,
With frosted silver tipp'd.

Grand was the darken'd aisles and solemn nave
The domèd roof, magnificently high
The airy walls and mighty architrave

A SIGH IN THE NIGHT.

The Manor House and Other Poems

The sweet star-tapers that could never die!
And grander still its purity of peace,Its untouched sanctity.

The worn and weary ones came there, to search
For rest and hope in holy Eucharist;
There in the splendour of that solemn church
They, priest and people, communed with the Christ;
Thus with all other temples overthrown They kept his sacred tryst.

With calm, grave eyes and even-pulsing breath,
They dipp'd their still oars in the darken'd space.
Strong now the hands fast rowing back to death!
And strong the simple hearts, new clothed in grace
The hush'd and quiet souls ere long to meetTheir Saviour face to face.

THE OLD MAID'S STORY.

AY, many and many a year's gone by,
Since the dawn of that day in spring,
When we met in the pine-woods, Harry and I,
And he gave me this golden ring.
I had lovers in plenty, of high degree,
Who wooed in my father's hall;
But none were so noble and brave as he,
Though he was the scorn'd of all.
On the soft, green grass, where the shadows lay,
All fleck'd with the sun and dew,
With a ring and a kiss did we seal, that day,
Our vow to be leal and true.
'Twas a life-long vow; but they did not know
And they thought not of love or pain;
We met just once in the sleet and snow
We were never to meet again!
He was sent away o'er the blank, wide sea,
And I, with my hopes and fears,
Had never a message to comfort me
For over a score of years.
They laugh'd at my heart, they paraded my hand,
But I answer'd them, cold and grim
"If Harry ne'er comes to his native land,
They shall only belong to him."

At last came a tale from the battle-field;
And they were not scornful now.
The sentence of exile might be repealed
They would honour our plighted vow!

The Manor House and Other Poems

They told how my Harry, like olden knights,
Had fought for his land and Queen;
Fought hard and well on the Alma heights,
Where the deadliest strife was seen.
They told how he fell in the fire and smoke,
And they gave me his things to keep;
They wonder'd why I never cried or spoke,
But it was too late to weep.

THE EASTER DECORATIONS.

O TAKE away your dried and painted garlands!
The snow-cloth's fallen from each quicken'd brow,
The stone's rolled off the sepulchre of winter,
And risen leaves and flowers are wanted now.

Send out the little ones, that they may gather
With their pure hands the firstlings of the birth,
Green-golden tufts and delicate half-blown blossoms,
Sweet with the fragrance of the Easter earth;

Great primrose bunches, with soft, damp moss clinging
To their brown fibres, nursed in hazel roots;
And violets from the shady banks and copses,
And wood-anemones, and white hawthorn shoots;

And tender curling fronds of fern, and grasses
And crumpled leaves from brink of babbling rills,
With cottage-garden treasures pale narcissi
And lilac plumes and yellow daffodils.

Open the doors, and let the Easter sunshine
Flow warmly in and out, in amber waves,
And let the perfume floating round our altar
Meet the new perfume from the outer graves.

And let the Easter "Alleluia!" mingle
With the sweet silver rain-notes of the lark;
Let us all sing together! Lent is over,
Captivity and winter, death and dark.

DEAD.

"ON board the **Petrel**, in St. Lucia's bay,
Of yellow fever aged twenty–nine."

"Who did you say, my lady?" drawled the Earl.
"The duke what duke?" "I did not speak of dukes,"
Replied the Countess slowly, white and grim,
Pressing the rustling sheet between her palms,
The while her diamonds heaved upon her breast,
And sank and heaved, and glitter'd like her eyes
Hungry, pathetic eyes, "'Tis only Dick,
Only a sailor–lad I used to know."

"Humph! A West Indian friend?" he softly sneer'd,
And bow'd and gave his arm. "The carriage waits
My lady loses time." Then pass'd they out,
Through silky servants, he, the great Earl, stark
In plume and crest and linked mediæval steel,
The Countess *en bergère*, in white and red,
With roses, diamond dew–dropped, in her hat
And in her queenly bosom; pass'd they out,
And, through clear gaslight and the avenue
Of silent Champs–Elysées, to the fête.

Her restless eyes were blind to all the blaze
And motley splendour of the throng'd saloons;
The flowers, the cool cascades, the magic wand
Of Strauss, the vine–draped balustrades, the gaze
Of wistful admiration meeting hers
At every step. The Empress smiled and bow'd,
The Emperor praised the beauty and the taste
Of her mock–rustic costume, princes begged
Her fair hand for the dance, and her grim lord
Scowl'd, wrathful, on her when she pass'd him by.
She cared for none, she look'd beyond them all.

She saw another night a hot, bright night
A night of years ago danced out in joy
'Neath the low roof–tree of a planter's house
In fair Antigua's bosom; saw the stars,
Large, liquid, golden, swimming in the blue,
Shining through open doors and jealousies,
And the green sparkles of the fire–flies, thick
About the forest, fringing all the dark;

DEAD.

The Manor House and Other Poems

The crimson creepers swaying in the air
From white verandah pillars swaying soft;
The small nest of a humming-bird; the stems,
Brown-ring'd, of feathery palm-trees, plaintains bow'd
With broad, thick leaves, and clustering fruit, and seeds
In scarlet vessels orange-groves, white-flower'd
And sweet, with hanging balls of green and gold
All vaguely outlined in the mellow night.
And nearer still a brave, brown English face,
Bent low, with clear grey eyes and faithful lips
That whisper'd, "Reine, I love you," meeting hers.
The drowsy sound of laughter and light feet
Behind them she could hear but the quick throb
Of poor Dick's English heart upon her breast
She felt to suffocation. "Reine, my sweet,
I love you Reine, I love you; kiss me, child."
And her soft hands stray'd softly round his neck,
And softer still she kiss'd him. Then she saw
A morning, hot and stormy saw the Earl,
Drunk with her wondrous beauty, standing there
Where Dick had stood. She saw his cultured ways,
His high-bred, stately courtesy and grace;
She heard his subtle flatteries, his tales
Of the great world, of court and city life,
With gaping ears and speculating brain.
The voice of the arch-tempter, low and soft,
Spoke in his polished accents, "Reine, 'tis sin,
'Tis sin and shame, that such a face as yours
Should waste its sweetness in these heathen isles.
There's not a fairer face in Europe, Reine;
'Tis worth a coronet. Come back with me
As a great earl's wife; in his diamonds dress'd,
You would have homage like a crownèd queen."
She shudder'd now, his diamonds gall'd her worse
Than felon's chains. Anon she saw a bay
Blue, limpid water, fringed with dipping palms,
A green rock-gateway opening on the sea,
Green cane-fields stretching upward, woods and hills
Lying entangled in the summer clouds;
An English ship at anchor burning noon
A thin, brown, fever'd face, with hungry eyes
Roaming from side to side, in dumb appeal,
Which none could understand, and dying lips
Muttering to vacant air and heedless ears,
"I love you, Reine, I love you!" "O my love
O Dick my Dick would I could sleep with thee
In thy last happy sleep among the palms,
With my dead hands clasp'd tight about thy neck!
O Dick, I did not mean it did not think
And now my heart is broken! "Take me home.
The rooms are hot, my lord, and I am faint

DEAD.

The music makes me giddy. Take me home!"

RECOLLECTION.

A **WAVE-WORN** boulder, with green sea-moss wrapping
A silken mantle o'er its jagged sides;
And silvery, seething waters softly lapping
Through gulfs and channels hollow'd by the tides:

A lime-cliff overhead, o'erhanging grimly,
A dash of sunlight on its breast of snow;
The white line of the breakers, stretching dimly
Along the narrow sea-beach down below:

The grey waste of the waters, with one slender,
Glimmering, golden ripple far away;
The haze of summer twilight, sweet and tender,
Veiling the fair face of the dying day:

The measured splash of surf upon the shingle,
The ceaseless gurgle through the rocks and stones;
No sound of struggling human life, to mingle
With those mysterious and eternal tones!

No sound no sound, a hungry sea-mew only
Breaking the stillness with her little cry;
And the low whisper, when 'tis all so lonely,
Of soft south breezes as they wander by:

I see it all; sweet dreams of it are thronging
In full floods back upon my weary brain;
To-night, in my dark chamber, the old longing
Almost fulfils its very self again.

The dying sunbeams, on the far waves glinting,
Come like warm kisses to my lips and brow,
Soothing my spirit all its grey thoughts tinting
With tender shades of golden colour now.

Alone and still, I sit, and think, and listen,
Looking out westward o'er the darkening sea;
My seat the boulder, where the spray-drops glisten;

The Manor House and Other Poems

The tall, white cliffs my regal canopy.

And, as I sit, the fretting cares and sorrows,
Weighing so heavy when the work is done,
The gloomy yesterdays and dim to-morrows,
They slip away and vanish one by one,

Slip backward to the world that lies behind me,
Every by sinful footsteps overtrod;
And in this unstain'd world leave nought to bind me,
This sweet world, fillèd with the peace of God!

THE DAWN.

ALL the wild waves rock'd in shadow,
And the world was dim and grey,
Dark and silent, hush'd and breathless,
Waiting calmly for the day.

And the golden light came stealing
O'er the mountain-tops at last
Flooding vale and wood and upland,
It was morning night was past.

There they lay the silvery waters,
Fruitful forests, glade and lawn;
All in beauty, new-created
By the angel of the dawn.

* * * * *

So my spirit slept in twilight;
All was quiet, grey, and still,
Till the dawn of Love came stealing,
Over Hope's snow-crested hill.

Then the dim world woke in glory,
And the iris-dyes grew bright
On the waves and woods and valleys,
In a morning flood of light.

Ah! the vineyards and the gardens!

THE DAWN.

Ah! the treasures, rich and rare,
Full of endless life and beauty,
Which that dawn created there!

THE BAPTISTRY.

ONE winter eve, at twilight, when the sound
Of sorrowful winds scarce troubled Nature's rest,
As she lay sleeping, with her hair unbound,
Holding her grey robe to her shivering breast,

I enter'd through a low-arch'd oaken door,
Circled with curious sculpture; and I crept
With slow, hush'd footsteps, o'er the shadow'd floor,
Where organ notes in sudden silence slept;

Far down the aisle, where darkness seem'd to brood
With such wide-spreading wings, and where the sigh
Of murmur'd prayer scarce came, until I stood
In the deep stillness of the Baptistry.

There, in the dim side-chapel, no bright glow
From jewelled windows on the wall was shed;
No sunbeams rested on the font below,
Or kiss'd those mighty arches overhead.

