

Little Seal-skin

Eliza Keary

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| <u>Little Seal-skin</u> | 1 |
| <u>Eliza Keary</u> | 2 |
| <u>LITTLE SEAL-SKIN</u> | 4 |
| <u>THE LEGEND OF THORA</u> | 9 |
| <u>SUNBEAMS IN THE SEA</u> | 11 |
| <u>THE GOOSE-GIRL</u> | 12 |
| <u>ASDISA</u> | 15 |
| <u>THE MILL STREAM</u> | 18 |
| <u>* * * * *</u> | 20 |
| <u>DISENCHANTED</u> | 21 |
| <u>RENUNCIATION</u> | 22 |
| <u>THROUGH THE WOOD</u> | 23 |
| <u>PRESENTIMENTS</u> | 25 |
| <u>THEODORA</u> | 26 |
| <u>TWO</u> | 29 |
| <u>A MOTHER'S CALL</u> | 31 |
| <u>MAVOURNEEN</u> | 32 |
| <u>KATHLEEN</u> | 33 |
| <u>SNOWBELL</u> | 35 |
| <u>* * * * *</u> | 43 |
| <u>* * * * *</u> | 54 |
| <u>DAYS</u> | 55 |
| <u>Evening</u> | 58 |
| <u>DAWN..OR.THE.TWILIGHT.CHORUS</u> | 60 |
| <u>OLD AGE</u> | 61 |
| <u>A FLOWER TO THE MOON</u> | 62 |
| <u>A SKETCH</u> | 63 |
| <u>A PORTRAIT</u> | 64 |
| <u>LUCY</u> | 65 |
| <u>AGNES</u> | 66 |
| <u>* * * * *</u> | 68 |
| <u>DOCTOR EMILY</u> | 69 |
| <u>SLEEP</u> | 73 |
| <u>DEATH</u> | 74 |
| <u>HOMELESS</u> | 75 |
| <u>INCOMPLETE—COMPLETE</u> | 76 |
| <u>A SAINT</u> | 77 |
| <u>CHRISTINE AND MARY</u> | 79 |
| <u>CHRISTINE to MARY</u> | 80 |
| <u>MARY to CHRISTINE</u> | 81 |
| <u>CHRISTINE to MARY</u> | 83 |
| <u>MARY to CHRISTINE</u> | 84 |
| <u>CHRISTINE to MARY</u> | 89 |
| <u>MARY to CHRISTINE</u> | 96 |
| <u>CHRISTINE to MARY</u> | 104 |
| <u>MARY to CHRISTINE</u> | 113 |
| <u>A FAREWELL</u> | 116 |

Little Seal-skin

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- LITTLE SEAL-SKIN.
- THE LEGEND OF THORA.
- SUNBEAMS IN THE SEA.
- THE GOOSE-GIRL.
- ASDISA.
- THE MILL STREAM.
- * * * * *
- DISENCHANTED.
- RENUNCIATION.
- THROUGH THE WOOD.
- PRESENTIMENTS.
- THEODORA.
- TWO.
- A MOTHER'S CALL.
- MAVOURNEEN.
- KATHLEEN.
- SNOWBELL.
- * * * * *
- * * * * *
- DAYS.
- Evening.
- DAWN, OR THE TWILIGHT CHORUS.
- OLD AGE.
- A FLOWER TO THE MOON.
- A SKETCH.
- A PORTRAIT.
- LUCY.
- AGNES.
- * * * * *
- DOCTOR EMILY.
- SLEEP.
- DEATH.
- HOMELESS.
- INCOMPLETE--COMPLETE.
- A SAINT.
- CHRISTINE AND MARY.
- CHRISTINE to MARY.
- MARY to CHRISTINE.

- A FAREWELL.

LITTLE SEAL-SKIN.

THE Fisherman walked up the hill,
His boat lay on the sand,
His net was on his shoulder still,
His home a mile inland.
And as he walked amongst the whin
He saw a little white seal-skin,
Which he took up in his hand.
Then "How," said he, "can this thing be?
A seal-skin, and no seal within?"
Thus pondered he,
Partly in fear,
Till he remembered what he'd heard
Of creatures in the sea,—
Sea-men and women, who are stirred
One day in every year
To drop their seal-skins on the sand,
To leave the sea, and seek the land
For twelve long hours,
Playing about in sweet sunshine
Amongst the cornfields, with corn-flowers,
Wild roses and woodbine:
Till night comes on, and then they flit
Adown the fields, and sit
Upon the shore and put their seal-skins on,
And slip into the sea, and they are gone.

The Fisherman stroked the fur
Of the little white seal-skin,
Soft as silk, and white as snow;
And he said to himself, "I know
That some little sea-woman lived in
This seal-skin, perhaps not long ago.
I wonder what has become of her!
And why she left this on the whin,
Instead of slipping it on again,
When all the little sea-women and men
Went hurrying down to the sea!
Ah! well, she never meant
It for me,
That I should take it. But I will,
Home to my house upon the hill,"
Said the Fisherman and home he went.

The Fisher dozed before his fire,
The night was cold outside,
The bright full moon was rising higher
Above the swelling tide,

Little Seal-skin

And the wind brought the sound of breakers nigher,
Even to the hill side;
When suddenly
Something broke at the cottage-door,
Like the plash
Of a little wave on a pebbly shore;
And as water frets in the backward drain
Of the wave, seeming to fall in pain,
There came a wailing after the plash.—
The Fisherman woke, and said, "Is it rain?"
Then he rose from his seat,
And opened his door a little way,
But soon shut it again,
With a kind of awe;
For the prettiest little sea-woman lay
On the grass at his feet
That you ever saw:
She began to sob and to say,
"Who has stolen my skin from me?
And who is there will take me in?
For I have lost my little seal-skin,
And I can't get back to the sea."

The Fisherman stroked the fur
Of the downy white seal-skin,
And he said, "Shall I give it her?
But then she would get in,
And hurry away to the sea,
And not come back to me,
And I should be sorry all my life,
I want her so for my little wife."
The Fisherman thought for a minute,
Then he carried the seal-skin to
A secret hole in the thatch,
Where he hid it cleverly, so
That a sharp-sighted person might go
In front of the hole and not catch
A glimpse of the seal-skin within it.
After this he lifted the latch
Of his door once more,
But the night was darker, for
The moon was swimming under a cloud,
So the Fisherman couldn't see
The little sea-woman plainly,
Seeing a fleck of white foam only,
That was sobbing aloud
As before.
"Little sea-woman," said the Fisherman,
"Will you come home to me,
Will you help me to work and help me to save,
Care for my house and me,

LITTLE SEAL-SKIN.

Little Seal-skin

And the little children that we shall have?"
"Yes, Fisherman," said she.

So the Fisherman had his way,
And seven years of life
Passed by him like one happy day;
But, as for his sea wife,
She sorrowed for the sea always,
And loved not her land life.
Morning, and evening, and all day,
She would say
To herself—"The sea! the sea!"
And at night, when dreaming,
She stretched her arms about her, seeming
To seek little Willie,
It was the sea
She would have clasped, not he—
The great sea's purple water,
Dearer to her than little son or daughter.
Yet she was kind
To her children three,
Harry, fair Alice, and baby Willie;
And set her mind
To keep things orderly.
"Only," thought she,
"If I **could** but find
That little seal-skin I lost one day."
She didn't know
That her husband had it hidden away;
Nor he
That she longed for it so.
Until
One evening, as he climbed the hill,
The Fisherman found her amongst the whin,
Sobbing, saying, "My little seal-skin—
Who has stolen my skin from me?
How shall I find it, and get in,
And hurry away to the sea?"
Then "She shall have her will,"
Said he.

So
Next morning, when he rose to go
A fishing, and his wife still slept,
He stole
The seal-skin from that secret hole
Where he had kept
It, and flung it on a chair,
Saying, "She will be glad to find it there
To-day
When I am gone,

LITTLE SEAL-SKIN.

Little Seal-skin

And yet
Perhaps she will not put it on,"
He said, "Nor go away."
In sleeping his wife wept;
Then the Fisherman took his net,
And crept
Into the chill air.

The night drew on—the air was still,
Homeward the Fisher climbed the hill.
All day he'd thought, "She will not go;"
And now "She has not," pondered he.
"She is not gone," he said. "I know
There is a lamp in our window,
Put ready on the sill
To guide me home, and I shall see
The dear light glimmering presently,
Just as I round the hill."
But when he turned, there was no light
To guide him homeward through the night.
Then "I am late," he said,
"And, maybe, she was weary
Looking so long for me.
She lays the little ones in bed
Well content,
In the inner room, where I shall find her,
And where she went,
Forgetting to leave the light behind her."

So he came to his cottage door,
And threw it open wide;
But stood a breathing space, before
He dared to look inside.
No fire was in the fireplace, nor
A light on any side;
But a little heap lay on the floor,
And the voice of a baby cried.
Rocking and moaning on the floor,
That little heap
Was the children, tired with crying,
Trying to sleep,
Moaning and rocking to and fro;
But Baby Willie hindered the trying
By wailing so.

Then "Wife! wife!" said the Fisherman,
"Come from the inner room."
There was no answer, and he ran
Searching into the gloom.
"Wife! wife! why don't you come?
The children want you, and I've come home."

Little Seal-skin

"Mammy's gone, Daddy," said Harry—
"Gone into the sea;
She'll never come back to carry
Tired Baby Willie.
It's no use now, Daddy, looking about;
I can tell you just how it all fell out.

"There was a seal-skin
In the kitchen—
A little crumpled thing;
I can't think how it came there;
But this morning
Mammy found it on a chair,
And when she began
To feel it, she dropped
It on the floor—
But snatched it up again, and ran
Straight out at the door,
And never stopped
Till she reached the shore.

"Then we three, Daddy,
Ran after, crying, 'Take us to the sea!
Wait for us, Mammy, we are coming too!
Here's Alice, Willie can't keep up with you!
Mammy, stop—just for a minute or two!'
But Alice said, 'Maybe
She's making us a boat
Out of the seal-skin cleverly,
And by and by she'll float
It on the water from the sands
For us.' Then Willie clapt his hands
And shouted, 'Run on, Mammy, to the sea,
And we are coming. Willie understands.'

"At last we came to where the hill
Slopes straight down to the beach,
And there we all stood breathless, still,
Fast clinging each to each.
We saw her sitting upon a stone,
Putting the little seal-skin on.
Oh! Mammy! Mammy!
She never said good-bye, Daddy,
She didn't kiss us three;
She just put the little seal-skin on,
And slipped into the sea!
Oh! Mammy's gone, Daddy—Mammy's gone!
She slipped into the sea!"

THE LEGEND OF THORA.

Written for the Pen and Pencil Club at Aubrey House.

UP the breezy hill slope, just as day had begun,
Bounded golden-haired Thora, child of the Sun.
"Come, kiss me, May-morning, the winter is done!"
Sang golden-haired Thora.

"Who sings in the dawn?" said the wicked hill Troll,
That sheltered hard by in his dark hidden knoll.
Then he rose from his litter and looked, and the Troll
Saw golden-hair'd Thora.

She passed the Troll's door with a shudder, yet bent
Her way still up the mountain, and ever she went
Singing onwards, so happy and innocent
Was golden-haired Thora.

"That singing shall cease," said the Troll, "by my head!"
Having no heart nor soul, he pledged that instead.
"I'll silence that Spring-bird," the wicked Troll said,
Of golden-haired Thora.

Then he chose three illusions out of his store,
In one he attired himself, and two more
Took loose in his hand, then walked out from his door
After golden-haired Thora,

Who had climbed and had climbed, and for breath standing still,
Was this Spring singing-bird half way up the hill,
When the Troll overtook her his vow to fulfill
On golden-haired Thora.

"Sweet bird of the mountain, fair Thora," said he;
Then she started and turned her head hastily,
Wondering who the companion could be
Of golden-haired Thora.

And lo! a young fisherman stood at her side,
The same she had thought of since last Christmastide,
When he spoke to her kindly and she had replied,
Golden-haired Thora,

Said the Troll to the maid, "There's a palace hard by,
As gold as the sun and as wide as the sky,
Let us build up our home in it, maid, you and I;
Look, golden-haired Thora!"

Little Seal-skin

Then he touched her frail hand, and led her a wee
Little way round a corner of rock, just to see
That palace of gold. There it stood certainly,
For golden-haired Thora.

But "No!" said the maid, "that is too mean a place
For my footsteps to roam in, my beauty to grace,
I should count its long corridors only disgrace
To golden-haired Thora."

Said the Troll to the maid, "There's a cottage below,
In a snug, sheltered corner, about a stone's throw
From the palace; a nook where wild dewberries grow;
Look, golden-haired Thora!"

Then he guided her down a rough crag or two,
And showed her a little low hut; 'gainst the blue
Of the sky rolled the blue chimney smoke. "There with you,"
Said golden-haired Thora.

The Troll opened the door, the maid led the way,
"It's just the right size for us two," she 'gan say,
"To live in and work in and rest in and pray,"
Said golden-haired Thora.

The Troll opened the door.—It was only a stone
From the side of the hill.—Thora went in alone,
Right under the ground. Such enchantment was thrown
Over golden-haired Thora.

Then back to his litter of leaves and rank grass
Went the Troll. "There's an end of thy song, silly lass!"
Said the Troll who had brought all this evil to pass
On golden-haired Thora.

But she—well it chanced that one curl went astray
From the rest of her hair in the mountain doorway,
One gold, golden curl that keeps wandering alway
From golden-haired Thora.

Up the sides of the mountains, in May-time, a glare
Curls over the furze of gold everywhere,
From that Spring singing-bird, the glorious bright hair
Of golden-haired Thora.

SUNBEAMS IN THE SEA.

THERE is no cloud in all the sky,
No shadow on the sea;
Upon the soft, warm sand I lie,
Over my head the sea-gulls fly,
And the white rocks shelter me.

Far off I see blue waters wide,
And wide blue heavens meet;
The broad sun rises ever higher,
And smallest waves like dancing fire
Come near and kiss my feet.

Come nearer, nearer, happy waves,
With voices old and new;
Come rippling up the golden sand,
And break in laughter round my hand,
That I may laugh with you.

So bright you are, I half believe
You're robbers every one;
That you crept up at earliest morn,
And when the splendid day was born
Stole fire-sprites from the sun.

Out of the purple deep you came;
Whilst in their home at play,
The little sun-sprites glanced about:
With dripping hands you drew them out,
And carried them away.

Now underneath your mantles blue
I see them whirl and swim;
Are they so glad to be with you?
Or look they at the sun, and do
They long to be with him?

The rippling waves creep near and near,
All up the golden shore;
Far, far and wide the sunbeams play,
And what th' unwearying waters say
Makes music evermore.

THE GOOSE-GIRL.

Written for the Pen and Pencil Club at Aubrey House.

A TALE OF THE YEAR 2099.

THE little goose-girl came singing
Along the fields, "Sweet May, Oh! the long sweet day."
That was her song.
Bringing about her, floating about, in and out through the long
Fair tresses of her hair,
Oh! a thousand, thousand idlenesses,
Spreading away on May's breath everywhere.
"Idleness, sweet idleness."

But this was a time,
Two thousand and ninety-nine,
When singing of idleness even in spring,
Or drinking wind-wine,
Or looking up into the blue heaven, was counted a crime.
A time harsh not sublime;
One terrible sort of school-hour all the year through,
When every one had to do something, and do it by rule.
Why, even the babies could calculate
Two and two at the least, mentally, without a slate,
Each calling itself an aggregate
Of molecules.
It was always school, schools all over
The world as far as the sky could cover
It, dry land and sea.

High priests said,
"Let matter be Z,
Thoroughly calculated and tried,
To work our problems with, before all eyes;
Anything beside that might prove a dangerous guide,
Xs or Ys, unknown quantities,
We hesitate not at once to designate
Fit only now and for ever to be laid aside."
So you see,
Everything was made as plain as could be,
Not the ghost of a doubt even left to roam about free;
Everybody's concern
Being just to learn, learn, learn—
In one way—but only in one way.
Where then did the little goose-girl come from that day?
I don't know.

Though, isn't there hard by
A place tender and sunny,
We can feel slid between
Our seen and unseen,
And whose shadows we trace on the earth's face
Now and then dimly? Well, she
Was as ignorant as she could ignorant be,
And the world wasn't school to her
Who came singing,
"Idleness, sweet idleness," up to the very feet
Of the professors' chairs,
And of the thousand thousand pupils sitting round upon theirs.
Who all up sprung,
At the sound of the words she sang,
With "No, no, no, no; no,
There are no sweets in May,
None in the weary day.
What foolish thing is this, singing of idleness in spring?"

"Oh! sunny spring,"
Still sang the little goose-girl, wondering
As she was passing.
But suddenly stayed for a moment, basking
In the broad light, with wide eyes asking,
What "nay" could mean to the soft, warm day?
And as she stayed,
There strayed out from her
May breaths, wandering all the school over.
But now the hard eyes move her,
And her lips quiver,
As the sweet notes shiver
Between them, and die.
So her singing ceases: she
Looking up crying, "Why,
Is my May not sweet?
Is the wide sky fair?
Are the free winds fleet?
Are the feet of the spring not rare,
That tread flowers out of the soil?
Oh! long hours not for toil,
But for wondering and singing."

