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Poems, by Frances E. W. Harper

October, 1996 [Etext #679]

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Poems

By

FRANCES E. W. HARPER

The Black Heritage Library Collection

First Published 1895

POEMS

BY

FRANCES E. W. HARPER

Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so
that no man went through thee, I will make thee an
eternal excellency, a joy of many generations.
ISAIAH 60:15.

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MY MOTHER'S KISS.

My mother's kiss, my mother's kiss,
 I feel its impress now;
 As in the bright and happy days
 She pressed it on my brow.

You say it is a fancied thing
 Within my memory fraught;
 To me it has a sacred place--
 The treasure house of thought.

Again, I feel her fingers glide
 Amid my clustering hair;
 I see the love-light in her eyes,
 When all my life was fair.

Again, I hear her gentle voice
 In warning or in love.
 How precious was the faith that taught
 My soul of things above.

2 MY MOTHER'S KISS.

The music of her voice is stilled,
Her lips are pale in death.
As precious pearls I'll clasp her words
Until my latest breath.

The world has scattered round my path
Honor and wealth and fame;
But naught so precious as the thoughts
That gather round her name.

And friends have placed upon my brow
The laurels of renown;
But she first taught me how to wear
My manhood as a crown.

My hair is silvered o'er with age,
I'm longing to depart;
To clasp again my mother's hand,
And be a child at heart.

To roam with her the glory-land
Where saints and angels greet;
To cast our crowns with songs of love
At our Redeemer's feet.

A GRAIN OF SAND. 3

A GRAIN OF SAND.

Do you see this grain of sand
Lying loosely in my hand?
Do you know to me it brought
Just a simple loving thought?
When one gazes night by night
On the glorious stars of light,
Oh how little seems the span
Measured round the life of man.

Oh! how fleeting are his years
With their smiles and their tears;
Can it be that God does care
For such atoms as we are?
Then outspake this grain of sand
"I was fashioned by His hand
In the star lit realms of space
I was made to have a place.

"Should the ocean flood the world,
Were its mountains 'gainst me hurled

All the force they could employ
Wouldn't a single grain destroy;
And if I, a thing so light,
Have a place within His sight;
You are linked unto his throne
Cannot live nor die alone.

4 THE CROCUSES.

In the everlasting arms
Mid life's dangers and alarms
Let calm trust your spirit fill;
Know He's God, and then be still."
Trustingly I raised my head
Hearing what the atom said;
Knowing man is greater far
Than the brightest sun or star.

THE CROCUSES.

They heard the South wind sighing
A murmur of the rain;
And they knew that Earth was longing
To see them all again.

While the snow-drops still were sleeping
Beneath the silent sod;
They felt their new life pulsing
Within the dark, cold clod.

Not a daffodil nor daisy
Had dared to raise its head;
Not a fairhaired dandelion
Peeped timid from its bed;

THE CROCUSES. 5

Though a tremor of the winter
Did shivering through them run;
Yet they lifted up their foreheads
To greet the vernal sun.

And the sunbeams gave them welcome.
As did the morning air
And scattered o'er their simple robes
Rich tints of beauty rare.

Soon a host of lovely flowers
From vales and woodland burst;

But in all that fair procession
The crocuses were first.

First to weave for Earth a chaplet
To crown her dear old head;
And to beautify the pathway
Where winter still did tread.

And their loved and white haired mother
Smiled sweetly 'neath the touch,
When she knew her faithful children
Were loving her so much.

6 THE PRESENT AGE.

THE PRESENT AGE.

Say not the age is hard and cold--
I think it brave and grand;
When men of diverse sects and creeds
Are clasping hand in hand.

The Parsee from his sacred fires
Beside the Christian kneels;
And clearer light to Islam's eyes
The word of Christ reveals.

The Brahmin from his distant home
Brings thoughts of ancient lore;
The Bhuddist breaking bonds of caste
Divides mankind no more.

The meek-eyed sons of far Cathay
Are welcome round the board;
Not greed, nor malice drives away
These children of our Lord.

And Judah from whose trusted hands
Came oracles divine;
Now sits with those around whose hearts
The light of God doth shine.

THE PRESENT AGE. 7

Japan unbars her long sealed gates
From islands far away;
Her sons are lifting up their eyes
To greet the coming day.

The Indian child from forests wild
Has learned to read and pray;

The tomahawk and scalping knife
From him have passed away.

From centuries of servile toil
The Negro finds release,
And builds the fanes of prayer and praise
Unto the God of Peace.

England and Russia face to face
With Central Asia meet;
And on the far Pacific coast,
Chinese and natives greet.