Soft lines and curves went upward, and were lost
In solemn shadow and in dreamy space;
Only the level floor was faintly crost
With glimmering brightness from the holy place.

And, as I listen'd, I heard music sweet
Trembling and swelling through the soundless air,
Threading dark aisles, as if an angel's feet
Were bidden bring God's message to me there.

Ah! and the echo of those anthem notes
Wanders and whispers in my heart for aye:
In all my life the mystic language floats,
Fitful and faint, as in my ears that day.

One whom we knew had enter'd into rest

The Manor House and Other Poems

Calm on the pillow lay his hoary head;
And through that music spoke, in accents blest,
Our holy Mother's voice, hallowing the dead,

Telling of perfect peace, of labours done,
Of long years' sorrow turned to joy at last
The quiet sleep, when battles all are won
The hush of evening when the day is past.

I look'd upon the font, and mused of all
Its wondrous meaning, till my thoughts grew dim
And vast and shadowy as those columns tall;
Morning of life for me death's night for him!

How fancy tried to span that awful space
Between the two between the here and there!
To bridge the nave up to that blessed Place
Where light and song stream'd on the chancel–stair!

Dim recollections drifted through my brain
Echoing footfalls of past childish years,
When the baptismal robe had less of stain,
E'en though unwash'd by penitential tears.

I saw the gloomy shadows o'er my head,
And sigh'd to think how I had suffer'd loss;
I saw the soft light, and was comforted,
I knew it shone straight from the chancel–cross.

A few more steps, and then I stood below
The towering minster coronet again;
Down on my face that pure and gentle glow
Fell, like a pitying kiss in time of pain.

Down to my feet it stream'd; a passage dim,
With hosts of phantom–shapes on either side,
It drifted through; as songs of seraphim
Drift through our mourning hearts at Easter–tide.

Looking up then, I seem'd to see my life,
A long, dim vista, where the rays descend
Where light and darkness wage continual strife;
But only light the full light at the end.

THE BAPTISTRY.

THE SOLDIER'S GRAVE.

'**TWAS** long ago, in the summer-time,
On a day as sad as this,
That I laid my babe in its father's arms,
And he gave it his farewell kiss;
When the army sail'd from the English shores
In a mist of sun and rain,
To the vine-clad hills and citadels
And the olive groves of Spain.

I set my face to the balmy south,
And listen'd, intent and dumb,
As though a cry from the battle-grounds
On the fragrant wind might come.
I yearn'd for a gleam of the red camp fires
Which burn'd through the watchful nights,
For the shine of the bayonets that clash'd one day
On the dread Albuera heights.

Ah me! And my face cannot turn away,
Though the ashes are on my brow,
Though the news of the battle came once for all,
And there's nothing to watch for now!
Though 'tis further away than that far south land
I must look for my dear man's face,
Though I know he will never come home again
To the chair in the old house-place!

ALL-SAINTS' DAY (1867).

BLESSED are they whose baby-souls are bright,
Whose brows are sealèd with the cross of light,
Whom God Himself has deign'd to robe in white Blessed are they!

Blessed are they who follow through the wild
His sacred footprints, as a little child;
Who strive to keep their garments undefiled Blessed are they!

Blessed are they who commune with the Christ,
Midst holy angels, at the Eucharist
Who aye seek sunlight through the rain and mist Blessed are they!

The Manor House and Other Poems

Blessed are they the strong in faith and grace
Who humbly fill their own appointed place;
They who with steadfast patience run the race Blessed are they!

Blessed are they who suffer and endure
They who through thorns and briars walk safe and sure;
Gold in the fire made beautiful and pure! Blessed are they!

Blessed are they on whom the angels wait,
To keep them facing the celestial gate,
To help them keep their vows inviolate Blessed are they!

Blessed are they to whom, at dead of night,
In work, in prayer though veiled from mortal sight,
The great King's messengers bring love and light Blessed are they!

Blessed are they whose labours only cease
When God decrees the quiet, sweet release;
Who lie down calmly in the sleep of peace Blessed are they!

Whose dust is angel-guarded, where the flowers
And soft moss cover it, in this earth of ours;
Whose souls are roaming in celestial bowers Blessed are they!

Blessed are they our precious ones who trod
A pathway for us o'er the rock-strewn sod.
How are they number'd with the saints of God! Blessed are they!

Blessed are they, elected to sit down
With Christ, in that day of supreme renown,
When His own Bride shall wear her bridal crown Blessed are they!

ALL-SAINTS' DAY (1868).

"But they are at peace."

NEVER to weary more, nor suffer sorrow,
Their strife all over, and their work all done:
At peace and only waiting for the morrow;
Heaven's rest and rapture even now begun.

The Manor House and Other Poems

So tired once! long fetter'd, sorely burden'd,
Ye struggled hard and well for your release;
Ye fought in faith and love and ye are guerdon'd,
O happy souls! for now ye are at peace.

No more of pain, no more of bitter weeping!
For us a darkness and an empty place,
Somewhere a little dust in angels' keeping
A blessèd memory of a vanish'd face.

For us the lonely path, the daily toiling,
The din and strife of battle, never still'd;
For us the wounds, the hunger, and the soiling,
The utter, speechless longing, unfulfill'd.

For us the army camp'd upon the mountains,
Unseen, yet fighting with our Syrian foes,
The heaven-sent manna and the wayside fountains,
The hope and promise, sweetening our woes.

For them the joyous spirit, freely ranging
Green hills and fields where never mortal trod;
For them the light unfading and unchanging,
The perfect quietness the peace of God.

For both, a dim, mysterious, distant greeting;
For both, at Jesus' cross, a drawing near;
At Eucharistic gate a blessed meeting,
When angels and archangels worship here.

For both, God grant, an everlasting union,
When sin shall pass away and tears shall cease;
For both the deep and full and true communion,
For both the happy life that is "at peace."

ADVENT HYMN.

>**ANOTHER** mile a year
Pass'd by for ever! And the warnings swell
From upper heaven to darkest depths of hell,
O we are drawing near!

The Manor House and Other Poems

All through the waiting lands
Dim signs and tokens, if unheeded, throng;
We feel them thickening as we pass along,
Holding out fearful hands.

Light! which in love sent down
That tender gleam on Eden's darken'd bowers,
When sin had breathed the blight upon the flowers
Whereof death made his crown:

Light! which did deign to stamp
The tables on that Arab mountain-crest;
Light! which, in shrouded glory, once did rest
On Israelitish camp:

O day! whose dawn was spread,
Golden and clear, on Judæa's terraced hills,
O shining noon! whose waxèd beauty thrills
Earth and her quick and dead:

Come to our hearts, we pray!
Through open doors let gracious gleams come in;
Fill us with light and life, and let the sin
And darkness pass away.

Lord, waken us who sleep,
Strengthen the feeble knees and weak hands now;
Teach us, with prayer and work, to measure how
The stealthy minutes creep.

Let not our lamp be dim
When in the night we hear the footsteps fall
Upon our threshold, let death find us all
Watching in peace for him.

Let us lie down to rest
In surest hope of endless life in store,
With happy reverent hands, that strive no more.
Folded across our breast.

And when the angels come,
And the sharp echo of the herald's cry

The Manor House and Other Poems

Pierces the dark and stillness where we lie
Cold in our sleep, and dumb,

May we arise, O King!
In bridal garments, beautiful and white;
And do Thou, coming in Thy godly might,
Our crown of glory bring.

AUTUMN.

SO still so still! Only the endless sighing
Of sad Æolian harp—notes overhead;
Only the soft mass—music for the dying;
Only the requiem for the newly dead!

So strangely dim! the grey mist on the heather,
The chill cloud—twilight in the wind—stripped bowers,
Where gold and scarlet sunlights lay together
On harvest fruit and summer wealth of flowers.

So empty now! only the dead leaves sifting
The dead brown berries underneath the trees;
Only my fair dead treasures idly drifting
About my footsteps in the autumn breeze.

All over now! No flowers that must be tended
Are left to grow upon the open plain;
No fruits to ripen; for the harvest's ended
There's no more need for either sun or rain.

The infinite hope, the boundless, strong endeavour,
The love and joy I never thought to sum,
The precious things that were to last for ever
All gather'd now, and nothing more to come!

Only the shroud of snow, the white star—tapers,
The passionate storm—winds, wailing in the air;
Only the icy rain and tearful vapours,
Only the winter darkness of despair!

The Manor House and Other Poems

* * * * *

So still, so sweet! with tender breezes blowing
Amongst the hills and o'er the Lowland sod,
And golden drifts of dead leaves softly strowing
The seed-graves hollow'd by the hands of God.

So grey and calm! the crimson glory faded
From this low sky, pale blue and purple-barred
This placid sea, with steel and silver shaded
This fair earth, now with autumn furrows scarred.

In the decay such chasten'd beauty blending
Beauty late-born of peace, and hope, and rest,
As in a saintly life when near the ending,
When all its strife and labour has been blest.

The harvest-time is past. But there remaineth
The well-stored treasure-house the hidden seed
That dead leaves help to nourish, which containeth
The germ of a new life that's life indeed.

THE LEGEND OF LADY GERTRUDE.

I.

FALLEN the lofty halls, where vassal crowds
Drank in the dawn of Gertrude's natal day.
The dungeon roof an Alpine snow-wreath shrouds,
The strong, wild eagle's eyrie in the clouds
The robber-baron's nest is swept away.

II.

Bare is the mountain brow of lordly towers;
Only the sunbeams stay, the moon and stars,
The faithful saxifrage and gentian flowers,
The silvery mist, and soft, white, crystal showers,
And torrents rushing through their rocky bars.

III.

* * * * *

The Manor House and Other Poems

More than three hundred years ago, the flag
Charged with that dread device, an Alpine bear
By many storm-winds rent a grim, grey rag
Floated above the castle on the crag,
Above the last whose heads were shelter'd there.

IV.

He was the proudest of an ancient race,
The fiercest of the robber chieftain's band,
That haughty Freiherr, with the iron face:
And she his lady-sister, by God's grace
The sweetest, gentlest maiden in the land.

V.

'Twas a rude nest for such a tender bird,
That lonely fortress, with its warrior-lord.
Aye drunken revels the night-stillness stirred;
From morn till eve the battle-cries were heard,
The sound of jingling spur and clanking sword.

VI.

And Lady Gertrude was both young and fair,
A mark for lawless hearts and roving eyes,
With sweet, grave face, and amber-tinted hair,
And a low voice soft-thrilling through the air,
Filling it full of subtlest melodies.

VII.

