

Mrs. Helen Jackson ("H.H.")

Thomas Wentworth Higginson

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IT is curious to see how promptly time begins to apply to the memory of remarkable persons, as to their tombstones, an effacing process that soon makes all inscriptions look alike. Already we see the beginnings of this tendency in regard to the late Mrs. Helen Jackson. The most brilliant, impetuous, and thoroughly individual woman of her time, — one whose very temperament seemed mingled of sunshine and fire, — she is already being portrayed simply as a conventional Sunday-school saint. It is undoubtedly true that she wrote her first poetry as a bereaved mother and her last prose as a zealous philanthropist; her life comprised both these phases, and she thoroughly accepted them; but it included so much more, it belonged to a personality so unique and in many respects so fascinating, that those who knew her best can by no means spare her for a commonplace canonization that takes the zest out of her memory. To describe her would be impossible except to the trained skill of some French novelist; and she would have been a sealed book to him, because no Frenchman could comprehend the curious thread of firm New England texture that ran through her whole being, tempering waywardness, keeping impulse from making shipwreck of itself, and leading her whole life to a high and concentrated purpose at last. And when we remember that she hated gossip about her own affairs, and was rarely willing to mention to reporters any fact about herself, except her birthday, — which she usually, with characteristic willfulness, put a year earlier than it was, — it is peculiarly hard to do for her now that work which she held in such aversion. No fame or publicity could ever make her seem, to those who knew her, anything but the most private and intimate of friends; and to write about her at all seems the betrayal of a confidence.

I.

HELEN MARIA FISKE, the daughter of Nathan Wiley and Deborah (Vinal) Fiske, was born at Amherst, Massachusetts, October 18, 1831. Her father was a native of Weston, Massachusetts, was a graduate of Dartmouth College, and, after being a tutor in that institution, became professor first of languages and then of philosophy in Amherst College, having been previously offered a professorship of mathematics at Middlebury College, — a combination of facts indicating the variety of his attainments. He was also a Congregationalist minister and an author, publishing a translation of Eschenburg's "Manual of Classical Literature," and one or two books for children. He died May 27, 1847, at Jerusalem, whither he had gone for the benefit of his health. His wife was a native of Boston, and is mentioned with affection by all who knew her; and the daughter used to say that her own sunny temperament came from the mother's side. She also had literary tastes, and wrote the "Letters from a Cat," which her daughter afterwards edited, and which show a genuine humor and a real power of expression. She died February 19, 1844, when her daughter Helen was twelve years old. Both parents held the strict Calvinistic faith, and the daughter was reared in it, though she did not long remain there.

Mr. and Mrs. Fiske had two sons, who died young, and two daughters, who lived to maturity; the younger of whom, Anne, is the wife of Everett C. Banfield, Esquire, at one time solicitor of the Treasury Department at Washington, and now a resident of Wolfboro, New Hampshire. The other, Helen, was a child of uncommon versatility and vivacity; and her bright sayings were often quoted, when she was but ten or twelve years old, in the academical circle of the little college town. She has herself described in a lively paper, "The Naughtiest Day of my Life" ("St. Nicholas," September–October, 1880), a childish feat of running away from home in company with another little girl, on which occasion the two children walked to Hadley, four miles, before they were brought back. The whole village had joined in the search for them, and two professors from the college finally reclaimed the wanderers. There is something infinitely characteristic of the mature woman in the description written by her mother, at the time, of the close of that anxious day: "Helen walked in at a quarter before ten o'clock at night, as rosy and smiling as possible, and saying in her brightest tone, 'Oh, mother, I've had a perfectly splendid time.'"