"No, no, no, no," these reply,
"Silly fancies of flowers and skies;
All these things we know,
There is nothing to wonder at, sing,
Love or fear.
Is not everything simple and clear,
And common, and near us, and weary?
So, pass by idle dreaming,

Little Seal-skin

And you if you would like to know
Being from seeming,
Come into the schools and study."
"Still to sing sometimes when I have the will,
And be idle and ponder,"
Said the goose-girl, "and look up to heaven and wonder."
"What! squander truth's time
In dreams of the unknown sublime?
No." "Then ignorant always," said she,
I must be;" and went on her way,
"Sweet May, sad May."
Hanging her head,
Till "The mills of the gods grind slowly," she said,
"But they grind exceeding small;
Let be, I will sit by the mills of the gods and watch the slow atoms fall."
So patient and still, through long, patient hours,
As she laid her heart low in the hearts of the flowers;
Through clouds and through shine,
With smiles and with tears,
Through long hours, through sweet years,
O years—for a year was only one school-hour in
Two thousand and ninety-nine.

And see,
Who are these that come creeping
Out from the school? Long ago,
When idlenesses out of her tresses strayed the school over;
Some slept of the learners, some played.
These crept out to wonder and sing,
And look for her yonder,
Away up the hills amongst the gods' mills—
And now
"Is it this way?" they say,
Bowing low;
"O wise, by the heaven in thine eyes,
Teach, we will learn of thee.
Is it No, is it Yes,
Labour or idleness?"
She, answering meekly, "This—
Neither No, nor Yes,
But, come into God and see."

O the deeps we can feel; O the heights we must climb;
O slow gentle hours of the golden time—
Here, the end of my rhyme.

ASDISA.

AN ICELANDIC LEGEND.

ASDISA, daughter of th' Icelandic chief,
Hrut by the Saga named, sat at her door
One summer's day eight hundred years ago,
Singing, and it was thus Asdisa sang:—

"Niord came, Niord
The old rough wind,
And Skadi slid
Adown the crags,
The frozen crags,

Till young Frey came,
And the ice-crag
Melted beneath
Her, and Niord
Fled, the rough wind."

And as she sang, the fierce Berserker passed,
Who was her father's bondman; he staying
His walk, gazed on her, listed the soft flow
Of her simple music, and love came
Like Frey upon old ice-crag to his heart,
Melting it into tenderness. "Woman,
The fierce wolf dies within me, and my spirit
Becomes a dove," he said, "listening to thee.
Thy father calls me bondman, yet is bound
More by my strength than I slaved by his gold;
And he shall listen to me whilst I pray,
Bargain for, nay, demand, Asdisa, thee,—
Fair for the strong, the strongest thine most fair."
She smiled a little cruel smile, she spake
Silver-sweet words untrue, then rose
And passed the Berserk to her home again.
But he, finding her father in the field,
Gently, yet proudly, as with right to ask,
Asked him for his Asdisa the most fair.
Hrut looked at him askance, feared the strong man.
Thought craftily, and said, "I will reward
Thee with her for a great work thou shalt do.
Hew me a road straight forward to the sea
From where we stand, heart-through yon rock between."
Then the Berserker felt his lion-rage
Of strength, not anger, come on him, and tore

Little Seal-skin

Huge stone from huger base, as one might pull
Pebbles from gravelly heaps, throwing them wide,
Straight in at the rock's mouth which he had cloven,
On to the very heart cleaving his way,
Until night came with rest, and sleep, and flitting
Of spirits from the bodies of sleepers,
Each in its natural shape truth-carven.
So is it in dim Northland now as then.
A fox came out of Hrut, his wily soul,
Long-tailed and hairy, a low-bodied thing,
Smelling the ground, creeping from side to side
Warily, in dark places, and behold
From the fair maid's white bosom, dusky wings
Upheaved, and, falcon-head with greedy eyes.
She rose and flew, Asdisa, falcon-souled,
To where the Berserk lay, for she had thought
Of him ere sleeping, scornfully, saying:
"Shall my hand touch a slave's?" She flew through night,
And Hrut the fox-souled followed where she led.
At length they reached the defile where he lay,
Amongst th' uncertain shadows of rude stones
Heaped up and broken. There she stayed, and poised
Upon a rock, and sang in her own voice
Out of her falcon throat snatches of song:

"Summer woods,
Doves cooing;
Bitter floods,
Love's rueing.

Kill the dove
Where he coos,
Baby love,
Ere he rues."

She sang, and from the sleeping giant rose
A silver-wingèd dove beneath the moon,
Glanced by the singer like a living beam,
And flew into the leafy woods beyond.

Three days he worked, and slept three moonlit nights,
One with the sea's deep music in his ears,
And the fourth day-break stood upon the shore
'Midst creamy ripples, and a broad road stretched
From the free sea to fair Asdisa's home.
He went to meet her walking towards the sun,
To greet her with the day's first glory on him.
But wily Hrut, who day by day had watched
The giant Berserk trembling, was prepared
With wily welcome, having dug a deep
Cave, which he'd filled with water to the brim,

ASDISA.

And hewn a stone to close the mouth of it.
So when the Berserk clasped his hand and claimed
His daughter, Hrut made answer, "Son, not slave,
I welcome you; but you are weary with toil,
And shall refresh your limbs ere fair Asdisa
Double my greeting." Then he led the man
To the cave's open mouth. "Plunge in," he said,
"And out that way where it shelves up to light."
There was no way but shelving down to night,
For Hrut first drew the grave-stone over him,
Then called Asdisa, and she came and stood
With him upon the cruel stone, and sang,
The sea behind, her fair face towards the sun.

"In the warm wood,
Frey, seven days,
Seven nights in the
Wood Barri,
Sighing for Gerd.

"Come to my arms,
Frey, my white
Gleaming arms,
Through fire,
Through flood,
To Frey's desire.

"On a gold hill
Sleeping, Odin
Found her.
To my white
Gleaming arms,
Come to my arms,
O Frey."

So did she sing, and the clear music fell
Thick-noted through the water on his brain,
And the Berserker saw her tender form
Beneath him; moving, melting upward through
The water, moving, melting down; and his
Arms clasped nothing, and his ears closed, and his
Eyes saw nothing, and he died whilst she
Was singing.—Cruel Asdisa, fair Asdisa!

THE MILL STREAM.

THE mother slept beside the fire,
The child stood at the door,
He looked at the little room behind
And the sunny fields before.

Mother has slept for half an hour,
And she is sleeping still,
Father works in his garden,
A long way up the hill.
Old John comes slowly down the road
With his waggon and his team;
This is the day for me to play
By the beautiful Mill Stream.

And if my mother should awake
(But I do not think she will)
She'd say, "I know he'd never go
Down to the dangerous Mill."
Sleep, mother, sleep, and then, and then—
I'll quickly be there and back again.

He turned and left the cottage
Without one parting look;
Ran quickly down the grassy slope,
And stood before the brook.
How still the wheel is waiting,
As if 'twere in a dream;
O! surely I may stop and play,
Mother would call it safe to-day
Beside the boist'rous stream.

I see the rushes growing
A little from the land;
I see a round white stone
Resting upon the sand,
And I can see there's room for me,
Just room for me to stand;
He said, then raised his rosy arm,
And stretched his dimpled hand.

But the wheel is still no longer,
Its pleasant dream is gone;
The miller has begun his work,
And turned the water on.

The child looked up to listen
To the Mill Stream's rumbling moan;

Little Seal-skin

The water tossed its foaming spray,
Dashed furiously upon its way,
And swept him from the stone.

Downward the river bore him,
Amongst the sedge and sand;
And there he still is lying,
With the rushes in his hand.

Ever at golden sunset
There comes a wailing scream;
And sobs and moans sweep round the stones
Of the treach'rous Mill Stream.

Little Seal-skin

* * * * *

The mother weeps beside the fire,
The father is on the hill;
The waggoner still drives his team,
The water turns the mill.

The sunny folds have looked since then
As bright as they looked before;
But the child will never stand again
In the opening of the door.

* * * * *

DISENCHANTED.

I TOOK my heart up in my hand,
I climbed the hill,
That superb height on which you stand;
And my strung will
Found only sweet
The labour that it was to reach your feet.

I poured my life out at your feet;
I almost ceased
To breath or be; my heart scarce beat;
No flutter teased
My calm; strength fast
Struck through my soul, that worshipped, loved, at last.

But then I looked up at your face,
And your self spoke;
My stung soul shuddered from its place
As my love broke
Wild from its chain,
And rebegotten in the womb of pain.

I dragged my life up from the ground,
And went forth bare,
(I had not found, I had not found)
Through sharp, stern air
Alone I went,
Alone I go, through vast abandonment.

RENUNCIATION.

AWAY, little tender heart from me, away!
I will not keep
Thee fluttering in the cage I made so strong,
My love, that should have held thee long!
Thee, aye!
Thou didst lie quietly once, asleep;
Awake, dost beat
Against the golden wires.
Oh! stay, panting dear pain upon my passion—fires
That scare thee so.
Lo! they shall part and free thee, sweet.
One life's-drop on thy wing—
A sting?—Yes, that might break so frail a thing—
No, no; no, no;—fly free!
See, I can bear the smart for thee;
Will thee no ill.
Little trembling heart, from me away!

THROUGH THE WOOD.

OUTSIDE,

A world in sunshine;
Upon an afternoon
Once in June.
Such a wide,
Deep light-flooding, we were almost
Drowned in it where we stood,
Nellie and I; but inside the Wood
Clean stems grew close to each other; overhead
The intertwined light branches threw
Sweet shade on the rough ground.
I said, "Nellie,
Let us walk into the tall Wood."
She, putting her hand in mine,
Led me on softly, and so replied.
We made the only sound that there was,
With our footsteps crushing
The light tumble of leaves on scant grass;
Not the ghost of a bird's song under
Any cover of bush.
So along and along
We went, pushing
Our way where the tangled wood came,
Neither inclined for talking. As for me,
It was all I wanted, to walk by Nellie;
And she——. O! no blame
To the rapt wonder in her face.
This was Nellie—
The great silent glory
Of the beautiful day
Had found a place that he could stay
In—Nellie—
And wrote her through with his story.
So she passed on silently,
Walking by me,
Heaven's temple by me.
Heaven is full of love,
I thought, over and over,
And said to my heart, "Hush!
You are happy, certainly."
Just then, from above,
Came three notes of a thrush,
Satisfied, low, out of a full breast;
Then Nellie broke silence, and said,
"You know we shall part presently, you and I.
At the end of the Wood. Friend,
I've a favour to ask of you;—
I may call you friend, and won't tell

Little Seal-skin

A long tale; one word's best.
This little packet—well,
Give it to Robert,
Into his own hand.
Thank you. He will understand.
I knew you wouldn't mind it for me.
You're not hurt?"
"I—Oh, no!" I understood.
After that, silently,
We walked on to the end of the Wood.
* * * * *

Outside,
A world in sunshine;
She with her hand in mine:
Such a wide, dark flood;
I died in it, where I stood—
By the side of Nellie.

PRESENTIMENTS.

SPINNING under the Great World Tree,
Yggdrasil, Nornir, the sisters three,
Singing noiselessly there in the skies,
Hidden in the deep blue away from our eyes.
Fair fates catching the wandering gold,
Weaving it nimbly, fold into fold,
Glibly, heedlessly. Ha! but what pull'd
Just a thought astray there, the fingers of Skuld?
A knot in the thread, double gold, or a grey
In the sun-lighted doom? Either way
The Fate lingers an instant, whilst over our heads
She lifts to the sun that caprice in her threads,
To see clearly, to shape it, perhaps, but the shade
Falls across our dim prescience, a spirit-hand laid
On our pulses that beat, now in hope, now in dread,
Presentiments, shadows from Skuld's lifted thread.

THEODORA.

SEVENTY to-day—my birthday!
Am I an old man,
Then? When I began
To write a letter or two
This morning, it had slipt through
My memory, till the date came,
Twenty-seventh of May.
Well, my work's play,
Now, I suppose—the pretence
Of an old man. Theodora,
Child, it's my birthday,
Daughter! There, there—the same
Slip of the mind; sense
Of things near doesn't fail me;
Only the dear, dear past; nothing's clear
In the dark behind. Theodora—
It's the mind—dense fog o' the mind and gloom.

In my old chair,
In the old room,
On my birthday evening,
In sweet May,
The day over and quiet. There
By the little stool, kneeling at play—Theodora.
No, no, forty years ago, perhaps, one spring,
The spring of Theodora.
Patter away, little feet,
Round the room;
Chatter away, little sweet
Voice, low little voice. Come
Close to my knee, little one.
What! the room's empty—I'm alone.

It grows dark
In the room, in the street. Hark!
There are children's voices outside;
They come in from the dusk, through the wide,
Low window. The children are playing,
Singing, saying, We've been out a-Maying.
Real live children, not Theodora who died;
No—who forsook me,
Who broke me, whose disgrace crushed me.
Who can tell?
It was some devil overtook me,
Jealous of joy that flushed me,
To provoke me with curses,
And pushed me to hell—

THEODORA.

Into hell, with flame in my head. What became
Of thee, little one, Theodora?
What part has she won?

Children's voices outside singing.

"Willie pulled the golans
By the river from the slush and the sedge;
Cicely found the violets
Hiding under the hedge;
Margaret gathered the white, white thorn,
Near the sparrow's nest,
Where wee bonnie birdlings were hatched i' the morn."

Theodora gathered the white thorn,
Theodora carried the hawthorn,
Sweet and white, in her breast.

Children.

"Mary is supple and tall;
She can spring
For a branch, and cling
Like a weed to the wall."

Supple, and tall, and slight,
And merry, my delight
From morning till night—Theodora.

Children.

"But Lizzie is taller, and Grace,
Grace was our Queen
Of the May. She is just seventeen."

Seventeen! Theodora,
In her simple girl's robes, her young face
Smiling under her curls;—one embrace,
And Good-bye only, hastily,
Without saying why.

Theodora,
Are you gone, then, my little one?

Children.

"Over and done, merry day! Good-bye!"

Little Seal-skin

Good-bye?—Theodora!

TWO.

IRENE.

ONCE again to the river, Paul,
To the river
Over again say it all, all
Again, that never—
Did you say never again, Paul,
We should clasp hands sitting close by the river
For ever?"

PAUL.

"In the warm shade, Irene, here,
Past the old tree
Ripples on the old ripple, dear,
On, just as we
Remember it many a year,
Sitting close, dear, where you'll sit without me,
Irene.

You'll forgive, Irene, friend-wife—
Nay, you'll approve
The pledge I have pledged in their strife,
Hatred and Love.
Is't most yours or mine, dear, my life?
Take it, tyrants, but no evil can move
From above

One supreme, the absolute right,
That we adore;
Oppression defy in that might,
Wage ceaseless war
Against wrong. Who falls in the fight,
Martyrs press over him, whilst they deplore,
Evermore.

You kiss me, my own;—can you share
All my blame, know
Me counted a criminal, dare
Seek me so low
As the prison-gate, darling,—bear
To look on my shame, Irene, and so
All hallow?"

"There, there, at your cell night and day."

TWO.

Little Seal-skin

"But, Irene,
When they take me to death that way,
Dear?" "Then I'll be
By the scaffold, Paul." "Will you stay
With rest in your eyes **there?**" "There, Paul, trust me."
"Irene!"

A MOTHER'S CALL.

COME back, sons, over the sea!
Strong limbs I bore,
Ye are mine still!
Do you rise, do you move to me?
Do you hear there, across the tossing brine,
Sons?—for the great seas swell;
I smell the breath of them, I hear the roar of them,
Leaping, tossing, toppling over one another,
Lapping up to the shore,
Lashing the rock—furies,
What do they come for?
Sires of yours, yearsfull agonies—
Home with a wild lament?
Seas, is it this you bear?
No. But the times that come,
And the thunders I hear,
And the rent wide apart in her garment
That covered us, blinded us, wound us—
Chains ground that bound us,
That gyved us, sword that drank at our heart!
Leap to the rock, waves!
Leap to the land, sons, O braves!
Over graves, upon blood-trodden graves
Plant your feet!
Come, times, God-revenge,
Slow, sure, complete!

MAVOURNEEN.

MAVOURNEEN is a priceless gem,
Jewelled her robe from throat to hem,
She's crowned with a rare diadem,
Mavourneen.

Her throne is pure gold, but not fit
For one so strangely fair to sit
Upon, and yet she honours it,
Mavourneen.

Slaves every moment throng her feet
With eager eyes upraised to meet
Each least desire of hers, most sweet
Mavourneen.

But, O! she wears the plainest gown,
Her dear head never crowned a crown,
Only my heart makes her renown,
Mavourneen.

And her gold throne I spoke about
Is only built of love, without
Any possible flaw throughout,
Mavourneen.

My thoughts are born in chains, they move
All round and round her in one groove,
Living to live for her I love,
Mavourneen.

KATHLEEN.

Written for the Pen and Pencil Club at Aubrey House.

SHE left the talking and laughter,
She went to the fairies' glen,
Looked into the trembling water,
And whispered, "Fairy Gwen,
Come, listen to me for a moment,
I've a favour to ask, Queen Gwen."

Then a sweet sprite parted the wave
With swan-white hands from her face,
Whose blue eyes a whole heaven gave
Back to the blue, boundless space,
And, "What is it that you would crave,
Kathleen," she said, "of my grace?"

She answered, "If I could be fair,
Flower-fair, Queen Gwen," said she,
"If I had your beams on my hair,
Perchance he would look at me;
But I am a little plain maiden,
And, oh! there is no one but he."

The fair sprite leaned on the edge
Of the wavelet tipped with gold,
Stretched her swan-hand into the sedge,
And let it a flower enfold:
A small, black-centred water-weed,
With a little crest of gold.