But the great baron, proudest of his line,
Fetter'd, with jealous care, his white dove's wing;
Guarded his treasure in an inner shrine,
Till such a day as knightly hands should twine
Her slender fingers with the marriage-ring.

VIII.

From all her household rights was she debarred
Her chair and place within the castle-hall,
Her palfrey's saddle in the castle-yard,
Her nursing ministries when blows fell hard

The Manor House and Other Poems

In border struggles she was kept from all.

IX.

A stone-paved chamber, and the parapet
Opening above its winding turret-stair;
The castle-chapel, where few men were met,
Round these the brother's boundaries were set.
The sweet child-sister was so very fair!

X.

She had her faithful nurse, her doves, her lute,
Her broidery and her distaff, and the hound
Best prized of all the grand, half-human brute,
Who aye watched near her, beautiful and mute,
With ears love-quicken'd, listening from the ground.

XI.

But the wild bird, so honourably caged,
Grew sick and sad in its captivity;
Longed like those hills which time nor storm had aged,
And those deep glens where Danube waters raged
In God's own wind and sunshine to be free.

XII.

And on a day, when she had seen them ride,
Baron and troopers, on some border raid,
Wooed by the glory of the summer tide,
The hound's soft-slouching footstep at her side,
Adown the valley Lady Gertrude stray'd.

XIII.

Adown the crag, whose shadow, still and black,
Lay like the death-sleep on a mountain pool;
Through rocky glen, by silvery torrent's track,
Through forest glade, 'neath wild vines, fluttering back
From softest zephyr kisses, green and cool.

The Manor House and Other Poems

XIV.

E'en till the woods and hamlets down below,
And summer meadows, were all broad and clear;
The river, moving statelily and slow,
A crimson ribbon in the sunset glow
The dim, white, distant city strangely near.

XV.

She sat her down, a-weary, on the ground,
With tremulous long-drawn breath and wistful eyes;
Caress'd the velvet muzzle of the hound,
And listen'd vainly for some little sound
To come up from her world of mysteries.

XVI.

She had forgotten of the time and place,
When clank of warrior's harness smote her dream.
A growl, a spring, a shadow on her face,
And one strode up, with slow and stately pace,
And stood before here in the soft sun-gleam.

XVII.

An armèd knight, in noblest knightly guise,
From golden spur to golden dragon-crest;
Through open vizor gazing with surprise
Into the fair, flush'd face and startled eyes,
While horse and hound stood watchfully at rest.

XVIII.

The sun went down, and, with long, stealthy stride,
The shadows came, blurring the summer light;
And there was none the lady's step to guide
Up the lost pathway on the mountain-side
None to protect her but this stranger knight!

XIX.

He placed her gently on his dappled grey,

The Manor House and Other Poems

Clothed in his mantle for the air was chill;
He led her all the long and devious way,
Through glens, where starless night held royal sway,
And vine-tressed woodlands, where the leaves were still:

XX.

Through pathless ravines, where swift waters roll'd;
Up dark crag-ramparts, perilously steep,
Where eagles and a she-bear watch'd the fold;
Facing the mountain breezes, clear and cold
In shy, sweet silence, eloquent and deep.

XXI.

Holding his charger by the bridle-rein,
He led her through the robber-chieftain's lands;
Led her, unchallenged by the baron's train,
E'en to the low-brow'd castle-gate again,
And there he humbly knelt to kiss her hands.

XXII.

Brave lips, o'er tender palms bent down so low,
Silent and reverent, as it were to bless
'Twas e'en a knightly love they did bestow,
Love true as steel and undefiled as snow;
No common courtesy, no light caress.

XXIII.

He rode away; and she to turret-lair
Sped, swift and trembling, like a hunted doe.
But wherefore, on the loopholed winding stair
Knelt she till morning, weeping, watching there?
Because he was her brother's deadliest foe.

XXIV.

Because the golden dragon's blood had mixt
In all those mountain streams, had dyed the grass
Now trodden for her sake; because betwixt
Those two proud barons such a gulf was fixt
As never bridge of peace might overpass.

XXV.

A bitter, passionate feud, that was begun
In ages long forgotten, and bequeath'd
With those rich baronies by sire to son
A sacred charge, a great work never done,
A sharp and fiery weapon never sheath'd.

XXVI.

Yet, e'er a month slipped by, as summer slips
On noiseless wings, another kiss was laid,
Not on white palms or rosy finger-tips,
But softly on shut eyes and quivering lips;
And vows were sealèd in the forest glade.

XXVII.

The robber baron, who had hedged about
That fairest blossom of the sacred plant,
Saw **he** the insolent mailèd hand stretch'd out
To break down all his barriers, strong and stout?
Knew **he** aught of that gracious covenant?

XXVIII.

His pride serenely slept. Nor did it wake
Till, in amaze, he saw his enemy stand
In his own castle, praying him to take
The pledge of peace for Lady Gertrude's sake
Praying him humbly for the lady's hand.

XXIX.

Slowly the knitted brows grew fierce and black;
Slowly the eagle eyes began to shine.
"Sir knight," he said, "I pray you get you back.
But one hour and the Bears are on your track.
There's naught but fire and sword 'twixt mine and thine."

XXX.

And then the doors were barred on every side

The Manor House and Other Poems

Upon the innocent traitor, who had done
Such doubly—shameful despite to his pride.
Mocking, "I'll satisfy your heart," he cried,
"An' you will have a husband, pretty one!"

XXXI.

Yet did she send a message stealthily,
Spurred by the torture of this ominous threat.
"Thou wilt not suffer it?" she said. And he,
"Fear not. To—morrow will I come for thee,
At eve to—morrow, when the sun has set."

XXXII.

And on the morrow, when the autumn light
Of red and gold had faded into grey,
She heard his signal up the echoing height,
Like hoarse owl—whistle, quivering through the night;
And in the dark she softly slipped away.

XXXIII.

Her faithful nurse, with trembling hands, untwined
The new—forged fetters and drew back the bars.
The hound look'd up into her face, and whined,
And scratch'd the door; he would not stay behind.
And so she went watch'd only by the stars.

XXXIV.

Adown the mountain passes, with wing'd feet
And bright, blank eyes her hand fast clutch'd around
A ragged slip of myrtle, white and sweet;
The hound beside her, velvet—footed, fleet
And silent, with his muzzle to the ground.

XXXV.

The knight was waiting, with his dappled steed,
Hard by the black brink of the waveless pool.
In his strong, tender arms now safe indeed
She cross'd the valley, with the wild bird's speed,
Fanned by the whispering night—wind, clear and cool.

XXXVI.

Away away far from the trysting-place
Over the blood-stain'd border-lands at last!
One wandering hind alone beheld the race;
A sudden rush a shadow on his face
A glint of golden scales and she was past.

XXXVII.

She felt the shadow of a mighty wall,
And then the glow of torchlight, and again
The gloom of cloister'd stair and passage, fall
Upon her vacant eyes. She heard a call;
And, in the echoing mountains, its refrain.

XXXVIII.

Then all around her a great silence lay;
She knew not why, nor greatly seem'd to care,
Till, in low tones, she heard the baron say,
"Hast thou confess'd, my little one, to-day?"
The while he weaved the myrtle in her hair.

XXXIX.

She glanced up suddenly, in blank amaze;
And then remember'd. 'Twas an altar, hung
With silk and rich embroidery, met her gaze;
'Twas perfumed, waxen altar-tapers' blaze
On her chill'd face and troubled spirit flung.

XL.

A holy father, with his open book,
Stood by the threshold of the chapel door.
Slowly, with bated breath and hands that shook,
Soft-clasped together drawn with but a look
She went, and knelt down humbly on the floor.

XLI.

The baron left her, lowly crouching there,

The Manor House and Other Poems

Her bright, starred tresses trailing on the stones;
And waited, kneeling on the altar–stair
Holding his sword–hilt to his lips, in prayer
The while she pleaded in her tremulous tones.

XLII.

A warning voice upon the still air dwelt,
A long, low cry of mingled hope and dread;
A pause a solemn silence and she felt
The sweet absolving whisper as she knelt,
And hands of blessing covering her head.

XLIII.

The knight arose in silence, with a brow
Haughty and pale; and, softly drawing nigh,
Love, life, and death in the new "I and thou"
He gave and took each solemn marriage vow,
With all his arm'd retainers standing by.

XLIV.

The soft light fell upon their faces still,
And calm, and full of rest. None now to part
The golden link between them! naught to chill
The blest assurance that the father's will
Laid hand in hand, and gather'd heart to heart.

XLV.

And so 'twas done. Each finger now had worn
The rings that aye ring'd in the double life;
From each the pledge had been withdrawn in turn,
As one by one the hallow'd oaths were sworn;
And Lady Gertrude was the baron's wife.

XLVI.

He led her to her chamber, when the glow
Of dawn began to quicken earth and sky;
They watch'd the rosy wine–cup overflow
The pale, cool, silvery track upon the snow
Of Alpine crests, uplifted far and high.

XLVII.

They saw the mountain floodgates open'd wide,
The downward streaming of unfetter'd day;
In blessed stillness, standing side by side
Stillness that told how they were satisfied,
Those hearts whereon the new-born glamour lay.

XLVIII.

And then, down cloister'd aisle and sculptured stair,
Through open courts, all bathed in shining mist,
They pass'd together, knight and lady fair;
She with the matron's coif upon her hair,
Her golden hair by lip and finger kiss'd.

XLIX.

He throned her proudly in his castle hall,
High on the daïs above the festive board,
'Neath shields and pennons drooping from the wall;
And they below the salt rose, one and all,
To greet the bride of their puissant lord.

L.

Loud were the shouts, and fair with smiling grace
The blue eyes of the lady baroness;
And bright and eager was the haughty face
Of her brave husband, towering in his place,
Yet aye low-stooping for a mute caress.

LI.

There came a sudden pause a thunder-cloud,
Darkening the sunshine of the golden noon
An ominous stillness in the armèd crowd,
While slowly stiffening lips, all stern and proud,
Shut in the kindly laughter all too soon!

LII.

"To arms! to arms!" A passionate crimson flush

The Manor House and Other Poems

Rose, sank, and blanched the fair face of the bride.
"To arms!" The cry smote sharply on the hush,
And broke it; all was one tumultuous rush
"The Bears have cross'd the border-land!" they cried.

LIII.

But a few hours had Lady Gertrude dwelt
With her dear lord. Sad honours now were hers.
With white, hot hands she clasp'd his silver belt;
She held his dinted shield and sword; and knelt,
Like lowly squire, to don his golden spurs.

LIV.

"Thou wilt not fight with him? thou wilt forbear
For my sake?" So she pleaded, while the sun
Shone on her falling tears each tear a prayer.
He whisper'd gravely, as he kissed her hair,
"I know not if I can, my little one."