A child of this description may well have needed the discipline of a variety of schools; and she had the advantage of at least two good ones, — the well-known Ipswich (Massachusetts) Female Seminary, and the private school of Rev. J. S. C. Abbott in New York city. She was married in Boston, when just twenty-one (October 28, 1852), to Captain (afterwards Major) Edward B. Hunt, United States Army, whom she had first met at Albany, New York, his brother, the Honorable Washington Hunt, being at that time Governor of the State. Captain and Mrs. Hunt led the usual wandering life of military households, and were quartered at a variety of posts. As an engineer officer he held high army rank, and he was also a man of considerable scientific attainments. Their first child, Murray, a beautiful boy, died of dropsy in the brain, when eleven months old, at Tarrytown, New York, in August, 1854. Major Hunt was killed, October 2, 1863, at Brooklyn, New York, while experimenting with an invention of his own, called a "sea-miner," for firing projectiles under water. Mrs. Hunt still had her second boy, named Warren Horsford, after her friends, General G. K. Warren and Professor Horsford, but commonly called "Rennie." He had, by testimony of all, a rare combination of gifts and qualities, but died suddenly of diphtheria at his aunt's home in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on April 13, 1865. Mrs. Hunt was thus left utterly bereaved, and the blow was crushing. It shows the strong relation between mother and child, and the precocious character of her boy, that he made her promise not to take her own life after he should be gone. She made him promise, in return, that if it were a possible thing he would overcome all obstacles and come back from the other world to speak to her; and the fact that this was never done kept her all her life a disbeliever in Spiritualism: what Rennie could not do, she felt must be impracticable. For months after his death she shut herself up from her nearest friends; and when she appeared among them at last, she was smiling, vivacious, and outwardly unchanged.

Up to this time, although her life had been full of variety and activity, it had been mainly domestic and social, and she had shown no special signs of a literary vocation. She loved society, was personally very attractive, dressed charmingly, and had many friends of both sexes. Through her husband she knew many superior men, but

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they belonged almost wholly to the military class, or were those men of science whom she was wont to meet at the scientific gatherings to which she accompanied Major Hunt. It was not till she went, at the age of thirty-four, to live in Newport, Rhode Island, that she was brought much in contact with people whose pursuits were literary; and it was partly, no doubt, through their companionship that a fresh interest and a few employment opened most unexpectedly before her. How wholly she regarded her life as prematurely ended at the close of its first phase may be seen by a letter written soon after establishing herself in Newport, when she had gone to West Point to superintend the removal of the remains of her husband and children to that spot. After speaking of the talents and acquirements whose career was finished, she bitterly added: "And I alone am left, who avail nothing." She had yet to learn how much her own life was to avail.

II.

WHEN she went to live in Newport (February 10, 1866), she had already written poems, and had shown them to her friends. She had, indeed, when in her teens, published some girlish verses in the Boston "Press and Post," but her mature compositions had all related, so far as I know, to her personal bereavements. Of these she had published one in the "Nation" (July 20, 1865), this being the very first volume of that periodical, which was edited by a personal friend, and which gave at first more space to poetry than now. This poem was called "Lifted Over," and consisted of fourteen lines of blank verse, referring to the death of her boy, and signed "Marah." The fact of its publication makes it likely that, wherever she had taken up her residence, she would have published more poetry of the elegiac kind; but it is doubtful whether her lyre would have reached a wide variety of notes, or whether she would have been known as a prose writer at all, but for the stimulus and fresh interests developed by her change of abode. In the society of her new friends she began for the first time to make a study of literary style and methods; she interchanged criticism with others, and welcomed it as applied to her own attempts; she soon ventured to publish more poems, and then to try herself in prose. The signature "H. H." first appeared, I believe, in connection with the first thing she published after her removal to Newport. This was a poem called "Tryst," in the "Nation" (April 12, 1866), followed soon by a translation — almost the only one she ever made — from Victor Hugo's "Le Soir" ("Nation," April 26, 1866), and by two poems called "A Burial Service" (May 22) and "Old Lamps for New" (May 29) — this last being, perhaps by accident, unsigned.

These were soon followed by poems in the New York "Independent," beginning with "Hagar" (August 2, 1866) and "Bread on the Waters" (August 9, 1866) — she still keeping mainly to her experiences of sorrow. Her first attempt in prose, under her own signature, appeared in the same newspaper for September 13, 1866, and was entitled "In the White Mountains." It was a sketch of a walk up Mount Washington from the Glen House, and, though spiritedly written, gave little indication of her rising so far above the grade of the average summer correspondent as she ultimately attained. She also wrote an unsigned review of "Felix Holt," in the same number. From this time till her death she was an occasional correspondent of that journal, writing for it, as its editors say, three hundred and seventy-one articles in all. She wrote also in "Hearth and Home," and published a few poems in the New York "Evening Post."