Crusaders once with sword and shield
The Holy Land to save;
From Moslem hands did strive to clutch
The dear Redeemer's grave.

A battle greater, grander far
Is for the present age;

8 THE PRESENT AGE.

A crusade for the rights of man
To brighten history's page.

Where labor faints and bows her head,
And want consorts with crime;
Or men grown faithless sadly say
That evil is the time.

There is the field, the vantage ground
For every earnest heart;
To side with justice, truth and right
And act a noble part.

To save from ignorance and vice
The poorest, humblest child;
To make our age the fairest one
On which the sun has smiled;

To plant the roots of coming years
In mercy, love and truth;
And bid our weary, saddened earth
Again renew her youth.

Oh! earnest hearts! toil on in hope,
'Till darkness shrinks from light;
To fill the earth with peace and joy,
Let youth and age unite:

DEDICATION POEM. 9

To stay the floods of sin and shame
That sweep from shore to shore;
And furl the banners stained with blood,
'Till war shall be no more.

Blame not the age, nor think it full
Of evil and unrest;
But say of every other age,
"This one shall be the best."

The age to brighten every path
By sin and sorrow trod;
For loving hearts to usher in
The commonwealth of God.

DEDICATION POEM.

Dedication Poem on the reception of the annex to
the home for aged colored people, from the bequest of
Mr. Edward T. Parker.

Outcast from her home in Syria
In the lonely, dreary wild;
Heavy hearted, sorrow stricken,
Sat a mother and her child.

10 DEDICATION POEM.

There was not a voice to cheer her
Not a soul to share her fate;
She was weary, he was fainting,
And life seemed so desolate.

Far away in sunny Egypt
Was lone Hagar's native land;
Where the Nile in kingly bounty
Scatters bread with gracious hand.

In the tents of princely Abram
She for years had found a home;
Till the stern decree of Sarah
Sent her forth the wild to roam.

Hour by hour she journeyed onward
From the shelter of their tent,
Till her footsteps slowly faltered
And the water all was spent;

Then she veiled her face in sorrow,

Feared her child would die of thirst
Till her eyes with tears so holden
Saw a sparkling fountain burst.

Oh! how happy was that mother,
What a soothing of her pain;

DEDICATION POEM. 11

When she saw her child reviving,
Life rejoicing through each vein

Does not life repeat this story,
Tell it over day by day ?
Of the fountains of refreshment
Ever springing by our way.

Here is one by which we gather,
On this bright and happy day,
Just to bask beside a fountain
Making gladder life's highway.

Bringing unto hearts now aged
Who have borne life's burdens long,
Such a gift of love and mercy
As deserves our sweetest song.

Such a gift that even heaven
May rejoice with us below,
If the pure and holy angels
Join us in our joy and woe.

May the memory of the giver
In this home where age may rest,
Float like fragrance through the ages,
Ever blessing, ever blest.

12 A DOUBLE STANDARD.

When the gates of pearl are opened
May we there this friend behold,
Drink with him from living fountains,
Walk with him the streets of gold.

When life's shattered cords of music
Shall again be sweetly sung;
Then our hearts with life immortal,
Shall be young, forever young.

A DOUBLE STANDARD.

Do you blame me that I loved him?
If when standing all alone
I cried for bread a careless world
Pressed to my lips a stone.

Do you blame me that I loved him,
That my heart beat glad and free,
When he told me in the sweetest tones
He loved but only me?

Can you blame me that I did not see
Beneath his burning kiss
The serpent's wiles, nor even hear
The deadly adder hiss?

A DOUBLE STANDARD. 13

Can you blame me that my heart grew cold
The tempted, tempter turned;
When he was feted and caressed
And I was coldly spurned?

Would you blame him, when you draw from
me
Your dainty robes aside,
If he with gilded baits should claim
Your fairest as his bride?

Would you blame the world if it should press
On him a civic crown;
And see me struggling in the depth
Then harshly press me down?

Crime has no sex and yet to-day
I wear the brand of shame;
Whilst he amid the gay and proud
Still bears an honored name.

Can you blame me if I've learned to think
Your hate of vice a sham,
When you so coldly crushed me down
And then excused the man?

Would you blame me if to-morrow
The coroner should say,

14 A DOUBLE STANDARD.

A wretched girl, outcast, forlorn,

Has thrown her life away?

Yes, blame me for my downward course,
But oh! remember well,
Within your homes you press the hand
That led me down to hell.

I'm glad God's ways are not our ways
He does not see as man;
Within His love I know there's room
For those whom others ban.

I think before His great white throne,
His throne of spotless light,
That whited sepulchres shall wear
The hue of endless night.