LV.

She held his hands, with infinite mute desire
To hold him back; then watch'd him to the field
With hungry, feverish eyes that could not tire,
Till sunny space absorb'd the fitful fire
Of the bright dragons on his crest and shield.

LVI.

When he was gone quite gone she crept away,
Back to the castle chapel, still and dim;
And knelt where he had knelt but yesterday,
Low on the altar step, to watch and pray
To pour her heart out for the love of him.

LVII.

Her bower-maidens sat alone and spun
The while she pray'd, the terror-stricken wife.
The long hours slowly wanèd, one by one,
And evening came, and, with the setting sun,
The sudden darkness that eclipsed her life.

LVIII.

She listen'd, and she heard the sound at last,
The ominous pause, the heavy, clanging tread;
She saw the strange, long shadow weirdly cast
Upon the floor, the red blood streaming fast,
The dear face grey and stiffen'd; he was dead!

LIX.

"Ay, dead, my lady baroness; and slain
By him you call your brother. Curses light
Upon his caitiff soul! Ah, 'tis in vain
To murmur thus, he will not hear again
He cannot heed your whisperings to-night."

LX.

She lay down on her bridal couch the stone
Whereon **he** lay in his eternal rest;
They, pitying, pass'd out, leaving her alone,
To kiss the rigid lips, and cry, and moan,
With her white face upon his bleeding breast.
* * * * *

LXI.

'Twas night a wakeful, restless, troubled night,
Both wild and soft mysteriously fair;
With clouds fast flying through the domèd height,
And shrieking winds, and silvery shining light,
And clear bells piercing the transparent air.

LXII.

Down vale and fell a lonely figure stray'd,
Now a dark shadow on the moonlit ground,
Now flickering white and ghostly in the shade
Of haunted glen and scented forest-glade
A woman, watched and followed by a hound.

LXIII.

'Twas Lady Gertrude, widow'd and forlorn,
Returning to the wild birds' mountain nest;
Sent out with smiling insult and with scorn,
And creeping to the home where she was born,
To hide her sorrow, to lie down and rest.

LXIV.

She reach'd the gate and cross'd the castle-yard,
And stood upon the threshold, chill'd with fear.
The baron rose and faced her, breathing hard:
"Troopers," he thunder'd, "Let the doors be barred
And double-barred! we'll have no traitors here."

LXV.

Such was her welcome. As she turn'd away,
Groping with sightless eyes and hands outspread,
The hound, unnoticed, slowly made his way
Along the hall, as if in track of prey,
With glistening teeth and stealthy velvet tread.

LXVI.

There was no clarion cry, none heard the sound
Of knightly challenge, till the champion rose,
Avenging. Lo! they saw upon the ground
The baron struggling with the savage hound,
And grim death grimly waiting for the close!

LXVII.

'Twas done. He lay there unassoilzied, dead,
Ere scarcely fell'd by the relentless paws.
And the fierce hound, with painful, limping tread,
Was following still where Lady Gertrude led,
His own red life-blood dripping from his jaws.

LXVIII.

'Neath shadowy glades, with moonbeams interlaced,

The Manor House and Other Poems

Through valleys, at day-dawning, soft and dim,
Up mountain steeps at sunrise uplands paced
By her dead lord in childhood she retraced
The long miles stretching betwixt her and him.

LXIX.

She reach'd the castle, ere the torches' glare
Had waned in the brightness of the sky
Another lord than hers was feasting there!
She shudder'd at the sounds that fill'd the air,
Of drunken laughter and loud revelry.

LXX.

And softly up the cloister'd stairs she crept,
Back to the lonely chapel, where all sound
Of human life in solemn silence slept.
With weary heart and noiseless feet she stept
Beneath the doorway into hallow'd ground.

LXXI.

Low at the altar, wrapped in slumber sweet
And still and deep, her murder'd lord lay here;
With waxen tapers at his head and feet
Forcing reluctant darkness to retreat
And cross-embroider'd pall upon his bier,

LXXII.

The blood-hound blindly stumbled, and fell prone
Across the threshold. Something came and prest
His huge head downward, stiffening him to stone.
And Lady Gertrude, passing up alone,
Spread her white arms above the baron's breast.

LXXIII.

The weapons which his lowly coffin bore
His sword and spurs, his helm and shield and belt
Like him, to rest from battle evermore,
Whose long-drawn shadows barred the chapel floor,
She kiss'd them, for his dear sake, as she knelt.

LXXIV.

She laid her cheek upon the velvet pall,
With one long, quivering sigh; and tried to creep
Where the soft shadow of the rood would fall,
'Mid light of sunrise and of tapers tall,
Upon them both, and there she fell asleep.
* * * * *

LXXV.

She woke no more. But where her track had been,
On that last night, became a haunted ground.
And when the wild wind blows upon the sheen
Of summer moonlight, there may still be seen
The phantom of a lady and a hound.

THE COO OF THE CUSHAT.

OVER the smooth lawns, broider'd with violets,
Over the hedges of snow-white thorn,
Over the billowy, pink apple-blossoms,
The musical coo of the cushat is borne.

In the still depths of the dim old plantations,
Where the sweet whispering night-wind stirs
The delicate scent from the dew-sprinkled flowers,
It sings by its nest in the tall green firs.

So peaceful, so pure, so divinely contented,
The world out of sight and its true love nigh
Their little grey wings softly folded together,
What dreams I have set to that melody!

I listen at dawn, and I listen at even;
I hear the notes bubbling all day long
Through the woodpecker's laugh and the chirp of the titmouse,
Little dove, yours is the sweetest song!

'Tis not a sad song, though it sets me a-crying
But gladness too deep to be spoken aloud;
Nor forlorn, though 'tis sung in the loneliest places
But only too sacred to sing to a crowd.

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I envy you, though you're so small and so humble;
I wish I were like you, you shy little dove
So far from the world and so free from its passion,
Yet sure of your white eggs and sure of your love.

I wish I were pure from low earthly ambitions,
As quiet and calm and contented as you;
I wish my heart held such a well-spring of music,
That I were as gentle and trustful and true.

Little dove, you were worthy to carry the olive
Over the waters to Noah's host,
To die for the mother of Christ in the Temple,
To be chosen for shrine of the Holy Ghost.

And now you have only to live and be happy,
To rear up your young ones and teach them to coo;
O sing on, and teach **me** the heavenly lessons,
To be faithful and worthy of God's work too.

Teach me so humbly to take what He gives me,
The manifold duties, the great and the small;
Teach me so simply to do what He bids me,
Loving and trustful, and thankful for all.

LOOKING IN THE FIRE.

THE snow falls soft and thick. My cedar bough
Sways up and down, and scratches on the glass.
The wind sighs in the chimney, as I sit,
With elbows on my knees, before the fire,
Resting a crumpled chin in hollow'd palms.

There is great trouble in the cold and dark;
And other girls shrink off and steal away,
To crouch in lonely rooms and look at fires,
And look at their dead joys and living griefs,
But they are pitied. None would pity me.

Friends come to seek them, and lay tender hands
On their bow'd heads and sore and restless hearts.
They find the wound, and drop the healing oil;

The Manor House and Other Poems

They lift the burden off, or make it light.
But they would smile, unless they laugh'd, at mine.

O still, warm fire, you will not bubble up
In mocking flames, your heart will soon be cold!
O wind for you have seen the roses bloom,
And the shrunk petals fall and drift away
You hear, and sob and sigh as you go past!

Is unrequited love so sad a thing?
Ay, ay, but this is even sadder still;
To want to love, and not to have the power
To meet your king at last with empty hands
To be so young, and to have squander'd all!

Alas, alas! to know your wine is sour
To have loved wrong, with love despoil'd of trust,
Dishonour'd love, that mix'd itself with hate,
To see the pearl of price laid at your feet,
And know your wealth is gone for dross and lies!

Ay, 'tis the saddest thing to want to love,
To want to cling, when you have lost your strength
To feel the ashes choking up the hearth,
And think how bright a fire there might have been,
To know when you are loved, too late too late!

GREY.

IS the morning dim and cloudy? Does the wind drift up the leaves?
Is there mist upon the mountains, where the sun shone yesterday?
Are the little song-birds silent? Is the sky all blurred and grey?
Does the rain fall, patter, patter, from the eaves?

Does your glass go down? And does your heart sink in the dreary lull?
Are the strings relax'd and limp, and do the soft notes whine and cry?
Has the damp got in and jarred the chords and spoil'd the melody?
Are you out of tune, belovèd? are you dull?

Has the chill wind found an entrance? Does it sigh and rustle there?
Is it drifting, not the dead leaves, but your dead hopes, all about?
Is it waking up your sorrow while your light is blotted out?
Does your heart seem sad and cold and full of care?

GREY.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Are you listless and discouraged, dear? and does your life look grey?
Does there seem no use in trying? Does your work fall from your hand?
Would you give up the great riddle that's so hard to understand?
Oh, then, go you to your chamber straight, and pray.

Go and pray, and God will give you peace and comfort for your pain
All the misty, dull confusion He will tenderly reform
And the fire of His own Spirit, that shall make you dry and warm;
And your harp—strings shall be strung and tuned again.

Ay, the Lord will put the melody in your heart and soul anew;
So that, howsoe'er unskilled and rude the hands that touch the wires,
There shall come forth beautiful chords of faith and hope and high desires,
Only music that is deep and sweet and true.

Go and work, the clouds will show the silver lining that's behind.
Go to squalid lanes and alleys, where grim want and sickness lurk;
Feed the hungry, soothe the suffering, tell the poor of Christ, oh, work,
And you'll no more hear the rustling of the wind.

Then you'll no more hear the restless, hopeless sobbing over sin,
No more hear the earthly troubles crying, crying from the ground;
For the wings of guardian angels, they shall compass you around,
That the wind shall have no place to enter in.

Then, as wither'd leaves lie browning on the quiet grassy slopes,
As they sink in peaceful earth, and moulder with it as they die,
To help nurture precious seeds for coming summers so shall lie,
Calm and still, your sorrowful memories and dead hopes.

O beloved, work and wait! The sun will shine another day,
On a heart refresh'd, and strong, and green, and cool. The rain and gloom
Are to make the sap run quicker, give the flowers a deeper bloom
We have need for both the golden and the grey.

HOME-SICK.

O TIME, great Healer! canst thou still
The crying hearts that feel the knife?
O great Restorer, canst thou fill
The wide gaps broken out of life
By love and duty's bitter strife?

HOME-SICK.