Thus launched into literature, she entered with the enthusiasm of a child upon her new work. She distrusted herself, was at first fearful of each new undertaking, yet was eager to try everything, and the moment each plunge was taken lost all fear. I remember the surprise with which she received the suggestion that no doubt publishers would be happy to send her their books if she would only review them; and her delight, as in a new world, when she opened the first parcels. From the beginning she composed with great rapidity, writing on large sheets of yellow post-office paper, eschewing pen and ink, and insisting that a lead-pencil alone could keep pace with the swiftness of her thoughts. The remarkable thing was that, with all this quickness, she was always ready to revise and correct, and was also a keen and minute critic on the writings of others. It was very surprising that one who was not really familiar with any language but her own — for the Latin of her school-days had already faded and even her French was at that time very imperfect — should have such a perception of the details of style. She had, however, been well trained in English at school, and used to quote Kames's "Elements of Criticism" as one of the books she had read there. Both her father and mother had also taken an interest in her early school compositions.

A statement has been lately made, on the authority of the late Mr. R. W. Emerson, that she sent poems to the "Atlantic" in those early days, and that they were rejected. It is possible that my memory may not include all the facts, but I am confident that this statement is an error. It is certain that she was repeatedly urged to send something in that direction by a friend who then contributed largely to the magazine, but she for a long time declined; saying that the editors were overwhelmed with poor poetry, and that she would wait for something of which she felt sure. Accordingly she put into that friend's hands her poem called "Coronation," with permission to show it to Mr. Fields and let him have it if he wished, at a certain price. It was a high price for a new-comer to demand; but she was inexorable, including rather curiously among her traits that of being an excellent business woman, and generally getting for her wares the price she set upon them. Fields read it at once, and exclaimed, "It's a good poem"; then read it again, and said, "It's a devilish good poem," and accepted it without hesitation. It

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appeared in the "Atlantic" for February, 1869, and another poem, "The Way to Sing," followed it a year after; but Fields never quite did justice to her poetry, while he greatly admired her prose, so that she offered but little verse to that magazine. Her "German Landlady" appeared there (October, 1870), and was followed by a long line of prose papers, continuing nearly until her death. Her little volume of "Verses" was printed rather reluctantly by Fields, Osgood Co. (1870), she paying for the stereotype plates, as was also the case with her first prose volume, "Bits of Travel" (1873), published by their successors, James R. Osgood Co. Soon after this she transferred her books to Roberts Brothers, who issued "Bits of Talk about Home Matters" (1873), and a much enlarged edition of "Verses" (1874).

She spent in all five winters at Newport, always at the same hospitable home, — Mrs. Hannah Dame's boarding-house, — and always going somewhere among the mountains in summer, early enough to keep off hay-fever, from which she suffered. Then she returned, late in autumn, preceded by great trunks and chests full of pressed ferns and autumn leaves, which she dispensed royally among her friends during the whole winter-time. These Newport seasons were interrupted by an absence of some fourteen months in Europe (November, 1868, to February, 1870), and she had several serious illnesses toward the latter part of the period. Indeed, she had an almost fatal attack while in Rome, and I am informed by the friend with whom she traveled, Miss Sarah F. Clarke, of a peculiarly characteristic act of hers when convalescent. Going to Albano to recruit, she refused to carry with her a professed nurse, as her friends desired, but insisted on taking a young Italian girl of sixteen, who had never had a vacation in her hard-working life, and to whom the whole period of attendance would be a prolonged felicity.

