

# **The Poet's Fame**

Richard Watson Gilder



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# The Poet's Fame

**Richard Watson Gilder**

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THE POET'S FAME.

Many the songs of power the poet had wrought,  
To shake the hearts of men. Yea, he had caught  
The murmuring and inarticulate sound  
That comes at midnight from the darkened ground  
When the earth sleeps; for this he framed a word  
Of human speech, and hearts were strangely stirred  
That listened. And for him the evening dew  
Fell with a sound of music, and the blue  
Of the deep, starry sky he had the art  
To put in language that did seem a part  
Of the great scope and progeny of nature.  
In woods, or waves, or winds, there was no creature  
Mysterious to him. He was too wise  
Either to fear, or follow, or despise  
Whom men call Science, — for he knew full well  
What she had told, or still might live to tell,  
Was known to him before her very birth;  
Yea, that there was no secret of the earth,  
Nor of the waters under, nor the skies,  
That had been hidden from the poet's eyes;  
By him there was no ocean unexplored,  
Nor any savage coast that had not roared  
Its music in his ears.

He loved the town, —  
Not less he loved the ever-deepening brown  
Of summer twilights on the enchanted hills;  
Where he might listen to the starts and thrills  
Of birds that sang and rustled in the trees,  
Or watch the footsteps of the wandering breeze  
And the birds' shadows as they fluttered by  
Or slowly wheeled across the unclouded sky.  
All these were written on his very soul, —  
But he knew, too, the utmost distant goal  
Of the human mind. His fiery thought did run  
To Time's beginnings, ere yon central sun  
Had warmed to life the swarming broods of men.  
In waking dreams, his many-visioned ken  
Clutched the large, final destiny of things.  
He heard the starry music, and the wings

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Of spiritual beings fanned the air  
About him. Yet the loud and angry blare  
Of tempests found an echo in his verse,  
And it was here that lovers did rehearse  
The ditties they would sing when, not too soon,  
Came the warm night, — shadows, and stars, and moon  
Who heard his songs were filled with noble rage,  
And wars took fire from his prophetic page:  
Most righteous wars, wherein, 'midst blood and tears,  
The world rushed onward through a thousand years.  
Nathless, he made the gentle sounds of peace  
Heroic, — bade the nation's anger cease!  
Bitter his songs of grief for those who fell —  
And for all this the people loved him well.

They loved him well, and therefore, on a day,  
They said, with one accord: "Behold how gray  
Our poet's head hath grown! Ere 'tis too late  
Come, let us crown him in our Hall of State;  
Let the bells ring, fill the wide air with praise,  
And spread his fame to other lands and days!"

So was it done, and deep his joy therein.  
But passing home at night, from out the din  
Of the loud Hall, the poet, unaware,  
Moved through a lonely and dim-lighted square —  
There was the smell of lilacs in the air,  
And then the sudden singing of a bird,  
Startled by his slow tread. What memory stirred  
Within his brain he told not. Yet this night —  
Still lingering when the eastern heavens were bright —  
He wove a song of such immortal art  
That there is not in all the world one heart, —  
One human heart unmoved by it. Long! long!  
The laurel-crown has failed, but not that song  
Born of the night and sorrow; and where he lies  
At rest beneath the ever-shifting skies,  
Age after age, from far-off lands they come,  
Not without flowers, to seek the poet's tomb.