The Manor House and Other Poems

O Friend, and canst thou, as they say,
Soothe all our troubles on thy breast,
Till, calm in death, they pass away,
And, one by one, are laid to rest
In unknown graves, beyond our quest?

Nay, there's a wound thou canst not ease;
Nay, there's a sickness past thine art.
Ah me! while I'm beyond the seas,
There'll be a sore place in my heart
That, at a touch, will throb and smart.
Nay, nay, with all thy skill with all
The care and cunning thou mayst spend,
Thou canst but weakly patch the wall
That wrench of parting came to rend,
That gap no mason's hand can mend.

And as for buried sorrows one
Hears every sound above its head;
Joys and prosperities may run
With happy footsteps o'er the dead,
This grief of absence feels the tread.
O Time, thy graveyard is a street
Thy graves no sculptured records crown;
Yet this one, trod of many feet,
Still shows the heap'd earth, fresh and brown,
No foot of joy can press it down.

There velvet mosses soon will creep,
And grey and golden lichens grow;
There sweet white snowdrops soon will peep,
And purple violets bud and blow,
From winter's bosom, cloak'd in snow;
There summer lights and shades will fall,
And soft rains patter through the trees;
There slender grasses, frail and tall,
Will weave and whisper in the breeze
'Twill be a grave in spite of these.

PRACTISING THE ANTHEM.

A **SUMMER** wind blows through the open porch,
And, 'neath the rustling eaves,
A summer light of moonrise, calm and pale,
Shines through a vale of leaves.

The Manor House and Other Poems

The soft gusts bring a scent of summer flowers,
Fresh with the falling dew,
And round the doorway, glimmering white as snow,
The tender petals strew.

Clear through the silence, from a reedy pool
The curlew's whistle thrills;
A lonely mopoke sorrowfully cries
From the far-folding hills.

O lovely night, and yet so sad and strange!
My fingers touch the key;
And down the empty church my Christmas song
Goes ringing, glad and free.

Each sweet note knocks at dreaming memory's door,
And memory wakes in pain;
The spectral faces she had turn'd away
Come crowding in again.

The air seems full of music all around
I know not what I hear,
The multitudinous echoes of the past,
Or these few voices near.

Ah me! the dim aisle vaguely widens out,
I see me stand therein;
A glory of grey sculpture takes the light
A winter morn brings in.

No more I smell the fragrant jessamine flowers
That flake a moonlit floor;
The rustling night-breeze and the open porch
I hear and see no more.

Great solemn windows, down a long, long nave
Their shadow'd rainbows fling;
Dark Purbeck shafts, with hoary capitals,
In carven archways spring.

And overhead the throbbing organ waves
Roll in one mighty sea,

The Manor House and Other Poems

Bearing the song the herald angels sang
Of Christ's nativity.

Dear hands touch mine beneath the open book,
Sweet eyes look in my face,
They smile, they melt in darkness; I am snatch'd
From my familiar place.

The summer night—wind blows upon my tears;
Its flowery scent is pain.
O cold, white day! O noble minster when
May I come back again!

To hear the angels' anthem shake the air,
Where never discord jars,
The Christmas carols in the windy street,
Under the frosty stars;

The dream—like falling from the still, grey skies,
With falling flakes of snow,
Of mellow chimes from old cathedral bells,
Solemn and sweet and slow.

To hear loved footsteps beating time with mine
Along the churchyard path,
To see that ring of faces once again
Drawn round the blazing hearth.

When may I come? O Lord, when may I go?
Nay, I must wait Thy will.
Give patience, Lord, and in Thine own best way
My hopes and prayers fulfil.

AWAKE.

CALM as that moonbeam on the wall,
Sleep broods on baby's eyes;
Arms, hush'd and still, but pulsing quick,
Enfold him as he lies;
My brain is full of thronging thoughts,
Strange passions thrill my breast,
My heart aches with a load of love
That will not let me rest.

AWAKE.

The dim years stand about my bed,
They neither smile nor weep;
Like softest kisses, on my face
The little fingers creep.
I hear slow footfalls, in the night
Of fates upon his track,
O love, I cannot let you go!
I cannot keep you back!

Lord, let him shelter in my arms,
Or take us both to Thine;
Or, if a troublous life must come,
Make all the trouble mine:
Or let thy sharp swords pierce my heart
To blunt them for the child,
What care I, Lord, for stain and shame,
So he keep undefiled!

Nay, Lord, I know not what I ask
I know not how to pray:
Hear Thou the crying mother-soul,
And not the words I say.
Do Thou what seemeth good to Thee,
So he be spared from sin;
And, oh! if love can aught avail,
Let mine be counted in.

AN ANNIVERSARY.

I.

AS flower to sun its drop of dew
Gives from its crystal cup,
So I, as morning gift to you,
This poor verse offer up.

II.

As flowers upon the summer wind
Their air-born odours shake,
So, in all fragrance you may find,
I give but what I take.

The Manor House and Other Poems

III.

My tree blooms green through snow and heat;
Your love is sap and root,
And this is but the breathing sweet
Of fairest blossom–shoot.

IV.

An outgrowth of the happy days
In wedded lives begun
Two lives, in all their work and ways,
Indissolubly one.

V.

The force that was to bind us so
We very dimly knew.
Ah, love! it seems so long ago,
And yet the years are few.

VI.

We did not wait for tides to rise,
Nor cared that winds were rough;
They call'd us foolish we were wise;
God gave us wealth enough.

VII.

He only knows what precious change
We took of Him for gold;
What blessing such a narrow range
Of circumstance can hold.

VIII.

No troubles now could memory spare,
No lightest touch of pain;
No hand experience of care
Would we unlearn again.

The Manor House and Other Poems

IX.

Such love surrounds, such beauty lies
On our most common needs,
As silver hoar-frost glorifies
The wayside sticks and weeds.

X.

All trials that are overpast,
All cares that are to be,
But make more sacred and more fast
The ties 'twixt you and me.

XI.

They are but clear lights shining through
The mist that round us rolls;
They are but touchstones, fine and true
For fond and faithful souls.

XII.

They are but fires, to cleanse and clean
Our human love from stain;
For naught of sordid, false, or mean
From these blest fires remain.

XIII.

They are but keys within the wards
Of that last, inmost door,
Where the heart's dearest treasure-hoards
Are garner'd evermore.

XIV.

Ah, dear! our very griefs are glad
Our every cross is crown'd;
We are not able to be sad,
Such comfort wraps us round.

XV.

How calm the haven where we rest,
Now passion's storms are past!
How warm and soft the little nest
Which shelters us at last!

XVI.

How blue, pellucid, and divine
Through all our days and nights,
The clear eyes of our children shine
Like heavenly beacon-lights!

XVII.

We listen to the laughter sweet
Whose echoes come and go,
The music of little feet
That patter to and fro.

XVIII.

And deepest thoughts of God awake,
Who hath reveal'd Him thus,
And, in His goodness, deign'd to make
His own abode with us.

XIX.

To God, in Christ, we kneel to-day
(Whose will on earth be done);
As He hath made us, let us pray
That He will keep us, one.

XX.

Together, may we feel Him stand
About our path and bed;
Together may we, hand in hand,
His royal highway tread.

XXI.

The dear ones He has given, to be
Of His redeem'd the type
Together, may we live to see
Their budding promise ripe.

XXII.

And, O my dearest! may we lie,
In our last night of rest,
Asleep together, peacefully,
Upon our Father's breast.

BY THE CAMP FIRE.

AH, 'twas but now I saw the sun flush pink on yonder placid tide;
The purple hill-tops, one by one, were strangely lit and glorified;
And yet how sweet the night has grown, with palest starlights dimly sown!

Those mountain ranges, far and near, enclasp me, sharply pencilled there,
Like blackest sea-waves, outlined here, like phantoms in the luminous air,
Between that cold and quiet sky, and the calm river running by.

The gum-trees whisper overhead, and, delicately dark and fine,
Their lovely shadow-patterns shed across the paths of white moonshine.
The golden wattles glimmer bright, scenting this cool, transparent night.

What spirits wake when earth is still? I hear wild wood-notes softly swell.
There's the strange clamour, hoarse and shrill, that drowns the bull-frogs' hollow bell;
And there's the plaintive rise and fall of the lone mopoke's cuckoo-call.

And nearer, an opossum flits above the firelight, pauses, peers
I see a round ball where he sits, with pendant tail and pointed ears;
And two are gruffly snarling now in hollows of yon upper bough.

Hark! that's the curlew's thrilling scream. What mountain echoes it has stirred!
The sound goes crying down the stream, the wildest bird-note ever heard.
And there's a crane, with legs updrawn, gone sailing out to meet the dawn.

It croaks its farewell, like a crow, beating the air with soft, wide wings.

The Manor House and Other Poems

On the white water down below its vague grey shadow—shape it flings,
And, dream—like, passes out of sight, a lonely vision of the night.

Ah me! how weird the undertones that thrill my wakeful fancy through!
The river softly creeps and moans; the wind seems faintly crying too.
Such whisperings seem to come and pass across the orchis—flower'd grass.

The darkness gather'd all around is full of rustlings, strange and low,
The dead wood crackles on the ground, and shadowy shapes flit to and fro;
I think they are my own dim dreams, wandering amongst the woods and streams.

The tangled trees seem full of eyes, still eyes that watch me as I sit;
A flame begins to fall and rise, their glances come and go with it.
And on the torn bark, rough and brown, I hear soft scratchings up and down.

Sometimes I hear a sound of feet, a slow step through the darkness steals;
And then I think of yours, my sweet, in spirit following at my heels;
For leagues before, around, behind, part me from all my human—kind.

Coo—ey! the long vibration throbs in countless echoes through the hills.
The lonely forest wakes and sobs, and then no sound the silence fills,
Only the night—frogs' bubbling shriek in every water—hole and creek;

Only a rush of wind in flight, as startled wild—ducks flutter past,
Quivering and twinkling in the light, skimming the shining water fast;
And ripples from a black swan's breast, darting from out its rushy nest.

How is't in England? Sunday morn, and organ—music, love, with you.
That breath of memory, idly born, like a great storm—wind shakes me through.
Ah, darling! bend your head and pray, it cannot touch you far away.

Why do I care? My house of God, beyond all thought, is grand and great!
My prayerful knees, upon the sod, its flowers and grasses consecrate.
And I can see Him in the stars, undimmed by walls and window—bars.

Great Nature spreads her wondrous book, and shows me all her pages fair;
To me the language, when I look, seems but a letter here and there
The very stones beneath me teach a lore beyond my utmost reach.