And she said, "There's death at the core,
But a rim of glory round;
And if fairness be your heart's store,
Kathleen, you must kiss the ground.
Yes, die and be buried, Kathleen,
And blossom in flowers all round."

"Then shall I be fair when I'm dead,
And if, if he passes by,
Will he wonder, praise me?" she said.
"But, oh! Queen Gwen, must I die?
Is that the one way to be fair?
I cannot," she cried bitterly.

The gentle sprite shivered beneath
Cold waves of the leaden water,
Kathleen walked away from death

Little Seal-skin

Into the talking and laughter.
Kathleen dreaming her day-dreams,—
Which way did the will-winds waft her?

SNOWBELL.

A LEGEND OF SUMMER.

IN July, when the year has eaten deep
Into the breast of summer, when the hours creep
Slowly, in a kind of drunken sleep,
Over each other, they're so satisfied
With the luxury, the tenderness, and the pride
Of the great time—when the air is all
Light and heat, even without sunshine—
When the green of the earth and the blue sky incline
Each to each, the trees
Drinking deep of heaven, and the sky taking shade from these—
When birds begin to hush
Their singing in tree and bush—
When the rose's blush pales by the flush
Of the ripe geraniums—when the mountain ashberries
Are growing red like cherries,
The petals of the large white lily yellowed over with down,
From its own self overblown—
When fruits are sweetening and corn ripening,
All at full height, toppling over, swaying
Between blooming and decaying;
A mystery, a sort of chasm between
Pleasures, crosses, treasures, losses,
Joy and sorrow, yesterday and to-morrow—
This is the dim land of no-being, the quaint, sweet land
Of spirit, fairy, dreaming, ruled by the wand
Of a wild power seated firm on either hand,
Whom yet we neither see, nor understand.
Look what I have found, here upon fairy-ground,
Written in cabalistic letters all over the daisies!
Who will thread the mazes
Of the mix'd words, interwoven phrases,
Fairy writ? Quiet thrush up there,
And you, O all beasts, fishes, birds in earth, sea, or air,
Listen to the fairy history of Snowbell, the most fair.

A little babe, who, on a winter's night,
Snow-white and softly falling as new snow,
On her queen mother's pillow did alight;
There lying rare,
And spotless fair,
All fairy-wise bedight.

Hush! for the soft knell

Little Seal-skin

Is ringing over the snow,
Ringing for the mother to go—
Snowbell, Snowbell!

Growing through spring to summer, first a child,
Delicate, wild
Fragrance of heaven, like what snowdrops hold
Hidden in the pure swell of their bosoms cold,
As they foretell the lily;
Then, slipping through
Her bud-life, fair and fairer grew.

She walks white amongst the lilies,
Her hair floats wide upon the quivering air;
She dons the sunlight for a crown, to bear it
Only; there is none to share it,
Yet she stoops to wear it.

She is our purity, say the lilies, our sister, queen;
Do you see the little green
Branch of a tree there, tenderly
Tipping her shoulder?
By free airs made bolder,
Lo! its motions enfold her,
Snowbell, happy graces that hold her.

Look, the birds come hopping out of the wood
From the cool shade,
Stopping just in the flood
Of sunlight, cooing for Snowbell, queen-maid,
Watching her, catching her,
Wooing her through the green glade.

The wood dove curves his supple throat
For glee of her; the blackbird's note
Drops in a sweet surprise
Of love taught by her liquid eyes.
Swallows sail low,
With poised wing scanning her curiously.
Thrushes and linnets follow;
The skylark crouches nigh;
Pert robin trips forward daintily;
Whilst proudly at her side,
Through brake and tangled grasses,
The peacock drags his glory, heeding nought
But glory, straying wide as Snowbell passes.

Skirting the wood she goes,
Through the long morning hours,
Softly, to the awakening of the flowers.
See their delicate blooms unfolding,

SNOWBELL.

In the dawn of her beholding!
Is she kissing yon wild white rose,
On the tips of its leaves, with her ruby lips
Stooping over them, pressing to gather
A sweetness?—nay, but to give one rather,
That is the end of her caressing.
Such a large sweetness, lo! it slips over
The little frail petals, swelling so
That it crushes them flat; crush round it, cover
Your pearl rose—No!

Then the rough earth shares it, daisies and clover,
And wild bees hover
About these to sip
The Rose-slip.

Blow, pure wind, from the meadow,
Blow near, blow far,
O sweet air of the meadow,
How magical sweet you are,
Is't with the breath of kine?
Rise, rise, from the low river side;
Blow wide
Wine of the lowland demon, rich and strong;
No! you belong
To Snowbell, this fair day,
For you are pure and sweet,
Because her feet incline your way.

Incline and pass
Over the emerald grass,
Feet, white, and soft, and fleet.
The large-eyed cattle watch her going
Adown the field to the magic hollow;
They love the pastures where they graze,
They move to gaze
Upon her face, to trace her ways.
Upheave slow limbs and follow,
Follow, follow her with gentle lowing.

To the hollow that dips
In a gap of the hill
That sits in the demon's lap—
The wide-mouthed hollow has misty lips,
It moves them to and fro;
They feel about, suck in, swell out, and blow
Little puffs of fog right off to the meadow.

Little loose mist-balls—look, one, two,
Gracefully swimming; the sun looks through,
And they glitter, and shimmer, and dive, and pass

SNOWBELL.

Little Seal-skin

To the upland, skimming the flower of the grass.

By fifties, by hundreds, more and more,
Swelling out, crowding up from the demon's door.

Crouching and leaping and gliding.
Ah! one between her and the sun,
Snowbell, guiding
Fantastical motions such way
As to puzzle her day.
She is snatching it—see—
The frail plaything, swaying it,
Bringing it close to the fair face,
Pressing her throat,
With fond touch delaying it,
Letting it float
Through the loose hair astray—
Now clutching its hiding-place,
Tossing it high,
Once, twice, and thrice rapidly.

Till, slidden in her breast unbidden,
It rests there,
She unaware,
Thinking it frolicked in the wide air.

So and so, adown the meadow
As the day grows, she goes
To the mouth of the hollow.

And lo! the misty lips move to and fro,
Glow, and quiver, and smile
Like a soft summer haze
To beguile
Her, Snowbell, who lingers awhile,
Whose eyes shine in amaze
As pile rises on pile
Of gold mist-wreaths,
The demon breathes.

Ay, stay the small feet.
She reaches her hands
Every side of her, fingering the mist where she stands,
That subtly spreads wide of her,
Mist that will swallow
Thee, sweet summer rose—ah! drawn into the hollow.

Snowbell, Snowbell, O! what a clatter
The birds make, now they see what's the matter.
Snowbell, Snowbell!
"Is she gone?" "Hush." "Did you see her go?"

SNOWBELL.

"No, but the robin did, or the thrush."
"I? Oh! no, no, no."
"Snowbell!" "Can nobody tell
Which way in the broad day?—"
"Well, well, well."
So, snatching the half-notes
Out of each other's throats
Before the sound can flow,
Clamouring and stammering they go,
Just in the fashion of their dawn-twilight chatter.

Now one by one the kine
Slow-paced come down,
And gentle-faced incline
Their eyes into the mist,
With no surprise that it has sucked her in,
Yet do they seem to list
Some stir therein,
They deem may bode of her: what is't?

They hear and cannot tell,
Snowbell, and will not leave
The margin of her sight for whom they grieve,
The brink of their delight,
But sink adown and lie
I' the mist there drearily,
Like spectres large and grey,
Chewing for cud the golden fog alway.

But she, drawn in stealthily, stops
As the mist-curtain drops—
O magical hollow—behind her,
And smiles as she sees the deep day, and wonders.
In thy heart the wise water,
That knows and can speak,
Lies asleep.
Almost her eyes' laughter
The silence doth break,
And she draws in her breath.
Is it death as she ponders,
Or swoon in the lap of the noon?
For asleep, and asleep, and asleep is the hollow.

In the charmed rest,
Her hair falling flat over shoulders and breast,
Hands prest each to each, hanging low,
Feet carest by the water's brim,
Innocent eyes looking in, a dim minute or so,
Snowbell unheeding,
How the wide, wild uncertain spirit time is speeding!

Noon that lingers,
Noon that flies,
Magic moments, mysteries,
Spirit fingers turn thy pages,
Book unwritten, midday, ages;
Spirits flitting through the leaves,
Unwitting of who joys or grieves;
Spirits wise and full of follies
To the brim;
Who shall lose and who shall win,
Skim the hour, or drown therein
At your whim?

Water singing.

"Snow is white,
Sunshine is sweet,
The sky is fair as violets are,
Snowbell has lilies for her feet,
She is fair and she is sweet,
And pure is night.
How soft the wing is of the dove,
And Spring is tender, what is love?
Deep as the seas,
Untold and millionfold, like worlds i' the height;
And she is love, and she is sweet and fairer far
Than these or anything, than all things are."

Sings the water, singing in sleep,
In a dream,
With a noise like the voice
Of some strange, hidden bird,
Dimly heard from afar,
Asleep, and the lisps of the sound,
Growing dimmer, creep wide round the rim;
Seem to die,
Lapse back from the brim;
Suck in to the heart, sweep out again, lie
On the crest; fade and swell,
Without rest, "Snowbell,"
In a dream.

Hours and hours—Lo! she is weary,
Fallen beside the water, with her cheek upon it,
Her coral lips apart: she would have spoken,
But that sleep came upon her heavily,
And the intent was broken
Into sighing. Now and anon a little wondering sigh,
Hours upon hours in magic slumber lying.

Speak, gentle night winds,
Stir the grass;
Wake, move amongst her hair,
Creep sweet into her breast;
Yea, kiss her lips, and say,
"Snowbell, that wert most fair, this day
Thou hast no peer,"
Once, twice, and thrice upon her lips so dear.

Wind sings.

"Fresh as the eyes of the dew,
As the sea's white foam on its crest,
As the scent of the flowers I carry,
Wild thyme, and the bee-sipped lime,
Till I faint with the weight and tarry
Through the long, hot hours, as I rest
On the wings of the noon;
The outspread wings that quiver
From a heart whose life at the brim
Thrills every sense with emotion,
Till these reel and swim
With the life of the life intense,
Till motion vibrating ever
Seems to close in its own excess,
And the breath of delight touches death."

But she, O mad caress,
Who kissed the day with her smile,
Who drank of the mystic hour,
Who toyed with the guile of the demon's breath,
With the mist of the wile of his power;
Who carries the bulb in her breast,
The bright mist ball in a nest
Of innocent snow—

Now cold as marble lies,
As smooth and clear the cheek, and covered eyes,
In the arms of the wild will, still.
Is it well? Is it woe?
Snowbell.

Clear, softness of the midnight air,
All gentle sweeps o' the wind,
Lie down and die.
Dimness and any tenderness or mystery
That, with a nameless sound,
Crept in about the hollow from the sweet sunset,
Looking round and lingering, slink ye behind;
Go, leave a clear, hard place,

SNOWBELL.

Moonlight shine strong upon her face,
Still in the chill night,
And mournful wise low laid.

What is it casts deep shade
Betwixt her and the skies,
Lo! shooting upwards, higher, higher?
A red soot flake out of the devil's fire, Ho!

Shaping a strange shape, I wis,
Whirling and changing alack!
A chariot flame-winged, living-wheeled on the track
Of her sleeping, drawn up close where she is.

See heavily and mournful wise,
Still sleeping as she lies,
Uplift is she;
Languidly on her breast
Clasped fingers rest,
Across the mist-ball magical;
Whilst fall
Her robes into the blackness of the air,
That drowns her yellow hair;
Now in the chariot laid,
Alas! fair maid.

Burn, turn, fiery tongues, lo! they shoot
Into traces, each flame from its root
At the chariot-head, stride
Devils' horses, that shake
The flakes of the night off wide
Into the blackness that clings.
Flame-wings plunge and sway,
Living wheels turn.
Away, what delay, chariot? Do you quake
At the weight of your freight,
At the wave of her sun-dipped hair,
At the weight of your fear of her fair?

But away and away
To the frozen country,
Swiftly. Hist!—
Till the night die pitifully for this,
That she hath slept away,
Till the sun, I wis,
Opening his door so bold,
To greet her, shall behold
Only a vanishing mist,
And a dewdrop or two upon his threshold.

Little Seal-skin

* * * * *

Ha! the sharp air,
Snowbell, Snowbell!
"Where?" with a little sob, she cries; "come
All the long dream through here,
Into cold, clear, keen Ruggeddom?"

Up, up, alone,
Startled maid. Chariot gone—
Art afraid? But what fell
Over her elbow
On to the snow
Just now, as she propped herself from the ground
And looked round?

The mist, frozen tight,
Lying fair, smooth, and white
In the cold. Let it lie!
And, she gone, presently
Three passing by
Will hold on their way,
When "Surely," shall one say,
"Some God,
Building up there a world in the immense air,
Carelessly out of his hod
Let fall this sweet small stone."
And one—
"'Tis but a frozen flower!"
And one—
"Yea, give it me, be this pearl my life's dower."

So wistfully uprist, see,
Through the chill, sweet air, wide wanders her sweet will,
All lovingly the still,
Cold daylight taking
To that pure bosom at her lone awaking.

Which way shall her feet range?
East, west, or south, or north,
Who bids her forth?

Fair face prest slantways 'gainst the tremulous air,
Heart's flutter hushed—what listeth she?
By white beams kist,
Over the long, low sweep of the snow?
Bells ringing merrily.

Ringling, ringling, ringling high
In the air with soft, wild joy,

* * * * *

To the arch of the sky;
Ringing tenderly down to the earth,
Yet silver-sweet, not wholly
Hushed with alloy;
Ringing crisply, sounding slowly,
Touching rim of melancholy
With the lip of mirth.

"Golden green, or changing white,
Crimsoning wine, chrysolite;
Blue of ocean, blue of fire,
Jasper, jacinth, sapphire,
Beryl, opal, chrysopras;
All emerald has
Come and pass;
Golden gold and glowing eyes,
Rest of meadows, depth of skies;
Changing water,
Wine of love, of woe, of laughter.
Chrysopras, golden green,
April leaflets sun between;
June coppice, frozen breath,
Is it sleep, or is it death?
Mimic rainbow, bleeding day,
Purple midnight, step of fay.
Over the mountains, brothers bold,
Beryl, chrysopras, moonlight cold."

Ringing, rippling over the plain,
Seven brother-dwarf-chimes, faltering, fain,
Dim towards the mountains, merrily, high,
Over the mountain-tops, hushed in the sky.
Over the mountains, where seven dwarfs dwell,
Come through the silver chimes, pretty Snowbell,
To the rock side of Ruggeddom well—

Up the jagged steps
To the snowed-ledge out from the grey,
With the stunt wide house on it, lo!
And the door ajar, brushing the snow.
Climbing up, creeping close, peering in, is she?
Is the fairy house empty?
Then come in,
One little foot in the doorway,
Over the threshold!
Be bold, ah! be bold, Snowbell! One, two!
The whimsical elf things can't hurt you.
Frisky, tricky, elfish things!
A minute ago
They were all pranking, I know.
Look at the gnarled chair,

* * * * *

Little Seal-skin

Standing a-cock there!
And the little kettle up in the air,
Hiding its wings, stops its hissings.
Seven quilts on the seven low beds,
Flopping up and down,
Twisting, turning over,
Making believe to cover
Their seven little brown
Master-dwarfs' heads.

Pot on the fire dripping—
See the rich gravy!
Fire-irons skipping;
Now all, craftily, as they are able,
Drawing close to fit places,
With a sort of hush
And surprise on their no-faces,
So to wipe out all traces
Of pleasantry,
Noiselessly,
If possible.

Till with a general sigh,
Inaudible, and a shy
Flutter of love unseen,
Their almost-hearts and no-hearts between,
For Snowbell, the natural fairies' queen.
Lo! each in silence stayed
Before her, fairest maid.

She just within,
Feet drawn together,
Wide eyes wondering;
Little chin
Lifted awry,
Suddenly
Wondering why she is wondering.
All is so simple and still,
Lying fair opened wide to her will—
The dwarfs' home, they gone,
And the long day before her to live there alone.

Seven stools there are, curled, malapert;
Each one touches she
With one finger carefully.
Do they hurt her? or why
Turns she timidly now, brushing by
Towards the chair
That stands empty, arms wide, all astare,
Resting there for an instant,
Still birdlike, now here, and now there,

* * * * *

Little Seal-skin

With no content anywhere?

Until every one of these elfish things she has fingered,
Knows too
Down into the very heart of each what it is meant to do;
Understands, inly fluttering,
What the little sprites are muttering
Inside the very molecules of the wood,
Or the iron, or the tin,
They are shut in.
Sees the forms unseen,
Knows them all through and through,
For evil and for good,
Snowbell, the Elves'-queen.

Who, rearing her slim form up high
Presently, and lifting a little white finger,
"O all you whimsical
Furniture of the dwarfs' home,
I'm a white summer ray, come
To winter in Ruggeddom!
Will ye learn from me
To be graceful, and sweet, and orderly?"
Sayeth she.

And hark! from the room
What sounds come, mixed in one,
Sweet and heavy,
Wavering and strong,
Like the hum of a honey-bee,
Wandering along
From feast and from sip,
At the tip of content i' the hot sun!
One and many, many and one,
All the little elf things together
Murmuring in answer to her.

Ready to act daintily,
To be sweet and serviceable.
Lo! with motion swift or slow,
Moving gently to and fro,
Always at her notion.