In May, 1872, she went to California with her friend Miss Sarah C. Woolsey; and in 1873-4, being convinced that her health needed a thorough change of climate, tried the experiment of a winter in Colorado. This State became soon after her permanent home; she being married in October, 1875, at her sister's house in Wolfboro, New Hampshire, to Mr. William Sharpless Jackson, of Colorado Springs. They were married by the ceremonial of the Society of Friends, the bridegroom being of that persuasion. For the remaining ten years of her life she had a delightful abode and a happy domestic life, although the demands of her health and her literary work, joined with a restless and adventurous disposition, kept her a great deal in motion between her new and her old haunts. Nobody was ever a more natural wanderer. She always carried with her a compact store of favorite pictures, Japanese prints, and the like; so that, within an hour after she had taken possession of a room at the Parker House in Boston or the Berkeley in New York, she would be sitting in a tasteful boudoir of her own arranging. With this came an equally ready acceptance of the outdoor surroundings of each place; and in migrating farther west, she soon knew more of Omaha or San Francisco than the oldest inhabitant. Her wonderful eye for external nature traveled with her; she planned her house at Colorado Springs with an unerring adaptation to the landscape, and on one occasion welcomed a friend with more than twenty different vases of the magnificent wild flowers of that region — each vase filled with a great sheaf of a single species. She had always lavished so much adornment on one or two rooms that her friends had wondered what she would do with a whole house; and those who visited her at Colorado Springs beheld the fulfillment of their wonderings.

III.

FOR the second time she was to encounter a wholly new intellectual experience after adopting a new abode. The literary development, which had begun somewhat late, was to be merged into a moral enthusiasm, beginning still later. She wrote to an intimate friend (January 17, 1880):

"I have done now, I believe, the last of the things I had said I never would do; I have become what I have said a thousand times was the most odious thing in life, 'a woman with a hobby.' But I cannot help it. I think I feel as you must have felt in the old abolition days. I cannot think of anything else from night to morning and from morning to night. . . . I believe the time is drawing near for a great change in our policy toward the Indian. In some respects, it seems to me, he is really worse off than the slaves; they did have, in the majority of cases, good houses, and they were not much more arbitrarily controlled than the Indian is by the agent on a reservation. He can order a corporal's guard to fire on an Indian at any time he sees fit. He is 'duly empowered by the Government.'"

In this same letter she announces her intention of going to work for three months at the Astor Library on her "Century of Dishonor"; and it is worth noticing that with all her enthusiasm she does not disregard that careful literary execution which is to be the means to her end; for in the same letter she writes to this friend, one of her earliest critics: "I shall never write a sentence, so long as I live, without studying it over from the stand-point of whether you would think it could be bettered." This shows that she did not, as some have supposed, grow neglectful of literature in the interest of reform; as if a carpenter were supposed to neglect his tools in order to finish his job.

Her especial interest in the Indians was not the instantaneous result of her Colorado life, but the travels and observations of those first years were doubtless preparing the way for it. It came to a crisis in 1879, when she heard the Indians "Standing Bear" and "Bright Eyes" lecture in Boston on the wrongs of the Poncas, and afterwards met them in New York, at the house of her friend Mrs. Botta. Her immediate sympathy for them seemed very natural to those who knew her, but it was hardly foreseen how strong and engrossing that interest would become. Henceforth she subordinated literature not to an ulterior aim merely, for that she had often done before, but to a single aim. It must be remembered, in illustration of this, that at least half the papers in her "Bits of Talk" were written with a distinct moral purpose, and so were many of her poems; and from this part of her work she had always great enjoyment. So ready were her sympathies that she read with insatiable pleasure the letters that often came to her from lonely women or anxious school-girls who had found help in her simple domestic or religious poems, while her depths of passion would only have frightened them, and they would have listened bewildered to those sonnets which Emerson carried in his pocket-book and pulled out to show his friends. No, there was always a portion of her literature itself which had as essentially a moral motive as had "Ramona"; and, besides, she had always been ready to throw aside her writing and devote whole days, in her impulsive way, to some generous task. For instance, she once, at the risk of great unpopularity, invoked the aid of the city solicitor and half the physicians in Newport to investigate the case of a poor boy who was being, as she believed, starved to death, and whom the investigation came too late to save.