For all my pain, and toil, and strife, I see so dimly what is true!
O Art! O Science! O great Life! I grasp thee by so faint a clue!

The Manor House and Other Poems

No more of ocean tides I dream than minnows in their shallow stream.

Sea without bottom, without shore, where is the plumb to fathom thee?
O mystery! as I learn thee more, the more thy deeps are dark to me!
But who am I, that I should scan the Divine Maker's mighty plan?

And yet, oh yet, if I could hear that organ—music once again,
My soul, methinks, would lose its fear; and on this troubled heart and brain
Some light of knowledge would be shed, and some few riddles would be read.
* * * * *

UNSTRUNG.

MY skies were blue, and my sun was bright,
And, with fingers tender and strong and light,
He woke up the music that slept before
Echoing, echoing evermore!

By—and—by, my skies grew grey;
No master—touch on the harp—strings lay,
Dead silence cradled the notes divine:
His soul had wander'd away from mine.

Idly, o'er strange harps swept his hand,
Seeking for music more wild and grand.
He wearied at last of his fruitless quest,
And he came again to my harp for rest.

But the dust lay thick on the golden wires,
And they would not thrill to the old desires.
The chords, so broken and jarred with pain,
Could never be tender and sweet again.

IN MEMORIAM.

"He asked life of thee, and thou gavest him a long life, even for ever and ever."

LIFE length of days the time to work and strive
In his Lord's vineyard; to bring heavenly light
Into the drear, dark places of the earth,
And make them fair and fruitful in His sight.

UNSTRUNG.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Life it seem'd all so bright and beautiful once!
It lay spread out before his kindling eyes,
A land of sunny hills, in white mist veil'd,
Of sweet green valleys under summer skies.

Such tender light and tender shadows there!
No dazzling blaze, no savage blots of gloom,
No keen-cut outline of the barren cliff,
No glaring waste, but all one gentle bloom

Of happy, innocent hope, a morning tint
Of pearly grey and gold, with just a shade
Of bright cloud-colour, giving life to it,
He saw not then the havoc death had made.

But soon the white mist melted in the heat
Of noonday, and the wasted fields lay bare
Vineyard of Eden like a bright face, scarred
With sin and shame and weariness and care.

And his vague aspiration took a shape.
"Grant me, dear Lord, if it seem good to Thee,
To labour here, with manhood's utter strength,
O Lord, good Lord, intrust this work to me!

"Let me have time to toil a long, long day
To dig and delve and root out wasteful weeds,
To cut down briars and thorns, and help to plough
Furrows where angels may sow heavenly seeds.

"Give me to foster, with my faith and love,
Frail, early flowers, that fear to droop and fade!
Father, I will not shrink for bleeding hands,
For heat nor cold I do not feel afraid!"

His voice was heard his will accepted. God
Gave deep and true fulfilment to his prayer,
Life life eternal, which should nevermore
The taint of death, or sin, or sorrow bear!

Oh pray, ye blind ones, as the beggar pray'd
When He of Nazareth pass'd by! Oh pray

The Manor House and Other Poems

With simple faith and worship, fear ye not
God's gracious ear will deafly turn away.

Ye know He bids us to tell out our wants,
Knowing them all; give up to Him your will,
And trust Him trust Him. In his wondrous love
He deigns the lowliest longing to fulfil.

Ay, and with that fulfilment which we ne'er
Shall grasp or fathom till we come to see
Our strange, mysterious human life unveil'd
In the clear daylight of eternity.

The beggar ask'd for sight Christ answer'd him,
For his faith's sake, and gave him sight indeed.
Just so **his** silent hands and darken'd eyes
Were lifted once, for grace of "life" to plead.

And God fulfilled his prayer as utterly!
He gave him life the life of saints above,
Beyond all earthly dreaming sweet and glad
An endless life in His eternal love!

THE SILENCE IN THE CHURCH.

(No. 1.)

O HOLY SPIRIT, we entreat,
Send down Thy quickening fire;
Let Thine own presence, dread and sweet,
These waiting hearts in spire.

In every thought and word and deed,
Breathe Thou the breath of life
The fulness of the grace they need
For their appointed strife.

Help them to hold, in clasp of prayer,
The rod and staff of God;
And lead them safely, surely, where
The Christ Himself hath trod.

THE SILENCE IN THE CHURCH.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Give power to speak Thy message, Lord,
To every feeble voice;
May they the true seed cast abroad
Till desert wastes rejoice.

Make strong the toiling hearts and hands,
Keep watching eyes from sleep,
That golden harvests crown the lands
When angels come to reap.

(No. 2.)

Pour now, O lord, all gifts of grace
From Thy most holy dwelling-place;
And let the living flame be shed
On each disciple's bended head.

Light up his soul with light divine,
A star of heaven on earth to shine,
A beacon on life's stormy sea,
To guide the wandering bark to Thee.

Lord, clothe him now in white complete,
In Thine own spirit, pure and sweet;
Let him go forth to labour well,
In truth and strength invincible.

May his calm lips, that whisper now
The yearning prayer, the solemn vow,
Be ready, in the judgment-day,
The faithful servant's words to say

"Lord, I **have** tried, in faithful strife,
To win Thy lambs to light and life;
Lord, I have truly kept for Thee
The awful charge Thou gavest me."

HOLY COMMUNION.

FATHER, for Jesus' sake,
Low at the footstool of Thy throne, I pray

(No. 2.)

The Manor House and Other Poems

That Thou, into Thine arms of love, to-day
My trembling soul wilt take.

Thine eyes can see, I know,
How many a dark and fearful spot of sin
Stains the white garment Thou didst clothe it in,
Once undefiled as snow.

I dare not come alone
Into Thy presence for that sin to plead;
But there is One who waits to intercede
Whose merits will atone.

Into the holy place
He takes the incense of our common prayer,
Which, mingling with His own, ascendeth there
Up to Thy throne of grace.

All too unclean it is,
Too cold and weak, above this earth to rise,
Save He, in love eternal, sanctifies
And hallows it with His.

Therefore accept from me,
Through His hands, now, my weak and wavering will;
And deign my heart's deep longing to fulfil,
As it seems best to Thee.

Pour down Thy healing light
Into the dark depths of my soul this day;
Dissolve the mists and shadows oh, I pray,
Let it no more be night!

Spirit of love, reveal
All hidden sins against Thy blessed name,
That I may weep for them in utter shame
As in Thy church I kneel.

And now, oh cleanse them out!
Make fair again Thine olden dwelling-place;
And let the fruitful streams of love and grace
Compass it round about.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Lord, with repentance, give
Faith, deep and strong, that naught may undermine
Of all that's evil in this world of Thine
Faith that shall breathe and live.

Pour from the hallow'd cup
Our dear Lord's stainless life into mine own;
Put it to my soul's lips so thirsty grown
And let them drink it up.

EVENSONG.

THE sun has set; grey shadows darken slowly
The rose-red cloud-hills that were bathed in light
O Lord, to Thee, with spirit meek and lowly, I kneel in prayer to-night.

I thank Thee for my "daily bread" the sorrow
And the gladness Thou hast given me this day
The strange rich gifts which, through a long to-morrow, Deep in my soul will stay.

I thank Thee for the grace that aye restrained
My passionate will when it was bent for wrong
That fed the soul-lamp when the light had waned, And made the weak hands strong.

I thank Thee that the gentle voice of pleading
Made itself heard amid the whirl and strife
E'en when I walk'd my wilful way unheeding, Telling of light and life.

That in the sad hour of my soul's affliction,
When I look'd backward as from parchèd lands,
The "gracious rain" of heavenly benediction Fell still from outstretch'd hands.

Ay, ay, no earnest hope, no true endeavour,
Has been unanswer'd or unblest'd by Thee:
Thou, Lord, who carest for Thine own for ever, Hast cared indeed for me.

I think of all the blessing and the sweetness
That made the burden of this day so light,
How my home-ties are still in their completeness Wound round my heart to-night;

The Manor House and Other Poems

How Thou hast had my treasure in Thy keeping,
And yet hast spared them to be mine still mine;
How o'er the beds where my loved ones are sleeping Thy folded wings will shine.

And, O my God! I cannot thank Thee duly
No word or deed which Jesus' love will take
Can span the measure of one blessing truly. Forgive for Jesus' sake!

THE RESTING-PLACE.

"Because I live, ye shall live also."

CALMLY the Paschal moonlight now is sleeping
On mossy hillock and on headstone grey,
Where still our Mother holds in faithful keeping
Such as, while living, in her dear arms lay.
Ah! loving and beloved, we know ye rest,
E'en in the grave, upon her hallow'd breast.

Where is the cumbrous robe the flesh the matter
Which held the spirit in such painful thrall?
A little dust that scarce a breath would scatter,
Darkness, and void, and silence this seems all.
Yet somewhere, safe, the waiting body lies,
While the freed spirit is in Paradise.

Ah! in that day, when earth is all refinèd
From death and sin, the darkness and the stain;
When Eden's perfect beauty is enshrined
In unmarred purity and light again;
Transfigured, and "exceeding white as snow"
But still that body it will rise, we know.

The self-same lips that hymn'd the Easter story
With heart of Easter gladness, here, may sing
The song of angels, in the angels' glory,
Around the throne of our Almighty King.
The same feet, which this ancient pavement trod,
May walk for aye the temple-courts of God.

O blessed day, which saw the Saviour risen!
Which told to trembling man that wondrous news
"The grave is not thy body's endless prison,
Thy soul no more in vain for pardon sues.

THE RESTING-PLACE.

The Manor House and Other Poems

From Adam's curse, by Christ's death, thou art free
The Lord accepts this sacrifice for thee."

"Peace be with you" by Him those words were spoken
After the glorious victory was won
After the angel gave that blessed token
To her whose favour'd lips had called him "Son."
Ah! where were peace, if every trembling breath
Strengthen'd the fetters of an endless death?

Where were the peace, if that dark cloud of mourning
From Calvary's hill had never pass'd away?
If our deep night had never known the dawning
Of that mysterious Resurrection-day?
O Christ our Lord! Thou didst indeed release
Thy sinful children, and didst give them peace.

And now we know that Thou art throned for ever,
True God, and yet true man, in heaven above;
That now no power our life from Thine can sever,
That naught shall rob us of Thy gift of love;
That Thou, within the veil, dost intercede
For all who suffer and for all in need.

That Thou art with us here, too, in our sorrow
With us to help in every time of strife,
Dost give to each dark day its joyous morrow,
Dost make us strong with Thine own love and life.
And we may love, and we may come to Thee
In heaven, and share Thy great felicity!