Now, all being orderly, Snowbell,
Sitting in a nook of the room,
Looks out in the face of that quaint elf place,
Wondering how soon its dwarf masters will come
To sleep above ground, in their fay home;
How they will look, and what they will say,
Finding her there,
Speaking her rough, or speaking her fair.

* * * * *

Pondering, and anon
Singing little snatches of song
As the day wears along.
Now, peering in wonder
The low door under,
At the sunflushes over the snow;
As daylight slants low,
As daylight grows grey,
As the last glimmer blinks in the eyes of the day,
As the shadows all,
Great and small,
Fold themselves up and hide away behind the bushes.

Rain Song.

"Dropping down with the west wind;
Clattering, setting all the trees chattering;
Sliding swift to the tips of the leaves;
Peering about with bright, round eyes;
Hiding in cracks o' the ground;
Pattering all the dry stones over,
With a sound—who grieves? There
Caught, do you see, by her long dripping hair,
In the tenderest branches of the trees;
Wet, all wet, from her feet to her knees;
Soaked to the arch of her head;
Tangled and tost in the arms that caught her;
Shattered with rain laughter!
Peep under the leaf-cover;
Swoop through, O west wind,
Sweep in asunder—
Upon a day, Fay Emerald."
Song of the rain.

Sun Song.

"Upon a day,
At her wheel,
Fay Emerald;
Gold-beams upon the grass floor,
Her door ajar into the land of dreams."
Song of the sun.

Water Song.

"Drip,
Creeping over the hard ground
Water-drop, lonely,

* * * * *

Little Seal-skin

Meeting, kissing, running on in a hurry—
One, two, three,
With a little rush tumbling
Edgeover hundreds—O so many!
Through the gorge grumbling,
Sweeping out free,
Overspreading the wide, low, reach placidly;
Heaven in the eye
Lapping the green—
Emerald, Emerald, ice-enthralled.
O, dead summer in a frozen sea!"
Water song.

"Upon a day,
When life and death meet,
Meet and mingle, and hurry the earth along."
Song of the spring.

"Upon a day
When death and life hold tryste,
When long suns wane,
When cold shoots down to the flower roots,
And pain bears sway again."
Song of the mist.

Hush, for the tweek, tweek, of young birds in the hollybush,
For the rush of dry leaves in the strong eddies' gush!
O song, O song, little sudden, sweet song,
Fade and flush—
For what call, what replying,
Here joying, here sighing,
Pulsing over here, dying.

Thus, through twilight to midnight,
From sick day to night's prime—
When through the midnight steal
Bells, bells, bells.

"Work time,
Rest time,
Silver chime,
Morning music, evening rhyme;
Morning rime, evening dew,
Labours many, favours few;
Climb, climb
Up the jagged slope wearily,
Glittering, slim tree,
Shower moonlight on the grey,

* * * * *

Little Seal-skin

As we pass through the broken way,
Beryl, opal, chrysopras.
Golden queen of the hard night,
Kiss the face of chrysolite.
Heavy heart in life apart,
Jacinth, sapphire, jasper,
Every heart a heavy heart.
What demons clasp her, sorrows hold her!
Work a day, each axe on shoulder;
Eyes in the heavens a thousand bold,
All snowed over is our threshold."

So stumbling up to the door
That was just a thought open, or a little more;
One after another
Each dwarf brother,
Clustering together,
With a lamp acock in each cap's brim;
All their lights mustering
In a dim, round patch
On the door's latch,
Fumbling to find it; chattering whether
A noise of singing had mixed with the din
Of their chimes, at last tumbling in
To the long, low room, fire-lit.

All in amaze
At the red fire's blaze,
At the room pleasant and orderly,
Musical silence instead of elf-din.
Supper ready,
Beds waiting restful to be slept in;
But most of all things seen
At Snowbell, fair lily queen,

Who, timidly looking from one to another,
Wistfully scanning the face of each brother,
Sees each face clad
In thoughts sad-coloured as the clothes they wear,
And "Work-a-day clothes, work-a-day faces,
All come up to me out of sad, dark, deep places,"
Says she in her heart silently,
A little afraid.

But, see presently, at fairy
Feast, all growing cheery
Round the little sister eerie,
Seven brothers from the work day weary.

Furze soup, pine wine,

* * * * *

Bread made of the barks of trees,
Spread with crushed hawberries,
Mistletoes stewed,
Hart's tongue and chestnut gravies
Daintily.
A broad fungus platter
Growing from the table
In front of each brother;
The first dwarf's a wee fatter
Than the next other,
And so on, all serviceable.

 Their cups each a waterbud
With a stud in each centre, one,
Chrysopras, gold green stone,
Two, all
Colours asleep in the soft opal,
Crimson-orange jacinth,
Blood of hyacinth,
Yellow moonlight,
Cold, gold chrysolite,
Beryl, sea-drop in a cup,
Sapphire, flashing up blue fire,
Jasper, green as mosses rare.

 In the great chair, Snowbell,
At the table's head,
With a pearl shell
The fungus instead,
And white lady-flower from some watered dell
For a goblet, edge-curved
Like a fairy flag three-quarters unfurled
In a wind-swell.

 So the time slips by
Till the clock strikes one,
Supper done,
And each dwarf on his little bed lies down.
When lo! a nest of green ferns grown
From nothing beside Snowbell's nook
Opens wide in her sight,
With a pillow snow-white in the plunge of it,
Stems closing round in a row;
For her fairest, her best
Snowbell, falling fain
On its rest.

 Grate empty, lamps all dark,
Dwarfs in bed,
And a sort of bound
Through the elf things all round,

* * * * *

Now and then.
Moonlight streaming
Into the dreaming room—
Snowbell quietly laid, not sleeping,
Hushed, puzzled watch a-keeping
Through the streaked gloom
Over the goblin men.

So, night after night,
In the quaint home
Starlight of Ruggeddom,
Day after day all alone,
Dew-drop of elf-home,
Half a tear, half a sun,
Snowbell, unheeding
How the uncertain spirit time is speeding!

Summer mist,
Autumn rain,
Winter frost,
Weep, weep, weep!
For asleep in the arms of the doom-sleep,
Snowbell lies asleep.
Fay sister, fay sister,
Alas! summer's lost daughter,
Has the mist caught her and kissed her?
Weep, weep, weep!

Forth from the earth to their nest,
Brothers seven
To their little love come
Up to heaven;
Find all their joy flown,
Their sweet rest gone;
Only a sorrow left to keep
For each one, and for every to-morrow.

Cold on the cold floor, Snowbell,
Like a chill gleam, alas!
White garmented, ornamented
With pale moon-jewels on her head,
Like diamonds liquid
In the arms of the wild will, still.
Will it pass,
Death dream?

Ring the bells wearily:
"Midnight hours come and go,
Still as death, white as snow,
Yellow moonlight on the floor,
Paling chrysolite,

* * * * *

Little Seal-skin

Tarnished gleams from summer store,
Yellow streams of grass,
April gold-green chrysopras,
Jacinth, opal, jasper.
What wild wills clasp her?
Emerald, emerald,
Ice-enthralled,
Flaming glory fleeing away,
Pearly twilight, deepening grey
From depth of day,
Sapphire, beryl, gloom of the deep:
Is it death or is it sleep?
Weary night hours wear and pass
Into wearier dawn, alas!
Then down to the heart of Ruggeddom
To work, and work, and work we
Till light dips low,
And home we shall go;
Grove through the night
With a new dead delight,
Oh! heavy to carry and hard to bury,
Ring our bells wearily."

Hush!—the dark going, away there, away,
And a little gurgle of light flowing in, and the grey,
And the large low sun showing through, and the day.

Break, break;
Great Eye shining about the golden head,
Ruddy gold on the snow,
Cold moonlight instead;
Gold, gold on the floor,
Fire through the door-chinks, awake,
Snowbell, Snowbell,
In every pulse-shake of the morning, ring.

"Ring, for another love is born
Over the green and golden earth.
Hush! for a little whisper runs
Along the new shoots of the corn
With a little rush, a murmur of her.
Ring our bells in the wide air,
Tears of the day at its birth,
Baby tears hold suns.
There is a promise, a promise, a promise;
Ring our bells a merry jangle,
Through tangle of sighs.
Merrily see where the demon is lain.
Ho! a lusty hope at the throat of pain;
Over the hills, over the plain,
Though ever a sigh, ever there be,

* * * * *

Little Seal-skin

Trailing the ground, touching the sky.
Ring our bells merrily."

Up, hence, away, each brother—
And little gusts of air,
Soft, curious, gather
About the day-bells, mutter
Their fair sweet clash all together,
Close and smother it under a plash;
Open, fling it high,
Spread it out smooth to the dim. Ring
Merrily, crash,
Ho! wild, wine-sweet, rapturous.

Little Seal-skin

* * * * *

That's the way the cabalistic letters go,
Glimmering in the daisies' eyes,
Fairy-wise,
Folded up, crushed together, deep in the nest
Of each golden breast,
Sticking to the little white lances;
Pull them off, spread them out, tell their fancies,
"Snowbell, Snowbell, Snowbell,"
Crabbed letters spell;
You little crooked thing there can sing,
Tell us almost anything;
Magic letters, spreading verse,
Fairy histories rehearse;
Diamond sparkle, rainbow hue,
Gathering, glistening in the dew;
Tears and treasure come together,
Fears and pleasure, cut the tether,
Pleasure choosing,
Tears refusing,
Treasure losing.
But you go, but you fly
Like thistle-down in ripeness blown,
Toward the sky,
Melt like snow in tender weather,
Cowering, hiding in the flower roots,
Down the grass-blades sliding.
Lo! the verses break and fade
Of demon, dwarfs, and fairy maid;
All the letters mix together
In a jumble
Blunt and pointed, simple-jointed,
Heavy as lead and light as feather,
Short and jagged, smooth and thin,
All press in.
Midnight powers, summer haze,
Ceaseless chime
Of silver promise, golden prime,
Fading time—
Faint and more faintly ebbing, flowing
Through the breezes earthward blowing,
Round and round the even rays,
Dim nights and days,
Through the under-ground fairy ways,
See them tumble;
So, we go, in amaze.

* * * * *

DAYS.

O SUMMER day of light and shade,
Of peace and glory blended,
Full in the robes of God arrayed,
But just begun when ended.

O sudden gleam! O gentle breath!
Upon our snows of sorrow,
Vanishing like a smile of death
Before our blank to-morrow.

August 27th.

Ah! petulant, sweet showers,
That make flowers;
Sad autumn rain,
Ah! drops of pain;
Can the tears of the Spring and the Autumn meet?
Can youth and age—
Bountiful promise and spare wage?
Or, love and **this**—
Or, O the dear, dear, "I wonder" and "I wis."

July 6th.

Day, day,
When cloud and sky melt into azure and grey.
O soft sigh! O sad joy! Lo!
'Tis the heart has welled up,
Has swelled over life's cup,
And lies
Tremulously tender upon the wide skies,
The earth—a live word,
Brooding dove-like with overspread wings,
With cooings unheard.

June 24th.

Come to my heart, day of Midsummer,
Sunshine, heat,
Light white of the lilies;
Yea, yea, and yea, in each beat,

From the depth to the brim.
Undrawn
Form curtain, flesh curtain, colour, light even,
Everything bodily, down to the soul,
That shining through, that bare
Pressing out to the soul of each, bare.

February 14th.

I wandered into Wind-home,
 And saw the winds asleep;
I walked about in Rain-home,
 And heard the showers weep;
I lost my way in Thought-home,
 And thence a slumber deep
Carried me into Dream-home,
 Where me the dreams did keep
Captive in a Castled home,
 Reared on the summit steep
Of rosy clouds in Wish-home;
 Within whose halls the sweep
Of thy white robes, my Heart's-home,
 Made all my pulses leap.

December 31st.

Bells of the New Year; bells
Ringing, ringing about
Hope. Are you ringing hope
In, bells of this new year?
Yes, you're ringing in, clear,
Brave, happy-voiced bells; hope
For this new year without
Fear. The sweet clamour swells
All round into my heart:
There isn't a corner in
My heart that can hold thee,
Hope; so, go out again;
Go, although I would fain
Gather thee close to me.
No; with the foolish din
Of the sweet bells depart.

February 29th.

Timidly
Reaches her hands
Out, up from the wide far lands,
Touches the cup of the sun, sips
From his life with weak lips,
Staggering, stands.
Ripples through the new blood
Childhood, frolickhood;
Making play flowers, hastily,
Small pale flowers.
Courses fleetly
The heat of the blood,
Intoxicate sweetly
Of God's food;
Answering meetly
In surfeit of good.
Rolick, and revel, and treasure,
Flung about without measure;
Riot and rout sweltering out,
Mad with pleasure—
Swoons lethargic, unheeding
The heart's life bleeding
Away, to the chill and the grave;
Frozen breath on the death wave—
This is the year's history,
And life's mystery.

November 12th.

The hours slip by me, and the months and years,
And a grey past companions me and grows,
A powerless presence; for the swift
And noiseless treading of her feet has never
Quickened my breath, nor made me turn and look
Into her passionless eyes. I know there are
No memories in them, neither loss, nor gain.
Pass by me, quiet hours and cold days;
Leave to my past those eyes, that subtle tread,
That we weep not when full companionèd.

Evening.

Linger, soft light,
Belovèd evening, stay.
Sweet death of a most blissful day,
Birth of a blessèd night.
Linger on sky and hill,
Lie still,
Soft evening rays, until
My eyes have drunk each glorious hue
Of roseate gold and blue.
What happy memories rise,
Kind evening, in thy dewy eyes.
O day of days, thy perfect hours lying,
Like folded roses upon evening's breast,
Are gathered to their rest,
And find no pain in dying.

June 11th.

My joy. Ah! my joy,
Born of heaven, and this heart that have kist;
Rise, child of the morn,
Spread your wings,
Beat the skies;
Soar and wake all the dull dead worlds with a cry
Of ecstasy trilled,
Thrilling, strong,
Pure, sweet, and long drawn, and intense;
Child, child,
Dropping thence,
Dropping down,
Home to rest;
Over the storm–breast, brood and sway—
Nay, but live–willed,
Break away;
Bound, break up to heaven, my joy,
Ha! my joy.

Little Seal-skin

DAWN, OR THE TWILIGHT CHORUS.

Little Seal-skin

DO you hear the mixed, merry chatter
Of the birds? listen to the dawn chorus;
Music scarcely, but such a clamour of praise,
Single notes bandied from one to another,
No two alike; each note a new-made word,
Fitting close to the little warm heart-throbs;
Chatter of chirp and song, and whimsical
Shouting of orders out loud, each to each.
See, a thrush comes skimming over the wet lawn,
Flitting across the shadowless light of the garden.
Do you hear? One word said three times over,
What refrain is't growing up in the clatter?
Is it "God" they say over and over again?—
There, three words repeated, what's that! The love
Of some lover, the content of some mate.
Is it love, "O love, sweet, I love you?" or
Wild, throbbing joy at the life-burst of day,
Life and light chanted in the cold morning.
Ah! now they're tired, and a sort of hush comes,
Not silence exactly, but a kind of subdued talking
About breakfast and worms. Is that
A little quarrel beginning between a finch and a sparrow?
A touch of full daylight, perhaps. But now
Rises one clear, rich song, flooding over
The mixed many noises, till it and they
Drop all together, and the birds fly out
Hither and thither, in sunlight and shade,
As if they had something to do or other;
And one is only aware of a chirp now and then,
In a business-like tone; perhaps they are bargaining.
The day's work has begun.

OLD AGE.

SUCH a wizened creature,
Sitting alone;
Every kind of ugliness thrown
Into each feature.

"I wasn't always so,"
Said the wizened
One; "sweet motions unimprisoned
Were mine long ago."

And again, "I shall be—
At least something
Out of this outside me, shall wing
Itself fair and free."

A FLOWER TO THE MOON.

O MOON! O moon!
Sailing light of the night,
O beautiful moon;
You glide by so quickly,
Linger awhile, one little while,
Moon, spare just a smile
Out of your white light,
Out of your broad, soft eye;
To beguile this little, low life, me.
There you go, on and on,
Tenderly, widely, over the earth and the sky;
Have pity, sweet pity, upon
Only a lilybud, queen, a white lily;
Yesternight I could peep
At you fair—that was all; half asleep
In my bud life, with scarcely an outlook even;
But to-day I have riven
My prison, and grown,
All the hot afternoon,
So large that I see you, moon—
Beautiful, brave, ay, and pant
For the free air above,
And faint at the scant
Life below.
Is it love that I feel, do I grow
Up to loving and sorrow?

A SKETCH.

UPON the ground,
Made tender around her with moss and with flowers,
A mound half-circling her,
Swelling to meet
The soft-falling robes and the delicate feet,
One hand restwise,
Earthward eyes,
Hair loose on the wind;
Now, a wistful smile
As the soft wind sighs, and flutters, and sings.
And a pulse that flutters her
With the rush and the fall,
And small fingers that carelessly
Pluck the thick-growing flowers,
With a quick gesture twitch,
Throwing away a few.
A gasp, a surprise,
Half-bend of the knee. Does she rise?
You, you, pretty slave,
Have you drained the last drain
Of your gold cup at last,
Knowing your ease pain?
The tender moss and the flowers,
The long love-sweet hours,
Mound round you pressed,
Woman, earth-caressed,
Eyes downward cast,
At last, O! at last,
Slave with wings hidden,
With divinity bidden,
To sleep—nay, drown
In its own blood, self-shed,
Inspired call unanswered,
So to fill the perfect part of womanhood
It was said.