Nor was the Indian question the first reform that had set her thinking, although she was by temperament fastidious, and therefore conservative. On the great slavery question she had always, I suspect, taken regular army views; she liked to have colored people about her as servants, but was disposed to resent anything like equality; yet she went with me to a jubilee meeting of the colored people of Newport, after emancipation, and came away full of enthusiasm and sympathy, with much contrition as to things she had previously said and done. She demurred at her Newport hostess's receiving a highly educated young quadroon lady as a temporary boarder in the house, but when the matter was finally compromised by her coming to tea, Mrs. Hunt lavished kindnesses upon her, invited her to her private parlor, and won her heart. The same mixture of prejudice and generosity marked her course in matters relating to the advancement of her own sex. Professedly abhorring woman suffrage, she went with me to a convention on that subject in New York, under express contract to write a satirical report in a leading newspaper; but was so instantly won over — as many another has been — by the sweet voice of Lucy Stone, that

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she defaulted as a correspondent, saying to me, "Do you suppose I ever could write against anything which that woman wishes to have done?" Afterwards she hospitably entertained the same lecturer when on the canvass in Colorado; and a few months before her death she gave an English advocate of the cause a letter to one of her Eastern friends, saying that her old prejudices were somewhat shaken. A California friend states, indeed, that she sometimes felt moved to write something on the legal and other disabilities of women.

But if other reforms had touched her a little, they had never controlled or held her, until the especial interest in the Poncas arose. After that she took up work in earnest, studied the facts, corresponded with statesmen, and finally wrote her "Century of Dishonor," as has been said. Over this she fairly worked herself sick, and was forced to go to Norway for refreshment with her friends the Horsfords, leaving the proof-reading to be done by a literary ally. Several charming memorials of this trip appeared in the magazines. She afterwards received an appointment from the United States Government to report on the condition and needs of the California "Mission Indians," in connection with Abbott Kinney, Esq.; and she visited all or most of those tribes for this purpose, in the spring of 1883. The report of the commissioners, which is understood to have been mainly prepared by her, is as clear, as full, and as sensible as if it had been written by the most prosaic of mankind. She also explored the history of the early Spanish missions, whose story of enthusiasm and picturesqueness won her heart; and she wrote the series of papers in regard to these missions which appeared in this magazine.

During this whole period, moreover, she did not neglect her earlier productions, but gathered them into volumes; publishing "Bits of Talk for Young Folks" (1876) and "Bits of Travel at Home" (1878). She also issued separately (1879) a single poem, "The Story of Boon." This was founded on a tale told in "The English Governess at the Siamese Court," by Mrs. A. H. Leonowens, a lady whose enthusiasm and eloquence found ardent sympathy in Mrs. Hunt, who for her sake laid down her strong hostility to women's appearance on the platform, and zealously organized two lectures for her friend. She published also a little book of her mother's, "Letters from a Cat" (1880), and followed it up by "Mammy Tittleback's Stories" (1881), of her own; and "The Hunter of Cats of Connorloa" (1884). Another book, for rather older children, was "Nelly's Silver Mine" (1878), and she wrote a little book called "The Training of Children" (1882). Then came "Ramona," first published in the "Christian Union" in 1884, appearing there because it had been written, as it were, at a white heat, and she could not wait for the longer delays of a magazine. It was issued in book form that same year, and completes the list of her acknowledged works. It was no secret, however, that she wrote, in the "No Name" series, "Mercy Philbrick's Choice" (1876) and "Hetty's Strange History" (1877). Into the question of other works that may have been rightly or wrongly attributed to her, the present writer does not propose to enter.

The sad story of her last illness need not here be recapitulated. She seemed the victim of a series of misfortunes, beginning with the long confinement incident to a severe fracture of the leg in June, 1884, this being followed by her transfer to a malarious residence in California, and at last by the discovery of a concealed cancerous affection that had baffled her physicians and herself. During all this period — much of it spent alone, with only a hired attendant, far from all old friends, though she was cheered by the constant kindness of newer ones — her sunny elasticity never failed; and within a fortnight of her death she wrote long letters, in a clear and vigorous hand, expressing only cheerful hopes for the future, whether she should live or die. One of the last of these was to President Cleveland, to thank him for sustaining the rights of the Indians. Her husband, who had been imperatively detained in Colorado by important business, was with her at the last, and she passed away quietly but unconsciously, on the afternoon of August 12, 1885. A temporary interment took place in San Francisco, the services being performed by the Rev. Horatio Stebbins, who read, very appropriately, the "Last Words," with which her little volume of verses ends. It was the precise memorial she would have desired; and the burial-place assigned to her was also in accordance with her own expressed wishes — it being a spot near the summit of the Cheyenne Mountains, about four miles from Colorado Springs.