Ay, when the grass upon our grave is sighing
In the cool wind and Easter moonlight fair,
The mortal dust, beneath the violets lying,
Shall rest in hope and rest in safety there,
Till Thou shalt come with Thy celestial train,
And our bright spirit take its own again.

"After Thy likeness," in its sweet perfection,
Shall we awake in that eternal day;
All save the sin shall have its resurrection,
Clothed in Thy glorious immortality.
And we shall stand Thy radiant throne beside,
Blessed for evermore, and satisfied!

"AFTER OUR LIKENESS."

BEFORE me now a little picture lies
A little shadow of a childish face,
Childishly sweet, yet with the dawning grace
Of thought and wisdom on her lips and eyes.

Fair, oval, broad-brow'd face small, delicate head
Transparent skin, with blue veins shining through
All the soft outlines, beautiful and true,
Bring me the echo of the words "God said."

Made "in our image" sure 'tis **that** we see,
God's likeness, in the fair face of a child,
By the world's sin and passion undefiled
Ay, as I look, it seems quite plain to me.

The light wherein the little features shine,
Strange, mystic light, so undefined and faint,
So far too pure for any words to paint
'Tis a reflection of the Face divine.

Some day the earthly shadows will be cast
Across that sunshine it may be to dim
Awhile the visible countenance of Him;
But 'twill be there the likeness to the last.

Some day the lucid waters, in which lie
Pictured those glorious lineaments, will be
Stirred up and troubled like a stormy sea;
But they will yet re-settle by-and-by.

They will re-settle when the soul is still'd,
Its passions, its wild longings, and its pain;
The pure reflection will shine out again
When earth's hopes are relinquish'd, unfulfill'd.

They will re-settle in those after-years
When life's hard lessons have been conned and learn'd;
When this child's beauty will have all return'd,
More lovely for the trouble and the tears.

The Manor House and Other Poems

They will re-settle in the calm of death,
When the sweet eyes are laid asleep, and when
The heart is hush'd. Truly God's likeness then
The mirror clear, unsullied by a breath.

Ah! while I look, and trace each tender line,
I think most of the day when I shall see
The dear face in that perfect purity,
Its mortal features clothed with the divine.

This self-same face, but with the image bright,
Nevermore undefined, and faint, and dim;
This self-same face, yet like the face of Him,
In glory and in beauty infinite.

AUNT DOROTHY'S LECTURE.

COME, go and practise get your work
Do something, Nelly, pray.
I hate to see you moon about
In this uncertain way!
Why do you look so vacant, child?
I fear you must be ill.
Surely you are not thinking of
That Captain Cameron still?

Ah, yes I fear'd so! You may blush;
I blush for you, my dear;
And it is scarce a week ago
Since Gerald brought him here
The day he fell in the hunting-field,
And his pretty horse was lamed.
O child and with your bringing up!
You ought to be ashamed.

Last night I saw you watching him,
And you danced with him thrice;
You turn'd quite red when he spoke to you
Such manners are not nice.
You, Nelly Gray, should not be seen
(I don't wish to be harsh)
Running wild, like the servant-girls,
For a red coat and moustache.

AUNT DOROTHY'S LECTURE.

Not that he isn't a gentleman
From spur to shako-brim
I know good blood when I see it yes,
I will say that for him.
He does not swagger, nor lisp, nor flirt
Has none of those vulgar ways;
And he does not talk like a stable-boy,
As the fashion is nowadays.

In fact, I admire him very much
My dear, you need not fret
I do; he's very different from
The rest of Gerald's set.
He's very handsome, certainly
I don't mind saying so.
He reminds me a bit of your uncle, when
I met him long ago.

He had a silky, long moustache
Of just that golden shade;
And broad Greek brows, with a tint of bronze,
That Indian suns had made.
He was a soldier, too, you know
As big and strong and tall:
He'd just come home when I saw him first
At Lady Talbot's ball.

I remember when we were introduced;
By stealth I look'd him o'er
Such haughty, indolent, gentle eyes,
I never saw before!
I felt so strange when he look'd at me;
I cannot tell you why
But I seem'd to feel he was mine, to keep
And love, till I should die.

'Twas very odd in a moment, too,
Before I knew his name!
But, Nelly O how the world was changed
And brighten'd, when he came!
I was so restless all that night;
I did not want to **see**,
I **felt** where he moved about the room
While he was away from me.

I was jealous I could not help it,
Although I struggled hard
Of the other girls, whose favour'd names
Were written on his card;
They were so rich, and I was poor;
They were so grandly dress'd,
And I so dowdy; and yet, and yet,
I thought he liked me best.

The last long hour he danced with them,
And oh I miss'd him so!
And then I heard our carriage call'd,
And I knew that I must go.
A big lump rose up in my throat
That I could hardly bear;
But, passing through the vestibule,
I saw him standing there.

I knew not where he came from,
But I felt no surprise
When he look'd down from his stately height
With his grave and quiet eyes,
And held his hand for a mute good-night
That said all words could say;
Ah, love! he made me happy then
For ever and for aye.

Well, well, but this is nonsense;
How I am running on!
His golden hair grew thin and grey,
And now he's dead and gone.
There, go and dress for dinner, child;
It's getting late, you see;
And perhaps I'll ask young Cameron
If he'll come in to tea.

THE KIND WORD.

SPEAK kindly, wife; the little ones will grow
Fairest and straightest in the warmest sun.
We talk so often of the seed we sow;
But, maybe, when we think our labour done,
And when we look to gather in the grain,
We'll find these stones, we fling about, again
Strewing the fruitless sod,

The Manor House and Other Poems

Having crush'd down and stunted the sweet life
That bore the likeness of the life of God.
All your hard words of bitterness and strife
Will lie upon their love, as stones would lie;
You think to pick them up, but, by-and-by,
You'll find where they have lain
By the poor, meagre, crooked ears of grain.
You will be sorry then.
Speak kindly, wife; you know not half the wealth
Kind words bring in. Ah! I remember when
I was a little lad, all youth and health,
How I went wrong for want of one, and how
One saved my live ay, keeps it steady now.

* * * * *

My mother died, you know, when I had seen
Only a few days' light; they say her face
Was fair and young and so it might have been;
I cannot tell. But she, who took her place,
Was coarse and hard, and had a shrewish tongue
That fretted all the household into strife.
Ah, how that sharp voice rung
Through ear and heart through all the peace of life!
It drove my father from his home at length,
And drove him to the ale-house, where he learn'd
To drink away the good name he had earn'd,
And drink away his precious health and strength.
I can remember well how he would sigh,
Would sigh, and turn from his own chimney nook;
And how, though wintry winds blew fierce and high,
He fumbled at the door with hands that shook,
And pass'd out slowly, as though caring not
Whither he went. And she, who tempted him,
Was first to see the change to mark the blot
That made his manhood's beauty blurred and dim
But had no mercy and no help for him.
I think I see her now!
Standing, with that red flush upon her brow,
Hurling her stinging insults thick and fast,
As he was sadly creeping through the door;
Until he raised his grizzled head, and swore,
And suddenly struck her, growing mad at last.
Was that the way to better him? Ah, no;
She taunted him, and stung his spirit so,
That what was weakness became sin and crime.
Wife, did you ever hear
What happen'd in that dark and dreadful time?
One night, when I was wide awake for fear,
Straining my baby ears to catch the sound
Of the fierce voices that were storming near

The Manor House and Other Poems

One night, I heard a cry
So sharp! so shrill! a strange and fearful cry
And then a heavy fall upon the ground;
And then and then in the grey morning light
I saw her lie,
With her hard face so strangely still and white,
With a broad purple stain upon her brow,
And dusky shadows on her lips and eyes.
Ah me! ah me! I think I see her now,
Wrapped in that awful death-sleep, as she lies!
I well remember how I cried and shook
In childish terror, and with what a look
I turn'd to all the living faces there,
Seeking in vain,
With the first dreary thrill of my despair,
The one face that I never saw again!
* * * *

I was so young a little lad, a child
And it was hard, ay, very hard, to be
So helpless and so ignorant and wild,
With not a soul to love and care for me.
She, when she storm'd about,
Had roughly used me, and had turn'd me out
Into the streets, to gather what I could
And what I liked of all the evil there;
But he, my father, at odd times he would
Sit, with his arms flung round me, in his chair,
And tell me, as he stroked my curly head,
How he could see the mother that was dead
In my blue eyes and in my golden hair.
And now I was alone quite, quite alone.
Ah, you can never know how I was toss'd
From place to place; how like a thing of stone,
Frozen for want of just a kindly tone,
My heart became all its good instincts cross'd!
And how like some distorted tree I grew,
Barren of all things beautiful and true.
Sullen, and hard, and reckless, I was fit
And ready, when the devil laid his snare
Quite ready to rush headlong into it.
And who was there to care?
In a wild night a well-remember'd night,
When I was prowling in a darken'd street,
Trying to hush the echo of my feet,
Trying to hide me out of sound and sight
Just as I heard the bells begin to call
From a church-tower as I caught a gleam
Of marble pillars, standing white and tall,
And saw the stream

The Manor House and Other Poems

Of tender, mellow light make, as it were,
A shining pathway in the misty air,
 Whither soft footsteps trod
 Out of the world into the courts of God
Just then they found me out
 They who had watch'd and follow'd me so long
They found me as I idly hung about
 That stately doorway; and I felt the strong
Relentless grip upon my arm I saw
The quiet, cruel, smiling eyes, and saw
 That I was bound.
That night I lay awake upon the ground
 Of a dark cell. The moonlight quiver'd in,
Tender, and pure, and sweet, and hover'd round
 Trying to cool the raging fire within
My eyes and heart; like tender mother's touch,
 It wander'd over lips, and hands, and hair.
I think I feel it now it came with such
 An unexpected pity to me there!
It was so dark and I was all alone.
 No gentle tone
To comfort and to keep me from despair!
 A blessing had been sent ah, now I know,
 Just by that little moonbeam; its white glow
Lay on my heart, till the tears fell like rain.
The long-endured, sullen sense of pain,
 So dark and deep,
Was stirred and touch'd, and almost lighten'd, when
 I plunged my face into my hands to weep.
Somehow the boyish spirit came again,
With just a little of its softness, then;
 The burning fever cool'd, and I could sleep.
Ah, I remember, as I lay there, she
 I never knew came gliding through my dream,
As through the shadows that encompass'd me
Glided the tender moonshine; I could see,
 Dim and yet purely bright just in the gleam
That cross'd the prison-floor a girlish face,
Divinely beautiful an angel's face;
 And long robes, fair and white,
 Shadow'd with wings that shone like living light.
I seem'd to feel, e'en in that gloomy place,
 The soft, sweet kisses stray
 Over my feverish forehead as I lay;
But when I woke, and look'd with glistening eyes
 Up through the grating, I could only see
The pale rose-colour dawning in the skies
 From whence that message had come down to me.
I was so lonely! Yet more lonely far
 In the bright day-time, when my sight was bound
 By cold, hard, scornful faces all around,