Little Seal-skin

A PORTRAIT.

A **FACE** tender and wise,
God, what power to bless in the pure eyes!
All that perfect grace,
With no place for "I" or for "mine;"
But a look straight out
On us weak, strewn all about;
A desire to bear, and to bear, and to bear,
A fire kept steady, and strong, and clear;
A prayer to be let near
Unto distress most dire.
Arm, O so weak, that would wield
A sword for the world, or a shield—
Would embrace the whole world from harm.
Little arm, ah! but one caress,
To bless me, sweet face, but one charm!

LUCY.

I FOUND her sitting among the toys,
On a low stool with idle fingers on her knees,
While the slant sunlight crowned her, and as it streamed
Along the shop through tiers of shelves,
Touched the quaint toys with life. I came to her,
And put my hand upon her arm, saying,
"What is it, Lucy? The clean floor quiet
From pattering feet, and these smooth shelves, and you
Alone! No children peering up and down?
Only bright motes swimming upon the dusty air!"
She said, "The children will not come again
To buy, nor I stay here to sell." "But why?"
I asked her trembling, for the sweet head drooped
So low. "Is it some trouble, Lucy—ruin?
May I know?" Then she looked up at me
With her clear eyes, and said, "No trouble, madam,
Only a change that breaks my life in two.
Perhaps, one liker to me, one as poor
As all my kin are poor, and one with years
Few as my own—this had been more my dream:
I never thought of love in golden guise,
Though I have dreamed one should be this and this,
And all for me—not what **he** is, madam,
He who has come to break my life in two.
Yes, let him break it; he has taken me
With love and tenderness like a father's—"
"But is not your young dream, my Lucy?" "No,"
The sweet voice made answer, and the drooping head
Drooped lower till it fell on trembling hands.
I sighed, "Weak woman, who cannot keep
Whole-hearted till her one supreme has come."

AGNES.

AGNES, a young seamstress, sitting at work, talks to herself.

IT'S hard, but I don't wonder at mother—
Many a girl would be quite proud of him,
Older than I—but, loved me from a child.
I only wonder at his faithfulness,
Coming and going those long voyages
After my weak half yes's and half no's,
Taking a hope out to the distant lands,
Bringing his love home in his heart again,
Then coming here, saying to me, "Agnes,
Are you well, sweetheart—happy these long months
That were so long away from you, Agnes?"
(Long! they had passed passionately by me!)
It was so last evening—the old story;
And I—left mother to answer for me,
Whilst I sat wondering how such slow months
Had brought the spring so quickly round again;
The spring and Edward—and oh! all these things
He gave me—these. How I wish he wouldn't give
Me presents; I'm afraid, too, they may make
One reason why—but no, I won't. Mother,
Poor dear mother—she means kindly by me.
Some day I'll tell her—shall I?—about **him**,
Our hazard meetings and our secret love.
No; she'd only answer, "Marry Edward."

[She starts at the postman's knock, and comes back reading a letter.

From **him**. "Dear Agnes, I'm in town again.
Dearest, I pray you let me see you soon.
To-morrow, yes, to-morrow; let it be
To-morrow that we meet somewhere by some
Happy chance. You'll be taking your work back
To Jay's at twelve o'clock; there I shall be
Lounging, or strolling past. We shall not fail
Each other. Each other! what words, Agnes!
And I shall see those beautiful eyes again,
And catch a syllable from the dear lips
That will be bold this time and praise our luck
At meeting; and you, dearest, cease to fret
About our difference, or this secrecy."

[She folds the note and sits down listlessly.

I wish, oh! how I wish, but of what use—
He a young lord, and I a needlewoman.
What clasp of hearts can bridge our difference?
I think my heart could reach across to him,
But does his love stretch far enough towards me?

Little Seal-skin

To-morrow—in secret, just as it was
Last time. To-morrow! O Love, to-morrow!

Enter EDWARD, a sailor, with violets in his hand, which he offers to AGNES.

"Nay, dear, to-day. Yes, say to-day, Agnes.
Let this day be the happy day of days
When you say 'Yes' to me. Child, there are years
Behind my love. Give me the little Yes
I've waited for and come to ask of you
Once, twice, and thrice—how many times, Agnes?
Be my sweet love, my little wife, my home,
My fair wind and my sunny port."

—"Edward,
Cease, cease. Look here—do you see this corner
Of a letter hidden in my bosom?
No!—it's not good enough for you to touch,
But oh! too precious for you to see. I'll
Hide it away. Yes, you may take my hands;
I'll even lean my head against you once,
And once speak out. Edward, there's not a spark
Of love for you in all my being. Oh!
Not love, love as I know it. I pity you.
Never let mother tell you that I love;
Never believe her, Edward, if she says 't.
I was afraid of her. Now go, and don't
Come back to me—oh! never mind the violets,
Lay them down anywhere, only leave me.

[She looks up, as he does no move.
Do go Edward."

—"Yes, I'm going, Agnes.
One word—God bless you, darling, as I do."

Little Seal-skin

* * * * *

Thank God he's gone, and there's one right thing done,
One honest work in all my web of wrong.
Now for another. Meet you—God! I think
I should have met him but for Edward's love,
That holy, worthless, hated, honoured love.
Now I'll—ah! what shall I do—meet him? no.
But I **do** love him; why, here's his letter—
The precioucest thing I have, the wickedest,
Dearest, worst—lies in my bosom, nestles
Next my heart—it **is** my heart. "To-morrow
We shall meet somewhere—shall not fail"—dear words—
"Each other." Yes, my love.

[Covers her eyes with her hands, looks up again, and says:—

Well, I suppose
I must write a letter and say—something;
That I can't come—that mother's ill—that I'm
Engaged to Edward—ha! that I won't come,
That he must claim me here for his own wife
If he would see my beautiful eyes again.
No! here's my letter. "This is good-bye
To you from Agnes
(puts a violet in the paper)
, and here's a violet
For you from Agnes." Sealed with a kiss—there,
There, and there, and there; a thousand kisses,
And a thousand thousand loves. Ah! but he'll
Only find the good-bye and the violet.

* * * * *

DOCTOR EMILY.

Written for the Pen and Pencil Club, Aubrey House.

HER room, bare of all beauty.
She in the gloom of the dull hour,
Midwinter's afternoon,
By the fire, grey and low,
Left of her hours ago,
Now with a little glow
And new stir in it just made by her,
Weary, come in alone,
Musing, "Did I ever wince
At sorrow, or pain of my profession, the parish doctor,
Chosen eleven years since,
As now? Though there has been torture enough, I trow,
Only a word or two just heard
Have set my heart throbbing so—
Can it rest again?
Matched with this, it was scarcely pain
That I felt by the dying man yonder,
All agony of sympathy,
As I watched the cruel death-blow
Dealt, long gathered up of want, sin, and woe.
It was thus I heard—walking
From the blank house with friends, talking
Of this sorrow and of some
Hope, might we cherish, in the long years to come,
When sin and pain,
Bound with health's chain,
Not even one should lie
Shut up in misery:
I still continually
Shadowed by **his** last sigh,
As we spoke;
One, silent till then alone, broke
On our converse: "Friend,
You are over sad, we must embrace the whole, the end
Each serves, **must** serve, purpose
Better or worse. Are not all
Fitted in due places they cannot fall
From, glory or shame,
Fulness of pleasure, inextinguishable flame?
All cannot win,
Or the **same** goal reach,
Since some by virtue, some by vice teach,
But why quail at each miserable wail,
And yet forget the praise
That from endless days

Swells through the universe?
Let the curse lie
In its own place—needed, verily.
Whereat we,
Chilled through our very pain as to death,
"Not that **He** wills it," cry,
"Say 'tis not that you mean."
And gasped for his reply,
This that came pityingly, "He!
Him I know not, but the things that be."

Chilled as to death whilst here alone
I ponder, ah! and he is not one
Saying thus we know, nor are they few;
And thus we know, nor are they few;
And these are they we love,
Towards whom our hopes move,
With whom we would prove
That we can friendly seek, and sympathize, and do;
These, who, whate'er betide,
We find, all tested, still on the generous side,
Who reach strong hands
Of help and kindness to brother lands,
Would shatter lawless might,
Who claim us, all, for right in the name of right.
What small cloud in their fair, deep sky do we see?
"Him, one I know not, but the things that be."
One in the hidden, in the finite
Lost, loss infinite.
Seek we the True that we dare,
They say, we dare face, be it foul, be it fair?
It, not **He**, then. Has it a heart, this, the True?
Faithless and hopeless; must we be loveless too?

But 'tis the age of woman, they say,
All say it, of her full message,
Presage of good, do we deem? Ah! blind,
Weak, awe-stricken, what do we strive
For? All that we **are** to **give**.
Are we a message to this scorching age
Whilst our tears rain upon it?
Want and woe and sin,
Searching that cannot find—
Would that we could win
Some influence from the skies!
Was not Christ born of Mary for mankind?
Alas! our eyes are dim,
Pining for Him.
Lo! we are broken with fears
Lest **One** belied,
Love should be crucified

Through countless years.

Must they not see that seek
Then? Can there be aught
Empty of Him, forgot,
Or does His promise break?
Some approach there must be.
And we, shall we
Who, fearfully, think
That we feel Him, tremble on His brink,
Have such fear of a deep
As to be prisoned in pain lest loved feet graze the steep?
Can light quench light?
May not the near the far?
Obscure our vision of it—
Nay, He is far and near,
Yea, who is more than light.
Can He fail? we will not fear.

Seek on, then, spurn
Giants of thought, old thoughts, turn
Still to new days. Hew
The immense tree with the strong axes two,
Even as visions of old
Tell how the giants hewed:
And lo! it fell, and lo! it stood, and lo! it grew.
Watching the while, we
Smile of sorrow and hope,
Saying God speed,
As loved faiths stricken from life
Thicken around us, darkening our skies,
Praying God speed,
Till the new dawn arise.
Yet we are home-birds, we must sing from home, place
Of sure refuge for our faltering race,
Low from the yearning of the Father's breast,
Wooing you hitherward,
Where love is Lord.
Children, come home, we seek His face;
When will ye come?
Home—not for rest—
Measureless labour, 'tensest sacrifice,
Price of the very life—"

So, musing this wise
With tears and sighs,
Into the night, till night had set,
Watching her, musing yet,
When "Doctor" a voice cries
From without, a weak child's voice, "come quick,
Come to us, sister. Mother fell sick

DOCTOR EMILY.

Little Seal-skin

At noon, and she dies in the dawn alone."
She, "Ready, I am ready,
I am coming, little one."

SLEEP.

JESSIE, as I came home to-day I saw
That crippled man upon the flags we have
So often seen, who moves our pity so;
I watched him crawl along the sunny street,
Through heedless crowds, until he reached the place
Where crossings meet, and there he flung aside
His strong companions, those two crutches worn,
And sat him down upon the stones and gazed,
And gazed, and gazed. Then, Jessie, all my tears
Rose to my eyes and in the street I wept
So I could hardly speak for weeping, but
I came close up to him and paused and said,
"Oh! I could break my heart against these stones
To see you thus. I'd give my limbs to be
Utterly broken and torn, if only by
My breaking I could give you perfectness."
He smiled at me and stared with eyes—oh! not
Like eyes that I once saw, whose grief had plucked
Majesty from despair; his had a strange
Ignorant calm, fuller of peace than pain.
Jessie, he is not sorry to lie there,
He never weeps as I wept for him then;
He finds contentment in the gaudy street,
Music in carriage wheels, a houseless home
Among the people, rest in their unrest.
I turned away; but, looking once again,
Saw how the sun rained fire upon his head;
The wan face drooped on the half-covered breast,
His eyelids closed, I thought that he was dead,—
He was but sleeping. Velvet-footed Sleep,
Threading his way amid the crowds and din,
Had taken him tenderly and laid him in
The cradle quietness. Stretched on the ground
I left him without weeping who had found
Infinite pity above him and around.

DEATH.

ON a low bed within a narrow room
She lies and she has lain through weary years.
Her pale lips, parted, smile; there are no tears
Within the languid eyes, her life's young bloom
Has faded from her, yet she does not mourn.
When Summer quits the year with all her flowers
She lets him weep, but leaves him not forlorn;
For, setting fire to all her golden stores,
She from her pyre excelling glory pours
Through Autumn's coming to its latest hours.
Is it the memory of joy, a light
From years long set, that makes those features bright.
Patient, frail sufferer, is remembrance sweet?
Oh! Memory, hide, my past has tearful eyes,
Pain is my pillow, want most near me lies;
But—I have heard the tread of unseen feet.
In some deep night, when all the world is still,
He will come in, come in through that low door,
Fearful, and beautiful, and crowned, and pale,
Asrael, God's angel. He shall stand before
Me face to face and say, "Thou'rt mine, thou'rt mine."
My sleeping nurse will start at the new sound
Of my rejoicing; see what I have found—
Thine for one moment, Messenger Divine,
Asrael, archangel, and that sudden thrill
Of triumph shall my troubled life fulfil.

Little Seal-skin

HOMELESS.

WITHOUT a home at holy Christmas-tide,
Sad-hearted at the feast of all the year,
These were strange words you told me, Phoebe dear;
I have no social joys when all beside
Meet with such blessed mirth round happy fires.
When the long-parted greet and draw fresh love
From ceaseless flow of talk that never tires;
Through all the homes there is no place for me.
No place, no room; dear friend, if it can be
One thought of joy to you, then know
My heart grew larger at your words, as though
It would have answered, "Hearts are homes, look in and see."
Yes, hearts are homes, and O! all hearts above,
There is a heart of hearts, a love of love,
A boundless home, one that for aye endures;
Hide in God's heart, beloved, that great Home is yours.

INCOMPLETE—COMPLETE.

I'VE lived my life some seventy weary years,
And, gathered up on my extreme verge of Time,
Lie looking with blind eyes on the dark sea.
When I looked first at life as now at death
My eyes were like two suns shining in strength
That pierced with sudden glory all they saw.
And "I will live a glorious life," I said,
"I will climb heights, I will shine out afar.
My 'meant to be' complete in my 'I am.'"
I am—what am I? weary, sad, and old,
I've failed, am weary, failed, and sad, and old;
My light is quenched, 'tis dark, all dark within,
I look at death and death glooms back on me.
Father, what is't? a voice—does it come from Thee,
Dost Thou remember? Canst Thou pity me?
"Each shall be all I meant in My great day,
Thou hast not failed, " God, do I hear Thee say,
"But seven times purified, art sevenfold dear,
And I've ten cities waiting for thee here."

A SAINT.

MARY most pure,
Mother holy,
Virgin mother of God
The Lord;

Stoop to my prayer,
Sinless mother,
I am a spouse of Christ
The adored.

This is my prayer,
O fair mother,—
All the weight of my sins
Deplored,

That thou make it
Crush me, break me
With thought of judgment
That's stored

In wrath for all,
Virgin faultless,
Mortals who sin against
The Lord.

Mary of tears,
Stricken mother,
Wounded mother of Him
That died,

This is my prayer,
O sad mother,—
Pierce my heart as the spear
His side;

Be my life's cup,
Mourning mother,
From the depths of thy grief
Supplied;

Wound me, slay me,
Sorrow-ridden
Mother of God
The Crucified.

Mary all true,
Spotless Virgin,

A SAINT.

Little Seal-skin

Mother, lover of God
The Son,

This is my prayer,
Single-hearted,
Chosen of Him the
Jealous one.

Mary, lover,
O pure mother,
Of each joy that my life
Hath won,

Rob me, strip me,
Virgin ruthless,
Cleanse me of every love,
Spare none.

Mary, most high
Queen of Heaven,
Mirror of God in Heaven's
High seat,

Crowned, God-covered,
Awful Virgin,
Praying, I swoon before
Thy feet.

Mary, meet me,
Mother, greet me
When my salvation
Is complete.

Little Seal-skin

CHRISTINE AND MARY.

A CORRESPONDENCE.

CHRISTINE to MARY.

MARY, sister, Mary of angels,
Theodora,—no, let the old name die
That was yours, that is love's,
Lie still,—it's asleep dear, Mary—
And yet, do you think I forget,
Don't grudge you even a little to Heaven,
And you smiling, scoffing me,
Calling you chosen of **Him** for His bride?
But oh! shame, killing love with that name.
He was tender once; was He tender,
And is He cruel now?
Laying low the heart's beat of love,
"Will ye climb, will ye reach up to Heaven," saying,
"Great Love and be God?
So are you ripe for my slaying;
Be accurst, bow, burst asunder, weak hearts,
I am Lord, I, One."
Was He tender, was He weak, was He lone?
And now this; and thou His?
Alas the life that has been,
Our life! Mary, spare me but one sigh, dear,
One heart's throb, some pitiful reply,
For I'm yours yet, dear, Love's yet,
CHRISTINE

MARY to CHRISTINE.