IV.

The poetry of Mrs. Jackson unquestionably takes rank above that of any American woman, and in the opinion of many above that of any Englishwoman but Mrs. Browning. Emerson, as is well known, rated it above that of almost all American men. Her works include, first, the simple poetry of domestic life; secondly, love-poems of extraordinary intensity and imaginative fullness; thirdly, verses showing most intimate sympathy with external nature; and lastly, a few poems of the highest dignity and melody in the nature of odes, such as "A Christmas Symphony" and "A Funeral March." The poem which combines the most of depth and the most of popular sympathy is that called "Spinning," where a symbol drawn from common life assumes the sort of solemn expressiveness that belongs to the humble actions of peasants in the pictures of the French Millet. Emerson's favorite was her sonnet called "Thought"; and other critics have given the palm for exquisiteness of musical structure to her "Gondoliers." But her poetry was only a small portion of her literary work; and of the range and value of this product, a good conception will be given when we say that a plan was at one time seriously formed by the late Dr. Holland and his associate in charge of this magazine, to let Mrs. Jackson's contributions accumulate sufficiently to fill one number of the periodical — poetry, fiction, travels, criticism, and all — and then send it all forth as the product of one person. The plan was finally dismissed, as I am assured, not from the slightest doubt of its practicability, but only because it might be viewed as sensational. It is probably the greatest compliment ever yet paid by editors, in the whole history of magazine literature, to the resources of a single contributor.

There is in her prose writings an even excellence of execution which is not always to be found in her poetry, and which is surpassed by hardly any American writer. It is always clear, strong, accurate, spirited, and forcible; she had a natural instinct for literary structure, as well as style, and a positive genius for giving characteristic and piquant titles to what she wrote. It was her delight not merely to explore the new, but to throw novel and unexpected freshness around the old. Before she had become so wide a traveler she used to plan a book, to be called "Explorations" or some such title, in which all the most familiar scenery was to be described under fictitious names; and only the map appended would gradually reveal, through its new local phraseology, that "Hide and Seek Town"* was Princeton, Massachusetts, and so on indefinitely. Her poetry sometimes offered deeper enigmas than these superficial ones, and some of the best of it will never be fully comprehended but by the few who had the key to the events or emotions that called it forth. So ardent were her sympathies that everything took color from her personal ties; and her readiness to form these ties with persons of all ages, both sexes, and every condition not only afforded some of her greatest joys, but also brought the greatest perils of her life; often involving misconception, perplexity, and keen disappointment to herself and others. Her friendships with men had the frankness and openness that most women show only to one another; and her friendships with women had the romance and ideal atmosphere that her sex usually reserves for men. There was an utterly exotic and even tropical side of her nature, strangely mingled with the traits that came from her New England blood. Where her sympathy went, even in the least degree, there she was ready to give all she had, — attention, time, trouble, money, popularity, reputation, — and this with only too little thought of the morrow. The result was found not merely in many unreasonable requests, but in inconvenient and unlooked-for expectations. During the middle period of her life there was never any security that the morning postman might not bring an impassioned letter from some enamored young girl, proposing to come and spend her life with her benefactress; or a proffer of hand and heart from some worthy man, with whom she had mistakenly supposed herself to be on a footing of the plainest good-fellowship. It sometimes taxed all her great resources of kindness and ready wit to extract herself from such entanglements; and she never could be made to understand how they had come about or why others succeeded them.