The Manor House and Other Poems

Instead of prison—wall and iron bar.
More lonely ay, so much more lonely! They,
 My judges and accusers, and the crowd
That witness'd all my misery that day,
 They knew not that my spirit was as proud,
As sensitive to suffering, as theirs.
They knew the sweet hearth—love, that makes the cares
 And storms of life so light!
And the great safeguard against sin and crime
 Stood round about their homes by day and night.
But I had no one in that bitter time,
 No one, I thought no one to stand by me,
 No one to teach me or to care for me!
I pass'd through fire as I stood waiting stood
 In that great, dreary, dreadful, crowded place;
 A fire that scorch'd out even the faintest trace
My tearful dream had left, of good and true.
* * * *

Wearily, wearily, I laid me down
 Within my little prison—cell that night;
And then I long'd for death to come, and drown
 The sinful, lonely sorrowful earthly life
 That always seem'd at strife
With God and man. I know it was not right
 I know it, dear; but it is hard to be
Shut out from all the pleasant, genial life
 That makes life worth! and it was hard for me.
And so I lay, and fix'd a vacant stare
 Upon my grated bars, now dimly drawn
Across a grey—blue thunder—cloud; for there
 The moonlight came, and there the rosy dawn
Peep'd in a kind and friendly face to see;
One thing, at least of peace and purity.
And dark thoughts brooded in my heart and brain,
 Such wicked, reckless thoughts! I wonder'd why
 I had been born to so much misery,
 Born to so large a heritage of pain!
Sure it was wrong, I murmur'd bitterly,
 Setting my teeth again.
And then there slowly drifted through my mind
 Vaguely and darkly, gaining shape at length
A thought whose likeness it were hard to find
 In any common words. I felt the strength
Of stern endurance and resolve die out,
And felt a fierce new strength creep round about
 My smouldering heart. Eager I turn'd to gaze
At my new vision and the warning doubt
 Died in the passion that was set ablaze.
What was the vision? Wife, I scarcely dare

The Manor House and Other Poems

Paint it again.

It's very memory enfolds such pain!
A river, dark, and deep, and dreadful, where
The moaning eddies swirl'd about the piers
Of a high bridge; lights twinkling in the air;
Unnumber'd voices thrilling in my ears;
And one one only speaking to me there
Calling from out the deep,
Dark water, in its slow, reluctant sweep. . . .
An awful space of shadows; then the gleam
Of steely ripples, lying far below,
Like bright snakes coil'd together on the stream;
Ah, wife, you know! you know!
I saw but did not see the grey-blue cloud
Change into black; the thunder roar'd aloud;
And shining arrows glanced across the floor,
Striking a blaze upon my staring eyes;
Darling, these are such painful memories,
I cannot tell you more.

* * * * *

But in the day that follow'd when the sun
Was high in heaven, and the crimson flame
Danced on the bleak white wall above me one
Bearing a sweet and holy message, came.
He found me lying motionless, alone,
Passionately quiet, and as hard as stone;
And he stepped softly, and bent over me
Until I saw his face
Fair as an angel's, with a shining crown
Of wavy golden hair a boyish face,
But shadow'd with a wondrous dignity.
As he bent down,
His grave eyes looking deeply into mine,
The dignity seem'd born of the divine.
Ah me, he was so good! so true! so kind!
He melted that black shadow on my mind
With his sweet, earnest tones; I sat and wept
Just like a child; and a new life and light
Once more, as he sat by me, gently crept
Into my spirit, that was dark as night.
He did not talk as if he were above
The sins and follies of his fellow-men;
But all his words were sympathy and love
Or I had never listen'd to them **then**.
He did not once reproach me, though he heard
Because he would not ask it every word
I had to tell him; but he counselled me,
Framing his lips in that humility
Which seems the stamp of a good man and true.

THE KIND WORD.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Saying not, "I know this," but "God has said;"
Saying not, with the solemn warning, "you,"
But mostly "we;" yet over all he shed
The high and special dignity he bore.
One felt he was a priest, as if he wore
His surplice standing in the church, instead
Of on a prison-floor.

* * * * *

And those kind words they brought a blessed morn
Unto my soul; I never wish'd again
That I might die; I never felt forlorn,
As if my life were given me in vain.
But I went out into the world, and fought
Against its legions, with an arm of strength!
Wife, though I often falter'd, what he taught
Nerved me to courage, and I won at length.

THE CROWN OF THORNS.

"And unto Adam He said cursed is the ground for thy sake. Thorns shall bring it forth."

"And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on His head."

IN bitterest sorrow did the ground bring forth
Its fatal seed. Thine eye beheld the birth
Beheld the travail of accursèd earth;
E'en then, O Lord! in greater love than wrath!

Thou sawest the sin that none could gather out
The vineyard cover'd with the thorn and briar;
Thou sawest the fair land ready for the fire
And still Thy pity compass'd it about.

Thou, O most merciful! didst spare the brand;
Thou didst redeem the Paradise of God;
The thorns were rooted from the stubborn sod.
In pain and toil, by Thine own blessèd hand.

How was our path to heaven o'er grown with sin
Bramble, and thistle, and the poisonous weed!
Though hearts should break, and patient feet should bleed,
And strive and struggle, none could walk therein.

The Manor House and Other Poems

And Thou didst call us when we went astray
Didst make our high road straight for evermore;
And, for our guidance, passèd on before,
Leaving Thy shining footprints in the way.

Still do the wild thorns hedge us round about;
Still grow the thistles from the ancient stock;
Still trails the bramble on the blasted rock
But we can dig, and Thou wilt pull them out.

Ay, we can work oh, help us in the strife!
Labour is sweet, for Thou dost share it now.
And we shall eat, in sweat of furrow'd brow,
Not earthly food, but Thine own Bread of Life.

And there are thorns of suffering left behind
Sorrow and loss that weigh our courage down;
But, ah! we know Thy sacramental crown
Was made of sin and sorrow, intertwined.

Give us of Thy sweet patience, Lord, we pray.
We would not spurn them with rebellious kicks,
Nor fret and strive, for Thou canst feel the pricks;
We too would wear them as a crown for aye.

We would put on Thy likeness we, the least
And most unworthy. Ay, each piercing thorn,
In Thy name patiently and meekly worn,
Shall bear a blossom for the bridal feast.

Look down, O Brother with the yearning eyes!
Behold us kneeling at Thy bitter cross!
Grant us a share in all Thine earthly loss,
That we may share Thy gain in Paradise.

O weary Head! we see Thee drooping now
Beneath that diadem of mortal pain:
We see Thee sprinkled with the scarlet stain;
Drop down the chrism on **our** polluted brow!

O sacred Head! pale, beautiful, benign
On **our** heads be Thy precious blood, we cry!

THE CROWN OF THORNS.

The Manor House and Other Poems

Lo, the destroying angel, passing by,
Shall spare to smite us reverencing the sign.

SEED-TIME AND HARVEST.

"Thou waterest her furrows, thou sendest rain into the little valleys thereof; thou makest it soft with the drops of rain, and blessest the increase of it."

FRET not thyself so sorely, heart of mine,
For that the pain hath roughly broke thy rest,
That thy wild flowers lie dead upon thy breast,
Whereon the cloud-veiled sun hath ceased to shine.

Fret not that thou art seam'd and scarr'd and torn;
That clods are piled where tinted vetches were;
That long worms crawl to light, and brown rifts, bare
Of green and tender grasses, widely yawn.

God's hand is on the plough so be thou still.
Thou canst not see Him, for thine eyes are dim;
But wait in patience, put thy trust in Him;
Give thanks for love, and leave thee to His will.

Ah! in due time the lowering clouds shall rain
Soft drops on my parch'd furrows; I shall sow
In tears and prayers, and green corn-blades will grow;
I shall not wish the wild flowers back again.

I shall be glad that I did work and weep
Be glad, O God! my slumbering soul did wake
Be glad my stubborn heart did heave and break
Beneath the plough when angels come to reap.

Be glad, O Father! that my land was till'd
And sown and water'd, in the harvest-day
When Thou wilt cast the weeds and tares away,
And when with ripen'd fruit Thy barns are fill'd.

Keep me my faith, I pray. I cannot see,
And fear to intermeddle with Thy work.
Oh, though I wince and fret, I would not shirk
The discipline that is so good for me!

The Manor House and Other Poems

I know that Thou wilt make my grief to cease,
Wilt send the cool, soft drops of healing rain,
And make my scarred heart green with springing grain,
That after patient waiting cometh peace;

That after beautiful labour I shall rest,
And after weeping have my fill of joy.
Thou breakest down to build up, not destroy;
Thou doest right, O Lord! Thou knowest best.

THE CANDLE OF THE LORD.

"The Spirit of man is the candle of the Lord."

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

OUR spirit ay, our own! the tree whose fruits
Have never fail'd the sign upon the door
'Twixt us and God's intelligent dumb brutes, That parts us evermore!

Our spirit last, best gift still unbereft
Of treasures stored in Eden's happy land;
One fragment of the human, as it left The Divine Maker's hand.

That seal of our high birth He did allow
Toe a unharm'd the sin and woe and strife;
That remnant of our godhead wanting now Only the "breath of life."

Only the breath of life, whereby the Lord
Made use to be His equals, fit to fill
His throne our free wills brought into accord With His own sovereign will.

Our spirit not the feeble soul which came
With our dishonour'd state and its new needs;
And not the feebler heart of sin and shame, That daily breaks and bleeds.

Our spirit our unshatter'd lamp still ours
Fill'd with the heavenly essence, as of yore,
To bear a light, to light the midnight hours, And light the wreck to shore.

Ay, 'tis the same the same! It hath not shared

THE CANDLE OF THE LORD.

The Manor House and Other Poems

The mutilation and the curse and blight;
When the destruction fell, the lamp was spared Only deprived of Light.

O God! and hath it ever ceased to grope
For light, and yearn and cry for light to come?
In blackest gloom, ere revelation spoke, While yet the Christ was dumb,

Thou knowest it search'd for every wandering ray,
And never wearied of the weary quest;
And fed and fenced and treasured, day by day, A glimmer in its breast.

O holy Dove! O Grace! O Love! come down
Our spirit with Thy perfect light inspire!
Circle each candle with its flaming crown, Its cloven tongue of fire!