Friend, little weak fair Christine, see
What a wail came, your long sigh
To my dove's nest. O! but my nest is built high,
Here at Heaven's edge. In His love
On the warm snowy breast of His bride,
I well hidden, revelling in the sweets.
Christine, He called **me**, I was bidden;
Listen how He called—no, that was eternally,
How I heard. On one eve then—
You remember our room,
The little dear room in our world's home, where we
Oft by the lattice sat talking familiarly,
Now with one or another
Sweet word of our love each for other,
Of our loves shared, our light cares,
Our young joys, our fears,
As the years flew; until I,
With a little flutter apart, I from you
Borne, by what will I know not,
Even in its stress scarcely knew, now all's dim,
But the breach grew, I being pressed back
From you, from your wide reach, within
To His rest, into Him.
On one eve then, we having been together bodily,
But your being gone,
The warm clasp of your hand only left,
And sweet print of a kiss, I alone
In the luscious solitude of the long hours, stood
Hushed, by the little crucifix.
It was June—
O, the great soulless joy of the year!
Flushed at flood height of luxury,
Drunk with God's blood—
I by the little crucifix stood,
Pondering, pale by the cold form,
Cold within and crushed into a dark night,
Wondering, He that made it all,
Life of the life in me,
Life of the whole universe inwardly,
Is He in anguish still and mourning
For the love of the scorning world?
Crucified, O crucified!
And lo! "Behold me," the pale lips sighed,
Yea, once, twice, thrice, 'twas spoken.
Then, "Behold me," my whole soul replied,
"Lord, but one little word,
Life-spark from Thee, one word—
And let all die, every love in me else,

Little Seal-skin

If that I have but Thee,
Bruised, broken beneath Thine agony."
Once, twice, and thrice—as I crept close
Into the ark, the nest, the bride,
Into the pulse, into the life, into the wounded side
Sealed with the love-kiss,
By His own inner token His;
So, in the night I rose; not I,
Where is there any longer one, Christine,
Of the dim years floated by,
One you held lovingly,
One of the happy twain?
Let it all pass, dear, put the old loves away,
Come to the dear feet with me, kiss them, stay,
Let the grey years drop by the road-side heaped up for death,
List what the Beloved saith,
Sayeth ever "Behold me," lie
Where I lay that day,
Let the loving breath blow by and slay,
Pray to Mary. Not yours dear, but Christ's for aye,
MARY.

CHRISTINE to MARY.

Mary, your message came, chill wind
Upon thirsty ground; you have forgotten me;
Your heart is full, it has no empty plot
Set tender-wise with yearning, like some fair spot
Of earth flower-hiding, that turns
A tremulous gaze spring-wards, that pants and burns,
Shudders and sighs,
Under denying skies,
Still to their chills, pale want confiding;
You are all blest,
Cradled upon His breast,
Who will have all or none.
He who is great alone, in selfish bliss,
Who has robbed me of thee; I rebel, Mary,
Sound my cry high,
Who will have all of us, wrongs our humanity.
See, **you** say, "God and me,
It is enough, is all, God," you cry,
"I have Thee, Thou me, die
Every hope beside, every love, let the whole world cease,
And God, if there still be Thou,
And my soul feeling Thee,
Let be; it is all peace, one peace, unfathomable eternally."
But I—I cry, is there One?
O love! or any life alone?
You say, "Him and me,"
It should be "me" really "me,"
For 'tis this your bliss,
"I love my heart's love, call it Him, call Him mine."
O! awake, dear, break the mirror, see the full sun shine,
Light deep, deep shade.
All the writhing, shivering fragments that the strong gusts have made;
Look at life, see the time,
Is it one, pitiful, base, cruel, weak, broken, sublime,
Thousand hearts, thousand hands, stretching up, eager, wan,
Grasping life, craving death with each new hope gone,
And He, is He here, Mary, where?
In our tears, laughter, life, or death, courage, despair?
For me, I can see but these
Crying pity, pity, pity, and find no peace.

MARY to CHRISTINE.

Christine, I am on my knees,
I am weeping,
Oh! I could crouch to the earth, weep age on age
In the dust, break my weak body,
Shed all my blood, to assuage
This agony, reflex of God's pangs.
Look, you have wounded Him,
Stricken the Stricken One;
Let the words ring to deafen you,
You have pricked thorns into His brow;
Know, He was looking down tenderly through
Your complaint, saying, "Give it to me,
All the full burden, give it to me and live."
But you, worm of the dust, turned,
Struck the sad face that yearned,
That burned with blushes for man,
Saying, None of Thee, robber, not Thee,
But all these whom I pity.
Christ, I could laugh at Thy great irony.
Did Thy lip quiver, did Thy heart leap compassionate?
O friend, God's enemy,
What fires can purge one sin speck out of His vision?
What thy fierce hate?
Where is my love? Alas, do I love God's enemy?
Yet I will pray. He will repent
And break you, or Mary will entreat,
Mary importunate.
Cover Thy Son, Mother,
A too fierce fire of purity and passion,
And shine, sweet moon, in the night of our souls.
He is thine; thou art mine, Mary.
But I forget—
Is my love all set heavenwards, then?
I know not, though I wot what I desire,
Nigher my bridegroom, nigher.
Christine, shall He give all, nor claim us?
Have you forgotten our piteous estate?
We, all men, man, the devil's blot
Upon His great, fair, finished, glory world,
Our being His wrath, our end—
Ah! you are broken, 'tis enough, friend,
Through dim eyes you see Him as I see
White light, the lightning purity
Flashing to man from Deity.
Love-fire out of wrath's flame,
Lapping the gulf, God in the shame
Of flesh, and He
New from won victory

Little Seal-skin

Out of the height by the fire-white Throne
Looking down, yearning for this our love.
O Majesty, that He can need, that He should plead.
Lo! 'tis the sunlight of His deep,
I see it break the unfathomed gloom,
Strike towards its bounds,
Sweet sounds that wake
Th' unsearchable silence.
O mystery, in which we die,
But He endureth
Over all death.
Alas, I cannot win you, what am I?
Unworthiest in our Carmel
Yet let that pass, of less or greater. I would tell
Of some sweet message or miracle
Our mother Theresa had or wrought,
Or some God-boon that fell
On her, bought by shed blood of Calvary.
She, listen, we read this in the refectory
The year I was professed.
It is all clear and wondrous in my memory.
Theresa, one night in sleep,
She had slept in prayer, with hands clasped on the cross,
Self-penanced fallen upon the bare cold floor,
Was shadowed by some angel methinks who bore
Her soul waked in his consciousness,
Down to the pit, showing her there
Her place, the very fire and depth of it,
Ready for her to inherit,
Sole lot when she had died,
Which she, all flesh, had found,
But for the sin-bound God, the Crucified,
Prepared and sealed, and written over thus,
"For one Theresa, God's enemy and the devil's slave,"
Which, with intense fire of vision,
In meek desire to explore
God's home for her, by His pure wrath declared
She pierced to its very core.
Nor of her agony spared she aught for pretence
Of impotent defence against His exquisite anger,
Gazing condemned upon her soul the damned,
Till to her flesh-life stung once more
By the clutched cross in her hand,
Pressed underneath as she lay,
And "Jesus, Jesus," with scarce breath
Left from that vision of death
To pray, prayed she—
Christine, and prayed through years and years
In memory of it, abased, dismayed,
Tortured with shame,
That she could find no tears

MARY to CHRISTINE.

Little Seal-skin

Of agony and penitence and gratitude
Commensurate, to bathe His name in,
Drop by Gethsemane's blood.
Listen, she agonized for these,
Cried, fasted, strove with the very Love
That it might please Him even to turn
And burn her soul in the fire,
So she might love some wise.
Till—did the pure will prevail,
Heaven's wall fall at her cries,
Desire compel desire?
Fail we, friend, fail,
Veil we our eyes before His mysteries,
Speak with low breath,
Beat faintly, heart,
Start not, awed face, before the page I trace.
She, ever as she was wont to be,
Before the cross, inwardly writhing night and day,
Before it outwardly in her body lay
One night, at midnight, as always
In the convent chapel,—
Jesu, the angels remember it well,
Up, up in Heaven as I believe,
And give a little festive hour to Mary still
In memory of sweet aid she gave.
Who is't but Mary that can have
Half will with her great Son?
Alone, alone,
From sisterhood, from brotherhood,
From any power of human good,
Darkness all behind and around,
Only ghostlike eyes of the night
Met her gaze—
Gleams from the tall white tapers that stood
Before Him hidden,
In the secret tabernacle He dwells in,
Palpitates there, the soul's live food.
One moment like to another rose
In the dim quietude;
Ghost-lights gleaming close
To the wan heart, saw almost
Its anguish lost,
Of wild desire and will,
It lay so still pain quelled at last.
When, lo, there passed
A glimmer athwart Him,
Then a luminous haze
Swelled, tender, increasing, through th' amazèd place,
She unaware, it came so soft, filling all space
Between Him hidden, and her uplifted face;
And still it grew and grew, and oft

MARY to CHRISTINE.

A shimmer ran through it like a wave
Of life, as when the spirit moved
Of old upon the deep, the ancient deep first God beloved.
Until from base to height
With soft increase it swelled,
From bound to bound
Expelled the night,
Girdled with peace
The sacred precincts round.
He in the midst and she
All faint, fallen on the ground,
Swooning by cause of this great mystery,
E'en though she knew it not that midnight hour;
No power was left in her
Who had so striven,
No will, nor consciousness,
A lifeless clay,
Prostrate, death—still she lay
Upon the brink of Heaven,
And He was at her side,
The Bridegroom come to meet His bride.
"Theresa, where is thy soul's desire?"
But she was mute;
Prayers that were wont upon words of fire
To search the abyss of eternity,
Fierce in pursuit prayer upon prayer
That had pierced, O Mary, to the inner sea
God looks into;
Ruffling the depths of its profound blue
Whole moments—
Which the very breath of hell's torments can't do.
All were mute.
The said Mary's sweet Son,
"Shall I lose my Bride's love, Mother?
Even this one
Weak soul's little love?"
Instant a seraph that stood
At the deep's edge, robed in flame, red as blood,
Who bore in his hand a dart lightning—like, fine,
Unforged, from God's armoury,
Whetted with sacramental wine,
Torn whole a live pain out of the eternal heat,
Raised high his overshadowing wings, beat
The great calm once, and like a thought had sped
Down to the chapel floor;
There, into the very heart that swooned,
The bodily heart of her lying as if dead,
Plunged he the heavenly steel,
Wounded with a God—wound—
Seraph terrible, caught up instantly,
Of the fire of the Lord born,

MARY to CHRISTINE.

Little Seal-skin

A sword drawn and withdrawn—
Then she who in long lethargy
Had lain bound
Burst the cold fetters,
Broke into heavenly morn,
Night passed, awoke
Self-slain at last, at last, at last.
Thus from death-swoon our great saint was revived,
And ever by life of that sweet pain she lived
Through years and years
God-wounded; her virgin heart
Verily bleeding around the heavenly dart,
Until that day of bliss,
Which for all Christ's brides there is,
When loved face through black pall
Beaming on troubled gaze,
Stoops low to kiss,
And the wan heart creeps warm
To the embrace
Of the Bridegroom's arm.

CHRISTINE to MARY.

Loving just her deliverer Mary,
All self, all self, and He—
Some other projected self seeming to save from misery,
The self which does not **seem**
But **is** true centre of the whole scheme.
Thus, thus they preach, all churches much the same,
Expounding the unutterable name.
For you, for me, for us
They teach and say
Things that have sickened me,
So many a weary day,
I'm sick to death of teachers speaking so doubly,
They would turn truth itself into a very lie.
I've tried to look at Him,
To see some God. Bear
With me, dear. Hear
How I've grown to what I am.
Yes, I too, we two together lived and prayed
Innocently in the still purity of youth.
Sweet Time delayed
To awaken us; we had no fears,
No tears save childhood's April drops we ever shed.
Loved we, all free
From struggle, unshaken by perplexity,
The dear God so near,
And Him divine who bled
For us, for all, so fairly 'twas pourtrayed,
Great truth that seemed to shine so calm and clear.
Till you, stirred by what breath
I knew not, in the unseen depth
Saddened and drew apart, within;
Fair life was marred for you methinks
By his other half, his twin
Intruding, a small worm of death
Upon your innermost, your mystery, writhing in;
Life, death, calm, change—
Unhinged from your life's centre thought began to range.
Not through wide tracts though, over wastes, or steeps,
Horrible precipices, lands night cold,
Impervious wildernesses, sun scorched sands
Where the souls lie
Gasping for breath in life's intensity,
But in old paths that wound
Long since amongst the creeds
That wind all churches round;
Old paths, fair set with stream and shade,
And flowers, and festivals, and many a safe made

Little Seal-skin

Cradle of rest for tired souls resting in holiest places,
Fair hills, fair vales sun-kissed, sleeping in heaven's embraces.
There your love strayed,
And there you said you found
Verily I know not what rare balm to cover o'er some wound;
Strange joy, you said, strong rest and fullest quietude,
Bonds that gave zest to freedom; chained you stood
And smiled, spread all your fetters to my gaze,
Toying with them like any child with toy new bought.
I had no guide, you said, who held aloof and thought,
No place inside the fold;
Then, caught my arm to an embrace,
"See, I am armour proof," you cried,
"In white and gold,
I am so safe, so sure from harm;
Come in, O friend,
The days are short of grace,
And the world lost in sin,
Come in, there is one refuge given
Alone, one creed, one church, one food, one sacramental way to Heaven."
So pleading, whilst I heard,
As ever beloved, holding your lightest word
For truth's own voice;
Scarcely with choice apart
From my half heart,
My life's whole love;
And still I heard, but could not,
Could not when most I would—
What? shut out all beside.
My brain turned faint, brought
To the foot of it, to close around that thought.
Then my will split,
How!—was it that **I** had wandered too,
Alas, alas, like you, far from the old, dear ground?
For even as I turned,
Meagre in argument, seeking the food
Of our unconscious babyhood
We had shared once content,
And eager to share once more one simple nourishment,
Offered it you in haste;
The taste, bitter to you, was to me alien.
We knew it not, our blest
Child-home in the far years' sunny gleam,
To you a robber's nest, to me a dream.
Where was my peace? Had **it** slipt wide, or **I**?
'Twixt then and now, a waste; 'twas all I could descry.
A waste, that grew,
Alas, even between us two, Theodora.
Yes, hear the dear name once again,
Once only again my God-given.
Ah! but the old pain is all new;

CHRISTINE to MARY.

God, will it never die,
Of one love riven in twain?
A waste, and each fain
To o'erreach it, sending words,
Love's messengers, that like birds
Who drop dead in the dead salt sea,
But an instant's space sped and fell silently.
'Tis our hearts that beseech each other,
I thought, our speech is naught;
'Tis our hearts that beseech each other,
I thought, our speech is naught;
'Tis I that am naught, I sighed,
Wont to fulfil her and now thrust aside,
And cried loudly in my complaint,
Whilst you, sweet saint,
Growing weary of me, I think, sat mild
And silent, listening to my wild
Ravings; you would pray,
You said, and ever grew day by day
Contenter, more apart, more rapt;
And often a smile would steal
Across your rest, and your quiet mood
Flush with new impulse of the blood,
Then, tell me I used to cry,
What is't, what memory,
What new hope i' the bud you brood upon?
And calm you would reveal
Some grave beatitude,
Half curse as well.
Flowers out of hell those seemed to me,
You deemed all good.
Till on a day we sat,
Cheek pressed to cheek,
Hand clasped in hand,
I would not speak,
And you, content thereat or careless,
Whilst your full eyes scanned
The scene, a land most gentle and fair before us,
Whose tenderest form of breast and fall,
Type of pure rest, all summer warm,
Was set in the glow
Of a large sun low in the sky,
Drew your sweet life in out of the unseen;
There where I palpitating within, raging,
Nothing but cruelty saw,
Only death and despair could draw
Out of the seen and the unseen.
"Cheeks and brows close,
A universe apart," I mourned,
And a strong curse
Out of my bitterness rose

Little Seal-skin

To my heart's edge with irresistible overflow,
Flooding my whole life till now.
For that spiritual life inborn,
I had seen born in you,
Selfishly, cruelly inborn,
Seed of some dreamed-of immortality,
The self-begotten, love-condemning lie,
Hateful to me, became
Hateful, O thenceforth utterly.
So when anon, of sweet message brought
To you, you spoke, of that yet higher call
To be one with the bride-church not only,
But even a bride of Christ, caught
Into the mystery
Of innermost tryste with Him in the eternal Ghost,
Fiercely I cried, Go in, O bride, O virgin bride,
Draw thick the veil,
Leaving us lost in sin,
Who neither will pray, nor quail
Outside the pale.
We who love free air height on height,
The expanse, the out-pressing infinite,
For ever the advance to the unknown, the untried.
We do not envy. What! we are sore in need,
Do you tell us? Not of your God then,—
Him **you** adore, God, man-magnified,
The man of each age that is, just this,
Nor bettered, but monstereed on every side,
Man-god, half love, half curse,
O pitiless will-force,
Making us thus to condemn us.
"Save us," you say.
Yes, a picked few driven through some narrow way
Up to the safe seats, safe above the flame
The million tortured lie in,
Whose smoke goes up eternally
Into the nostrils of Deity.
Saved—where they cry
Their Holy, holy, holy to His name,
With endless hallelujahs glorify Him, glorify.
I—I would rather lie in the agony, smell
The cloud of the torment smoke
As it belches out of the jaws of hell.
Thus with the cry
Of a rebel, even of an enemy
In my heart, a cry all churches justify,
The cry of my soul's pity,
Binding me to humanity,
I have lived through passionate years, Mary,
Years you have given to heaven,
You have lived within, with Him.

CHRISTINE to MARY.