She had great virtues, marked inconsistencies, and plenty of fascinating faults that came near to virtues. She was never selfishly ungenerous, but she was impulsive in her scorn of mean actions, and was sometimes cruelly unjust to those whom she simply did not understand; this misconception very often occurring, however, in the too Quixotic defense of a friend or a principle. To those who knew her best she was a person quite unique and utterly inexhaustible; and though her remoteness of residence during the last ten years had separated her from the society

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of many of her earlier friends, there is not one of them who does not feel the world deeply impoverished by her going out of it. She did not belong to a class; she left behind her no second; and neither memory nor fancy can restore her as she was, or fully reproduce, even for those who knew her best, that ardent and joyous personality. And those who recall her chiefly in gayer moods will find their remembrance chastened by the thought that she could write, when finally face to face with death, such poems as "Habeas Corpus," "Acquainted with Grief," and "A Last Prayer," — poems which are here first published, and which add a new dignity to the falling away of the flesh and a new nobleness to human nature.

* See this magazine for August, 1876.

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THE LAST POEMS OF HELEN JACKSON (H. H.).

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ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF.

DOST know Grief well? Hast known her long?

So long, that not with gift or smile,
Or gliding footstep in the throng,
She can deceive thee by her guile?

So long, that with unflinching eyes
Thou smilest to thyself apart,
To watch each flimsy, fresh disguise
She plans to stab anew thy heart?

So long, thou barrest up no door
To stay the coming of her feet?
So long, thou answerest no more,
Lest in her ear thy cry be sweet?

Dost know the voice in which she says,
"No more henceforth our paths divide;
In loneliest nights, in crowded days,
I am forever by thy side"?

Then dost thou know, perchance, the spell
The gods laid on her at her birth, —
The viewless gods who mingle well
Strange love and hate of us on earth.

Weapon and time, the hour, the place,
All these are hers to take, to choose,
To give us neither rest nor grace,
Not one heart-throb to miss or lose.

All these are hers; yet stands she, slave,
Helpless before our one behest:
The gods, that we be shamed not, gave,
And locked the secret in our breast.

She to the gazing world must bear
Our crowns of triumph, if we bid;
Loyal and mute, our colors wear,
Sign of her own forever hid.

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Smile to our smile, song to our song,
With songs and smiles our roses fling,
Till men turn round in every throng,
To note such joyous pleasuring,

And ask, next morn, with eyes that lend
A fervor to the words they say,
"What is her name, that radiant friend
Who walked beside you yesterday?"

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FEALTY.

THE thing I count and hold as fealty,
The only fealty to give or take,
Doth never reckoning keep, and coldly make
Bond to itself with this or that to be
Content as wage; the wage unpaid, to free
Its hand from service, and its love forsake,
Its faith cast off, as one from dreams might wake
At morn, and smiling watch the vision flee.
Such fealty is treason in disguise.
Who trusts it, his death-warrant sealed doth bear.
Love looks at it with angry, wondering eyes;
Love knows the face true fealty doth wear,
The pulse that beats unchanged by alien air,
Or hurts, or crimes, until the loved one dies.

Mrs. Helen Jackson ("H.H.")

VISION.

BY subtle secrets of discovered law
Men well have measured the horizon's round,
Kept record of the speed of light and sound,
Have close defined by reasoning without flaw
The utmost human vision ever saw
Unaided, and have arrant sought and found
Devices countless to extend its bound.
Bootless their secrets all! My eyes but stray
To eastward, and majestic, bright, arise
Peaks of a range which three days distant lies!
And of the faces, too, that light my day
Most clear, one is a continent away,
The other shines above the farthest skies!

Mrs. Helen Jackson ("H.H.")

THE POET'S FORGE.

HE lies on his back, the idling smith,
 A lazy, dreaming fellow is he;
The sky is blue, or the sky is gray,
He lies on his back the livelong day;
Not a tool in sight; say what they may,
 A curious sort of a smith is he.

The powers of the air are in league with him;
 The country around believes it well;
The wondering folk draw spying near;
Never sight nor sound do they see or hear;
No wonder they feel a little fear;
 When is it his work is done so well?