And, do you think I haven't wanted Him too?
Sick of my enmity, haven't yearned like you
For the unseen?
To love, to love, to worship,
O from one's life source up to the lip
All through? With eyes intuned
You had seen, O God, not God—
Your nobler self would have spurned
That image, marred by base gratitude,
Stained with innocent blood,
But for the lies of creeds, blinding your eyes,
Binding you with your dread of possible needs,
When a soul all bare
Might stand and plead
In utter extremity with One,
"Open the door, Lord, Lord,
The night is dark indeed,
My foes are near to assail,
And I alone;
My numb feet fail for fear,
Weary and sore,
Open the door."
And He, hearing her cry,
Should keep close the door,
And laugh at her calamity
And mock her fear.
But, He had saved you,
He was your God, God of the favoured few.

I, on the other side not willing to find inwardly,
Since I had foresworn all selfhood in faith,
Sought all pervading good.
If there be God, I thought, He must
Be, not what they teach, but just
Divinely, only beneficent, wide, free
From all passions of poor humanity,
Unruffled, wise beyond power of prayer to fulfil
All times, perfect in power and will.
Could I have loved such! But did I find Him?
What faiths hold such up to our eyes?
Mary, philosophy and dreams have some such verbiage,
Gleams in the night, will-o'-the-wisps,
Empty of warmth, with unreal light
Leading the uncertain steps through comfortless ways.
For what age speaks good, good only,
Or finds but praise in humanity's cries?
None, and they are pitiless who say
Time testifies to One all good who yet is all in all,
Stable, benevolent, supreme, inevitable—
Inscrutable—yes, yes, see how it slips from the grasp.
For I have seen this, Mary,

Little Seal-skin

That only as creeds explicitly declare Him,
Profane Him by vain records,
In crude words dare to explain Him,
They carry in their rude force
Vitality to the source of times impulsing hearts and deeds,
But, wrath with the life mixt,
Progress with strife equally,
Creed following creed over the surface of the centuries,
And only the evil out of each one rising for it to drown in,
As one after another dies.
This too, that ever as an exalted few,
Wearied with multiplicity of impure impulse,
And longing for some one verity,
Have out of the inner light,
And by sweet thirst for gentleness, truth, right,
Timidly forth-shadowed some dim
Image of Him, intangible, an unreal Supreme,
With reverence meet only half-uttered.
The vapourous cloud glory
Has been unreachable by the crowd,
Or a thin mist shroud
Only, wrapping them in from the real world below;
The colour, the light,
But a sunset glow
That fades in the night.
So may not they be wise
After all, I have asked, who say
The world is about us, the Heavens are far away?
Enough are the years for man to have spent in vain,
Extolling the heights he cannot attain
To, the knowledge that flies
Him, a tremulous bridge overarching the earth through the skies,
Touching nowhere, a vapour—
And what is it worth?
Here the truth lies—
Facts of our bodily life, that our bodily eyes
Can investigate, our minds classify
Which science heaps up eternally.
O beautiful succession of causes, sequences
We can learn perfectly!
Is't not enough? Must we scale the air
To fall again miserably, blinded, scarred,
Useless, or noisome in the world's workshop,
Where each link marred of the great chain
Is just so much on the loss side of humanity?
And in pain I have answered, Yes.
For is not this clear, Mary,
That the Unseen being reachable by
The inner light only, or through authority,
In an age when **this** breaks, wallowing in the pit,
Disgraced, below popular instinct, or possible belief in it,

CHRISTINE to MARY.

Little Seal-skin

When science vociferates "Matter makes mind,
This inner light, this consciousness, this I,
What is't? that takes only shifting forms, lacking identity
From moment to moment even, deceivable,
Incapable to grasp aught but its own sensations verily"—
We find both doors into Heaven shut; blind
In the dark; blind, blind.
Well, I'd forsworn myself,
Light, rest inborn, life for myself—
'Twas right, 'twas best, 'twas just,
That I should know the unreality,
Seek to the outward utterly,
Low in the dust, the common dust of humanity.
So I've grown to be this, dear, and can you forgive
That I don't love as you love,
Or believe as you believe?
Ah! but you love Him too much, Mary,
Spare Him such worship to bless you for.
Besides, won't you have Him eternally?
But to my empty heart, that will crumble to nothing by and bye,
Wants you more, O more, Mary. Give
It a little love, dear, to live by whilst it must live.
Christine

MARY to CHRISTINE.

What! have you fallen so low then, Christine,
So low indeed in the dust,
Not of humanity, because men are just
Need, inextinguishable need of Him;
Raised from the brutes by this,
The breath of their very being,
That which they live and die by,
What the second death cannot destroy,
Torturing it into agony?
No, you can't flee Him,
Is there one empty spot?
Not in the star depths even,
Not in the wastes of thought.
And listen; He is no less in Hell than in Heaven.
Must you cull bitterness from the root of joy?
Will you drink fire out of the tender breath? O, why?
What a mire of lies 'tis that you rot it!
An unreal Supreme! Christine,
It was sin to me reading your blasphemies,
My misery too, lacking surprise,
Confounds me the more, for did I cry,
Did I plead with you half enough,
Little one, lost one, thrown
On that devil's road that has one end only.
Alas that you should have sighted it, friend!
And do you know this,
The devils all lie in wait
Delighted, by the road side from its wide gate
At the beginning, with guide post written this wise:
"Each for himself to search and judge and see,
Secure in hard individuality,
Critical, free from inspired authority
Of the Bride-church:"
Until the hour of absolute unfaith be reached,
They may devour the souls in—
Unfaith, unfaith, even in that freedom claimed,
Even in that maimed individuality.
You had no guide, O friend, outside
The pale, outside—
Negative Churches, that have no life nor growth in them,
Do the angels wonder, think you,
Who are all love and humility,
Seeing these fall asunder?
But, O! that I could have snatched you out of the perilous way!
Did I pray half enough? did I cry night and day?
Might He have had mercy?
What! has He less than I!

Die, insolent pity!
Ah! true is't the pit yawns close by us ever,
Whilst Heaven dawns afar. Aid us, Mary, help-giver!

You know, Christine, how these two,
Worship and pity, swayed me equally, even as you
Once, lying close, until He rose
A Sun full orb'd on my soul
All amazed, all absorbed,
Self effaced as she gazed,
A tablet erased for God to write on.
All her pity in drawn,
Laid to rest on His breast,
In whose peace depths of yore
Slept all virtues compact,
In full power to be,
Before power of the act began
In time's dawn, the hour
That begat these and man.
Since then, they're one, one in me,
Worship and pity, because He
All my love has, all my will,
All necessity to do or to be,
Being as He is in me.
Am I torn now, betwixt praise and pain?
How possibly, never more, never more,
Who adore Him self-slain!
Earth-lights fade in the sun, true—
And deepest light, deepest shade,
Through all One.
Can it loss be,
Updrawn from life's course,
To lie still, eased from self,
To die in life's source;
You call this self, to love so—
Do you know love, then?
Christine, in the world's love even
I remember how life, young, sweet,
Infinitely tender, from the bud
Blown complete into flowerhood, yet incomplete
Thrills to want's pulse, grown up to pain;
How the heart-beats wax and wane
Until one meets and fills
The eternity—for a life say,
An instant, with only a handful of clay,
And ecstasy of union all that pain stills,
And that want satisfies,
Even as the self lies hidden.
Listen to love's mystery;
A labyrinth each is to each,
Each lost in each, a rich amaze,

MARY to CHRISTINE.

Circling delights of amaranthine ways,
 Dewed with the morning freshness of the days.
 But what? A Lethe draught
 Quaffed at Heaven's brink,
 Self dying to consciousness; and yet
 Human with human through what stress so ever of love met
 Mingles imperfectly, not interpenetrates,
 Weighed asunder by this,
 That each to each mortal is,
 Human units apart,
 Joined in will, heart to heart may be,
 Self taking sweet rest, yet awaking,
 And so purged scarcely,
 For spirit only spirit can inherit;
 But when He takes the soul,
 Lo! the whole interpenetrates,
 Spirit, clay, to Him one—
 The atom fades in the sun circles,
 Merged in absolute union.
 Limit separates from the limitless,
 Makes the I,
 Limit wiped out in light—impersonality.
 Thou, Thou, Thou only, Thou through me.
 Of my love, of my joy, of my pity,
 What is there now? all that I was,
 Ceased utterly.
 Do you call this praise for safety?
 This, love for bliss?
 Know, if it could be, out of the dust I speak,
 That for His glory's sake,
 Or to satisfy some necessity of His being,
 He were to make
 Desolation in His temple. Thrust aside
Her, even the Bride-Church, to lie
 Eternally in the flame,
 Denied him eternally;
 Meek to fulfil her part
 She would be found, lying lowly,
 Crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy," to His name.
 O sacred Heart!
 O bleeding Heart of the Crucified!
 Is it pain the souls shrink from, nailed to the Cross,
 Sorrow, self-loss, do you think,
 Back from Hell's brink?
 No, for they know these,
 Can watch the throes of unavailing agonies,
 Brave to embrace
 Uttermost anguish of the place
 God looks upon.
 But the lost love Him not, and, lo!
 They stagger and reel, crushed backward by the blow

Little Seal-skin

Of hate, calling importunate for great deliverance.
Lord! 'tis our life to love Thee;
Yet this too at Thy word—
What severance possibly?
See, what we might have been,
How planned if He had willed.
Shut from Him, dim in consciousness, within
Bodily keen senses, with low rapture filled,
Below strife of desire;
Made like the devils whose breath is hate's fire.
But instead—O bounteous shade
Of being into being—from scant
Feeblest motion, up through joy, strength, want,
Grade up to grade, fiercer, higher,
Beyond perfectest passion of life we aspire,
Immortals He only can satisfy,
Called forth for delight,
Response of the Infinite.
Yet men will not turn, will not fill
The great Heart with love.
O, shame! all shame above,
Loss beneath loss—
Though He cries from the cross,
"It is done!"
Though He cries, "Of the ten
Is there one?"
Though He cries from the waste,
The Alone.
So we haste. Is there cure for such pain?
O, can love staunch Thy blood, Thou love-slain?
Yet we cry, we His chosen ones, "I,
I am here, Lord, take me,
This folded heart, Thy white lily,
Kept for Thee."

There was joy for us, Christine, only joy
That time when the people raged,
When sublime death flew at the instant
Hither, thither, like the spirit blowing;
When one knew not going
From mart to home, if he should meet
Heaven or hell in the poor street.
Joy for us there was, ecstasy,
Seeing the thin veil drawn
To a mist, frail as the haze of dawn,
But a shade's shade between us and Him.
The clay coldening to death,
The white soul at the verge
With wings spread, uplift,
All but dipped for the rapture,
Her flight into Him.

MARY to CHRISTINE.

True, they outraged Him,
Their infamies raged,
Their fires scorched the skies;
But His own flew
With whole love t' assuage Him,
With live coals from the altar—
Through **such** sin, **so much** grace.
Yea, did the weak heart falter,
Did the rapt face pale,
Even when the evil turned
Round on itself?
Slayer by slayer slain, men drowning in blood.
Nay—it is His command,
Man's hand against th' uplifted hand.
Is it not good?
Easily we rejoiced at the vengeance, and
At a thousand-fold had even a thousand-fold been glad
If only had one pitifullest soul perchance
Been lifted by suffering out of its mire of sin,—
One soul, one soul. Who knows
The soul's last God-clasp at its close
Of time? How He,
Out of an instant shaping eternity,
Can drink the life into Himself
Even off the charnel's brink?

Verily we are but flowers and grass,
A day's breath, gone to-morrow,
Only sunshine, or rain,
Our joy and our sorrow;
And yet our pain **is** pain.
Thrust out from the hearts of men,
Who shall say, does not the lonely heart
Drop in the desert blood?
Pulses of the Immortal in worms of clay.
What when **He** then, Love Himself,
Has been thrust aside,
Must not **His** wound be?
In the dust, in the dust let us lie,
Covered with penitential ashes, silently
Before Love's woe,
We know not, nor can ever know.

But, when the tide ebbs at last,
And the storm, passed into upper air,
Leaves a bare earth, ridden, emptied of her violent throes,
Then the chidden flowers,
Risen after rain,
Kiss the unhappy winds with their perfume,
Hidden well, inwardly folded during the cruel blast,
So we, flowers of His spirit garden

Little Seal-skin

That grow beside the water-courses
Where our Beloved feeds,
Break our close leaves with sighing as He passes
Amidst the feathery fragrance of tall reeds and grasses,
Bent and re-risen;"Love, but one little moment turn,
Rest and abide with love;
Dead lies the storm;
New light embraces Thy beloved form;
The pressed sward clasps Thy feet,
A little while—towards us, is it not meet
To move amongst Thy flowers lovingly,
That bloom for Thee of love?"

Thus, and 'tis ever thus, Christine,
Out of hate-furrows most love grows.
Hear! There was one of us,
A sister, who here in this very spot
Living, long time ago, through terrible years,
Her very name forgot,
Has left white record of her in tender words
Written on her cell walls
E'en with blood and tears, as we think,
A love-song to her Adored,
Which in the dim space,
Between her pallet's place
And the high window barred,
We trace, broken and smeared here and there, hard
To decipher, time-worn,
Long, sweet verse incomplete;
But anon, a full cadence, of love born,
All on fire, to the heart's lyre set,
Beaten forth of it, strong and complete.
"The garden of the lilies,"
This written above,
"The garden of the lilies who are the brides of Christ."
And then a list
Of names, fair flowers and jewels of His; tryste
In the spirit and wonderful whispers of love.

"All night, all night, O Love, the night winds sighed across the sea,
The fresh tide seeks the shore,
Fresh with the breath of Thee.

"All night Thy lilies sighed across the waste their fragrance,
Kissed the white sea for Thee, seeking Thee.
Where didst Thou hide?

"The night flies, Love, O Love, and the young light,
Thy herald, thrills the cold air,
Tremulously strikes to the heart of Thy bride.

Little Seal-skin

"O garden of Thy lilies,
Steep from the sea to the hill-top,
Steeped in the red rose of Thee.

Nigher, O Love, to greet Thee new buds break into fire,
New love that grew
Through the dark hour,
From seed to flower.

"See the starred orange tree,
Where the full light pours,
White-starred, gold-planeted,
White with her purity,
Gold-hearted fidelity,
All fragrant amorously,
Fire-purified, sevenfold furnace tried,
Gold heart of Thy bride.

"The day is full, O Love, and the hushed sea
Murmurs of Thee.
The air all aglow,
Flushed to the overflow,
Drunken with Deity;
Drink Thy love, Love, back to Thyself,
Light, Thine own light;
Lord, lest the wanton night,
Finding one delight
Left, of one should defraud Thee.

"The streamlet leaps, O Love, from steep to steep,
Truth sprung from Thee;
Its life-full runnels creep
Amongst the roots of fig and vine,
Swell through the largening fruits
Where lemons incline
Their delicate pale oval against yon red-rock walls,
Trellised with roses, saffron and crimson and white,
Shaded with shape
Of flowers in clusters,
Purpled with pomegranate and grape,
Swathed in pink tendrils,
Bathed in Thy light,
Bright and set towards Thee,
Whom the water calls Love as it falls,
Talks of Thee,
Through Thy garden from the height to the sea.

"Take Thou Thy lily, O Lord,
In those pure hands of Thine,
And worship her sweetness stored.

Little Seal-skin

"The hot day wears, O Love, we pine;
Hot hours are years athirst.
The runnels are Thine, O Love, and we
And the rich life divine—
We are athirst for Thee.

"Nearer, O Love, even manifest,
Cleave Heaven;
Voice of the wide air in the secret ear,
Near—art Thou near?
Flutter of the Dove within;
Is it Thou, Love? art Thou here?

"The sweet day wanes, O Love, we yearn for Thy embrace;
Searching all space in pain for Thee,
For Thy loved sorrow-stricken face.

"O Love and the heat wanes,
And must night be again?
We trust in Thee.

"Love, heat, light. List—
On the darkening amethyst
The feet of Christ."

CHRISTINE to MARY.

What! for Him, Mary,
All your pity, all your worship, all your love!
So fallen out of pity's height
To the slave's ignominy,
Base, with adoring face
Turned heavenwards to the smiter,
From crushed humanity to might,
In extravagant blasphemy of worship!
Calling that love that made for its glory all,
Angel and devil lives!
Calling that love that craves for itself whilst it gives!
Calling that God—phantasm that a weary brain,
Surfeited with th' inexhaustible life pain,
Flings upon nothingness,
Drawn out of its best or its worst
Verily I know not!
To cling to, or cringe to, or what—
But thrice accurst let every lie be,
If it torture, or comfort us equally.
You're athirst? Is humanity?
So you try, has **it** not ever tried,
Filling the great void with lies;
Ignorant, so very wise
In the darkness, naked, blind,
Piling up for a covering amidst the emptiness,
Battlements that are naught.
Mary, not any height
Of passion for that which you call Him and Infinite,
Nor interchange of love, if it were possible even,
Between that and the soul—
Seems to me great, sublime, beside
The story of how one atheist died.
Listen, in the pitiless time
When you swooned with love,
When the blood of men cried
From the ground to the wide reach of being,
If haply there might be found
One pitiful to bless, not to save—
Out of the hunted brood
Driven to the slaughter, e'en in the battle's stay,
Three by an open grave stood
Together upon a day.
Who maketh His sun to shine, verily
Upon the evil and the good doth He?
In the delicious wood,
Spring—blossoming that day—
Maketh His sun to shine

Little Seal-skin

Through delicate atmosphere,
To rise and shine and smile upon the day of death,
Warm with May's breath,
Sweet with new life in the bud—
Sweet day, dear life!
Listen; they stood
One with eyes blinded, shrinking with natural fear,
Two with clear outlook on their murderers.
And of these two, one calling on God
Looked Heavenward as he fell;
The fearful gave no sign, but fell
As the tree falls or flower cut down,
Or beast before the knife,
Yielding his life
A martyr to men's uses helplessly.
And one, neither with faith, nor fear,
Nor hope, nor penitence fell.
Did I say faithless? O, but he had a creed
Most precious to him, and flung it forth defiantly,
"Liberty" the last word on his lip,
Purer than any worship
Chanted round blood-stained altars of the city,
Even though he too was pitiless,
Made pitiless by pity.
Think of him, Mary, who fell thus—
Nay, is it possible for us,
You and me, Mary,
Inheritors of that fair lie,
Taught to us also through gentle infancy,
Of the inextinguishable life in us,
(Sweet words delirious, delicious cheat,)
Saying "death," to reach even the verge of this intense thought,
That life for ever changing thro' multitudinous form
Of earth, worm of earth up to highest developed man,
Is and is and is—whilst I, this
That is conscious here now, thinks and feels,
Shall cease utterly.
Mary, could you or I,
Knowing this through and through without doubt, dread
It not, face the nothingness, shed
Every drop of life, O beloved life!
Not for the love of One
Supreme, out of whose infinity
Life cannot escape although merged,
But for the unknown,
To us th' indifferent ceaseless Time,
Dropping her children off one by one,
Letting them lie by the roadside dead,
For this monster Humanity.
Do they die fiercely who die for this?
Does that surprise you?

CHRISTINE to MARY.

Little Seal-skin

The absolute sacrifice,—
Loveless, passionless; does it scare you,
The last light of those eyes that glare
Back what they see?—**we** should call it despair.
Let be, there may be tenderer acts and sweeter
Many, but any sacrifice completer?

But what is this—this Humanity which they worship,
Do they not say worship?
Casting aside at last utterly
Every puerility of the past,
Child's play, hopes of the spring—time of the earth,
Joys and tears April mixed,
Which in his reason's dawn,
Man from the dimmer being drawn, newly drawn,
Evolved in the birthtime of years,
Fears also out of his helplessness,
Compassed with pain,—
Horror, worship, Heaven, Hell,
God, th' illimitable hope,
The unfathomable dread,
Passion, turmoil, seething of the growing forming race,
Good up to better,
And stiffening of limbs in the fetters
Self-forged, as the limbs grew;
And now, what new is there out of the old?
Coldly from the twilight rises the new day.
Are they all dead, devils, gods?
Lo! there is naught either to live or to die,
Hope or dread. Height, depth, vanished alike—
God, horror; beauty,
Th' indefinable, inextinguishable soul.
Strike at the monstrous growths, light coldly stealing
Over the level plain, **this**, dreary, real, true, **this** revealing,
Free from the poisonous night vapours.
Were they dreams then,
Dreams only of our infancy,
Marvellous sweetnesss, nightmares also,
Those we deemed pulses of spring-time and blossoming,
True flowers from life's root
Fruit bearing, like flowers, like fruit?
Spring-time, infancy, dreaming—
Dreams even scarcely,
For does not Humanity
Now, first to-day, in this ripe time
Open her mild eyes complete
Out of the womb of Being?
(Unborn in the beautiful ages of lies.)
Is the night past,
Chaos ordered at last,
And this, this life, is't a poor thing,

CHRISTINE to MARY.

That we thirst for some other, above us, beyond,
Some cheat promise,
Lisping for ever half utterances? Hist!
Let such lie by the roadside dead.
Listen to the new worship.

There was a word, a name,
Dreaded, adored, trusted, propitiated,
Now as a multitude, now One,
Satiated alike with blood.
A name,—what has it done?
Who can define it, test it, try its worth?
Well, there was chaos and night,
And travail in our great mother the earth;
Now, order and light.

Humanity—see
The little rivulet out of the hill,
Thin mist wreaths of spray
Out away there where the falls fret the chasm,
Broad way of the waters,
To the still, pure blue lake holding Heaven.
Humanity, lo! the night riven,
A glow, a light gentle pervading,
A warmth spread,
A life—thrill and dead atoms unite;
Through the ages **this** grows,
This **conscious** Humanity.
Hush! the awake heart, the pulse,
To the outmost, remotest, life—blood's rush,
From unit to unit the subtle tie,
See it, feel it, die individuality.

Humanity built up in the obscure,
One, awake to—day perfect, pure,
A self all—comprehending. I—what am I?
A link, a cause, a sequence, a transition,
See how I fall off from myself,—I,—
A mystery? only the common sound
Of a note struck that must sound
At the striking. From known to known,
Out of the near past from the remote,
Flower of the seed sown,
That which must be.
I,—from the unseen to the unseen?
No, just a vision clearer,
Microscopic, looking nearer,
Open the taught eyes and see
Growth multitudinous, endless,
Calculable, sure, O man! at last wise.
Beautiful, pure from the pure,

Baneful, base, as unfailingly
From its source! Do they lie
Any longer shrouded? what mystery,
As the course of time runs, now we know
That from such and such seeds such flowers must grow;
Units poor, plain, building up the determinable All,
Threads of new moss overspreading the massive wall,
Indestructible small links.
Behold the giant bound;
Tenderly though, Being great, privileged on the common ground
To live, ever progressive,
Never to reach the shore
Of a soundless deep; soar
Into dizziness where any Unknowable may be,
Strain at strong doom or desire again,
Not again verily.

So what gain, O, for thee, Humanity,
Torn by the cruel birth-pangs,
Born into a gentle morning?
Look around thee, breathe the quiet air!
Is not the nightmare dead, despair?
Is not the pit closed? awake,
Shake the shadows off!
Beneath thee, what is this?
Time, such as we know it, such as this that is.
Beyond thee, Time, even as thou shalt fashion it.
Thou, thou, at thy holy feet we bow;
Thee adore, whom each little vessel feeds,
Each in his small place thou, not thou—
Absorbing, all adorable,
Whom we evolve, even as we adore,
Thy good, thy glory, thy progression our heaven.
Perish all needs of every hungering one,
Whose filling fills thee not, slakes not thy thirst.
No waste shall be henceforth of years,
Labour, thought, pain, strength, tears;
Perish each feebleness of individuality
For thy sake, mighty one, man's only deity.
Man's even to make as he would have thee be;
Man has no help but man, nor enemy.
Is the pit closed—the veiled mystery unveiled?
Or lingers there still
A something of source and will
Unsearchable that escapes us,
Some truth unserviceable? In its cold height
Such unassailed we can pass by,
Pledged to the new culte loyally.

Death—what is **this**, to die?
Spring follows spring;

We do not weep at memory
Of last April's blossoming;
Sleep succeeds sleep, new rays
Awake the hills, days crowd on days.
Lives upon lives lie countless,
Death—heap of Time, this that we cover awhile,
Smile over with life, until we die,
We too lie slain and the years forget us.
Yet there's a memory, a dim
Singing amongst the spheres of such or such an one,
Who wrought some unending gain.
Fame—man's immortality,
Delicate bloom on the horizon,
Perfume from the sweet past,
Blown on by the kind blast
To the unsown fields—
Shall it too perish at last
In the new life life yields?
Yea, let each die;
It boots not, so the times grow,
Fatten and multiply and draw strong nourishment
From death, feed on the lives spent;
Each one complete through bud and flower and fruit,
And death as sweet as life,
Each upon each successive;
Unerring, progressive way
Time treads upon, strength and decay.
O World increase, increase Humanity,
Until nights cease and only days be.
Will nights decrease? Pity be praise?
Love hope fulfil? Peace, peace;
We cannot see—we die.
We cannot know if love obtain
And life, as the ages grow,
Or pain or endless pain,
Although the pit be closed we know—
We cannot know.

Death—What is this, to die?
For **me**, what is it?
Have I come near thee,
Death, near unto knowing thee?
Though I can see thee almost,
Shadow of my life, feel thy companionhood,
Freeze at this chill of the blood,
As it creeps from th' extreme to the core?
Death—friend? enemy?
Victor at least certainly;
Come and talk with me, death, familiarly.
Thou art—the end
Of struggle and pain and hope, thou art a friend

Then, death, thou bringest peace; the end—
The end of joy and quiet and rest;
My end that feel all these.
How shall peace hold me if I feel not peace?
Death, what is this, to cease?
Let me see truly and understand;
Kiss me beforehand, death.
Yes; there's the blank before me,
Neither despair, nor bliss.
No lie at least to wither in mockery;
Only thyself, great death, thy majesty—
I try to understand;
Let my hand lie obediently in thy hand.
I—what am I?
The least, O less than nothingness; let me die.

And thou too, beloved, if the sleep
Fall on thee first, and I must weep;
Dead I shall know thee, lost and dissolved and naught,
Treasures of heart and brain
Rotted, up through decay
Absorbed, perchance, and purified for some new form of clay,
Fresh personality
To be loved again and lost;
But of thee naught, of thine own self—
Alone, I shall weep for thee, Love, alone,
Forlorn because thou art not.
What! shall I love with strong love,
Mourn with long mourning,
Dust to the dust returned?
Are the **dead** loved?
O, can the **dead** be mourned?
Alas! when love must lie with thee beneath the grass!
But what's love worth,
Earth-born, food of death?
Once called th' Immortal,
God of the old faith.
Come, steely calm, and hold us,
Nothing obtains but death.
Love dies, and grief,
And joy, and peace, and fond alarm with these,
And pains are brief.
One wakens at sunrise,
With eyes aglow, who wearies,
Lies at mellow sunset low,
With hard set eyes,
Dull, unregretful eyes.
Life's but a breath
We draw 'twixt death and death;
Still on untiring wing,
Through ceaseless change of good and ill

It flies—and what remains—
O'er each who reigns?
Death is the king.

Is anything worth love?—
The short love even of this fading day?
Is the world less and less
As each lessens? How shall we say?
That worthlessnesses in the aggregate
Grow great, mass into worthiness;
Is it so? Is aught worth
Loving on all this weary earth,
Humanity, Deity that we dream of,
Art but a lava stream,
Out of death's jaws hardening?
Soulless Immensity,
What shall we render thee?
Service for increase of bodily development,
Thought and knowledge subservient,
Each will obedient
To thy imperious cry,
Suffering, perishing Humanity;
So pain and sorrow,
Such as we can measure and know,
Shall decrease; men at last content
With material nourishment,
The while pomp and splendour shall throw
An outward poetry and glow
About the times, saving from sordidness.

What! is this less
Then thou dost, Christianity,
Wedded, in these days at least, to gold?
(Property and faith, the age's respectabilities)
Than thou dost, through thy votaries,
Thou lie on the lips that mutter thy formularies.
Userer, priest, do the nameless die
In their dens, rot, and waste, and decay?
And ye,—when they rise,
(O blind, leading blind to what precipice!)
When they rise, mad with hate
And desperate to sweep away
Society's bounds, heaped up to stay
Th' irresistible sea—ye cry
For blood, life for gold, for follies, butcheries;
Fly each at his brother's throat,
Gloat over the slaughter, setting afloat
Law, order and faith again.
For thy share millionaire,
A Bourse buoyant, all paths free for gain,
The world for thee, to absorb and to dispense,

Little Seal-skin

With answer ready to any one who saith
"Where is thy brother Cain?"
In defence of sacred property he was slain,
That is in Thy defence, Lord, thine and mine.
Are ye more pitiful then,
Faith and free-will thus
Than we are, who hold
On to life but as links of th' unending gold?
We who must
Count the down-trodden dust
A holy thing, is it not all of us?
We who for large Humanity,
Perchance unskillfully,
May crush a heart's sigh,
Some feeblest individuality—blind—
But for the great All we shall have sinned;
We, who this common ground
Of earth, of flesh, are fain to touch tenderly,
Feeling our frailty compass us around,
Who share the day-fly's immortality,
What shall we scorn?
See what mood's born in me,
Even as I sighed in terriblest sadness!
Has not the heart replied?
Lo! here is gain,
To have found a brotherhood
Though in the grave; gentle, and meek, and good,
To a tender calm subdued,
Sweet calm, death calm—
I know now what is good.

MARY to CHRISTINE.

Sister, I bore your sorrow and your sin
Within my heart, a very death at the core
Of my life, whole nights upon the sacred floor
In penance and prayer before Him,
And had no sign, nor heard
His dear knock at my heart's door,
Nor flutter of dove-wings stirred
The gloom; then did hope pine,
A weary time, a weary waiting time.
"Is Thy love quenched, O crucified,
In this slime of hell;
Has the knell sounded?" I cried,
"And the enemy taken his prey
On this side the grave.
Must she pass away
Into the dark?" I sickened—
"To the unfathomed deep and there be none to save,
Lord!" and for answer a knell
That sounded in my ears
Full and strong,
Growing dull to the quickened sense,
And duller to an unbearable silence.

Staggering I rose in the desolation, turned
My back upon His altar, spurned
The mercy seat and with swift feet
Fled from the presence of the Lord,
Scorched by the icy cold,
Stunned by the silence,
Blinded by the gloom,
Tortured upon His threshold stood
Face to face with the night-flood;
When suddenly upon that sea
One coming unto me
I knew not; Christine, I will tell it thee,
That vision of the night I had,
Brightness that smote upon my wearied brain,
Albeit I may not say
If 'twere an angel of light,
Or an evil one clad in white,
Brought it to me. Outside
His Church, they say, one may not reach the Crucified;
Yet I will tell it thee,
Some influence impels me,
So it may gladden thee as me,
And, Mother, forgive me if my lips unsealed
Speak aught thy wisdom had kept unrevealed.

There was a chill light round Him,
Now, it seems
As I had felt Him first in a thrill,
And that sight second became aware
Of the pale gleam that awoke in my despair.
As the sudden change of a dream,
He grew unstrange whom I knew not,
Broke upon my innermost,
And I, yet in the flesh,
Was born into the ghost world.
"Thou that wert glorified
To the side of th' Eternal,
Thou art not here," I sighed inwardly,
"Not in Thy man's form visibly,
Though in the mystery we apprehend Thee;"
Christine, not a voice answered audibly,
But as it were every sense and nerve in me,
"Can He dwell apart, Emmanuel?"
Then suddenly
A dim multitudinous murmur and rush of the sea
On a long shore far away, gathering close, closing around me,
In music, in rapture; the depth of the night
Light about Him;
Crowds upon crowds countless, the seraphim.

Not in the mysteries only
Or story long told, fetished, or forgotten,
Of God in the flesh born, He lives;
Were the eyes holden? He lives,
Rives thy fetters—O creation travailing arise.
Man into the spirit born,
Man in the flesh shall behold Him.
Spirit into flesh born,
Flesh into spirit redeemed—
This that was dreamed of, **is**,
Every eye, face to face.
Where's Thy similitude to greet Thee?
Faith but a buried store,
Love waning evermore,
'Twixt rich and poor, a river fed full with hate-streams.
Christ, not in dreams far spent
Art Thou, but here, ready to break visible on our bewilderment;
Real king midst living men, making love actual.
Above the flood brood, holy Dove,
Divide, reveal, bring forth new love,
Breath of the Spirit, new light, new faith, new love.
Did we ween we had heard Thee,
Word from all eternity?
Do we begin
To catch the glimmer of Thy glory entering in?

MARY to CHRISTINE.

Little Seal-skin

Lift up, ye everlasting gates, creation,
God and man one.

Ever about me
Multitudinous murmur and melody,
Clouds of faces of angels around Him the Loved One, the Lovely;
But—a swooping shadow across my sight,
A cry striking along the melody,
And the vision fell,
And the night bound me;
Christine, and I cannot tell
Who brought that vision to me;
Nor if the cry or the harmony
Were wrought out of heaven or hell;
Nor part the sleep from the waking:
But a bubbling spring in my heart is
From a well deep below which I know not,
A song in my heart that I sing.

And yet one word that I know, dear,
Here in my little cell,
Down from the height come to me, dear,
Bending low, for one night—watch with me here alone
Where my small life drops its hours
One by one, year by year, in penitence.
Could I but make you see,
Catch by some spirit sense,
As I see on the wall, there portrayed
Him—were the colour laid
By mortal hands, glory and shadow,
Impressing Him to the innermost; the royal brow
Weighted with anguish; th' absorbing eyes
Hungry with selfless love.
Lo! th' amazing love. Lo! the whole sacrifice,
Out—cast of earth and heaven.
Lo! the **one** spotless life to earth given,
Th' innocent life spilt in the fire;
Heart, with guilt broken,
Jesus the forsaken.
Hear the cry, O humanity,
Th' unfathomable cry,
One with Him King of suffering.

A FAREWELL.

TO SISTER MARY OF THE BLESSED TRINITY.

AH! yes, good-bye,
Dear love.
At last we say it, you and I.
So long my friend,
Dear, you have been so long my friend.
Have you no pain
At my distress? Is this the end
Of our long love, my loss, your gain?

At last, good-bye,
Dear love.
Again I say it, O good-bye.
You've been so sweet,
Love, to me, you have been so sweet.
You say, warm heart,
Love cannot die, and we shall meet
In spirit, though so far apart.

In spirit meet,
Dear love,
Perhaps in dreaming we shall meet,
And there will be
A shadow of you, dear, by me,
That will not speak,
Though I be weeping bitterly,
Nor touch my hand, nor kiss my cheek.

But O, good-bye,
Dear love.
A last farewell. Love cannot die.
One crowning kiss
You'll give me, darling, one long kiss,
And there will be
No other, dearest, after this
For ever, between you and me.

The End.