Never sight nor sound to see or hear;
 The powers of the air are in league with him;
High over his head his metals swing,
Fine gold and silver to shame the king;
We might distinguish their glittering,
If once we could get in league with him.

High over his head his metals swing;
 He hammers them idly year by year,
Hammers and chuckles a low refrain:
"A bench and book are a ball and chain,
The adze is better tool than the plane;
 What's the odds between now and next year!"

Hammers and chuckles his low refrain,
 A lazy, dreaming fellow is he:
When sudden, some day, his bells peal out,
And men, at the sound, for gladness shout;
He laughs and asks what it's all about;
 Oh, a curious sort of smith is he!

July 12th.

Mrs. Helen Jackson ("H.H.")

VANITY OF VANITIES.

BEE to the blossom, moth to the flame;
Each to his passion; what's in a name!

Red clover's sweetest, well the bee knows;
No bee can suck it; lonely it blows.

Deep lies its honey, out of reach, deep;
What use in honey hidden to keep?

Robbed in the autumn, starving for bread;
Who stops to pity a honey-bee dead?

Star-flames are brightest, blazing the skies;
Only a hand's breadth the moth-wing flies.

Fooled with a candle, scorched with a breath;
Poor little miller, a tawdry death!

Life is a honey, life is a flame;
Each to his passion; what's in a name?

Swinging and circling, face to the sun,
Brief little planet, how it doth run!

Bee-time and moth-time, add the amount;
White heat and honey, who keeps the count?

Gone some fine evening, a spark out-tost!
The world no darker for one star lost!

Bee to the blossom, moth to the flame;
Each to his passion; what's in a name?

Mrs. Helen Jackson ("H.H.")

HABEAS CORPUS.

MY body, eh? Friend Death, how now?
Why all this tedious pomp of writ?
Thou hast reclaimed it sure and slow
For half a century, bit by bit.

In faith thou knowest more to-day
Than I do where it can be found!
This shriveled lump of suffering clay,
To which I now am chained and bound,

Has not of kith or kin a trace
To the good body once I bore;
Look at this shrunken, ghastly face:
Didst ever see that face before?

Ah, well, friend Death, good friend thou art;
Thy only fault thy lagging gait,
Mistaken pity in thy heart
For timorous ones that bid thee wait.

Do quickly all thou hast to do,
Nor I nor mine will hindrance make;
I shall be free when thou art through;
I grudge thee nought that thou must take!

Stay! I have lied; I grudge thee one,
Yes, two I grudge thee at this last, —
Two members which have faithful done
My will and bidding in the past.

I grudge thee this right hand of mine,
I grudge thee this quick-beating heart;
They never gave me coward sign,
Nor played me once a traitor's part.

I see now why in olden days
Men in barbaric love or hate
Nailed enemies' hands at wild crossways,

HABEAS CORPUS.

Mrs. Helen Jackson ("H.H.")

Shrined leaders' hearts in costly state:

The symbol, sign, and instrument
Of each soul's purpose, passion, strife,
Of fires in which are poured and spent
Their all of love, their all of life.

O feeble, mighty human hand!
O fragile, dauntless human heart!
The universe holds nothing planned
With such sublime, transcendent art!

Yes, Death, I own I grudge thee mine
Poor little hand, so feeble now;
Its wrinkled palm, its altered line,
Its veins so pallid and so slow —

. . . (Unfinished here.)

Ah, well, friend Death, good friend thou art;
I shall be free when thou art through.
Take all there is — take hand and heart;
There must be somewhere work to do.

August 7th.

Mrs. Helen Jackson ("H.H.")

A LAST PRAYER.

FATHER, I scarcely dare to pray,
So clear I see, now it is done,
That I have wasted half my day,
And left my work but just begun;

So clear I see that things I thought
Were right or harmless were a sin;
So clear I see that I have sought,
Unconscious, selfish aims to win;

So clear I see that I have hurt
The souls I might have helped to save,
That I have slothful been, inert,
Deaf to the calls thy leaders gave.

In outskirts of thy kingdoms vast,
Father, the humblest spot give me;
Set me the lowliest task thou hast,
Let me repentant work for thee!

August 8th.