That I who fell, and he who sinned,
Shall reap as we have sown;
That each the burden of his loss
Must bear and bear alone.

No golden weights can turn the scale
Of justice in His sight;
And what is wrong in woman's life
In man's cannot be right.

OUR HERO. 15

OUR HERO.

Onward to her destination,
O'er the stream the Hannah sped,
When a cry of consternation
Smote and chilled our hearts with dread.

Wildly leaping, madly sweeping,
All relentless in their sway,
Like a band of cruel demons
Flames were closing 'round our way

Oh! the horror of those moments;
Flames above and waves below--
Oh! the agony of ages
Crowded in one hour of woe.

Fainter grew our hearts with anguish
In that hour with peril rife,
When we saw the pilot flying,
Terror-stricken, for his life.

Then a man arose before us--

We had once despised his race--
But we saw a lofty purpose
Lighting up his darkened face.

16 OUR HERO.

While the flames were madly roaring,
With a courage grand and high,
Forth he rushed unto our rescue,
Strong to suffer, brave to die.

Helplessly the boat was drifting,
Death was staring in each face,
When he grasped the fallen rudder,
Took the pilot's vacant place.

Could he save us? Would he save us?
All his hope of life give o'er?
Could he hold that fated vessel
'Till she reached the nearer shore?

All our hopes and fears were centered
'Round his strong, unfaltering hand;
If he failed us we must perish,
Perish just in sight of land.

Breathlessly we watched and waited
While the flames were raging fast;
When our anguish changed to rapture--
We were saved, yes, saved at last.

Never strains of sweetest music
Brought to us more welcome sound

THE DYING BONDMAN. 17

Than the grating of that steamer
When her keel had touched the ground.

But our faithful martyr hero
Through a fiery pathway trod,
Till he laid his valiant spirit
On the bosom of his God.

Fame has never crowned a hero
On the crimson fields of strife,
Grandier, nobler, than that pilot
Yielding up for us his life.

THE DYING BONDMAN.

Life was trembling, faintly trembling
On the bondman's latest breath,
And he felt the chilling pressure
Of the cold, hard hand of Death.

He had been an Afric chieftain,
Worn his manhood as a crown;
But upon the field of battle
Had been fiercely stricken down.

18 THE DYING BONDMAN.

He had longed to gain his freedom,
Waited, watched and hoped in vain,
Till his life was slowly ebbing--
Almost broken was his chain.

By his bedside stood the master,
Gazing on the dying one,
Knowing by the dull grey shadows
That life's sands were almost run.

"Master," said the dying bondman,
"Home and friends I soon shall see;
But before I reach my country,
Master write that I am free;

"For the spirits of my fathers
Would shrink back from me in pride,
If I told them at our greeting
I a slave had lived and died;

"Give to me the precious token,
That my kindred dead may see--
Master! write it, write it quickly!
Master! write that I am free!"

At his earnest plea the master
Wrote for him the glad release,

"A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM." 19

O'er his wan and wasted features
Flitted one sweet smile of peace.

Eagerly he grasped the writing;
"I am free!" at last he said.
Backward fell upon the pillow,
He was free among the dead.

"A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM."

Only a little scrap of blue
Preserved with loving care,
But earth has not a brilliant hue
To me more bright and fair.

Strong drink, like a raging demon,
Laid on my heart his hand,
When my darling joined with others
The Loyal Legion * band.

But mystic angels called away
My loved and precious child,
And o'er life's dark and stormy way
Swept waves of anguish wild.

* The Temperance Band,

20 "A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM."

This badge of the Loyal Legion
We placed upon her breast,
As she lay in her little coffin
Taking her last sweet rest.

To wear that badge as a token
She earnestly did crave,
So we laid it on her bosom
To wear it in the grave.

Where sorrow would never reach her
Nor harsh words smite her ear;
Nor her eyes in death dimmed slumber
Would ever shed a tear.

"What means this badge?" said her father,
Whom we had tried to save;
Who said, when we told her story,
"Don't put it in the grave."

We took the badge from her bosom
And laid it on a chair;
And men by drink deluded
Knelt by that badge in prayer.

And vowed in that hour of sorrow
From drink they would abstain;

THE SPARROW'S FALL. 21

And this little badge became the wedge
Which broke their galling chain.

And lifted the gloomy shadows
That overspread my life,
And flooding my home with gladness,
Made me a happy wife.

And this is why this scrap of blue
Is precious in my sight;
It changed my sad and gloomy home
From darkness into light.

THE SPARROW'S FALL.

Too frail to soar--a feeble thing--
It fell to earth with fluttering wing;
But God, who watches over all,
Beheld that little sparrow's fall.

'Twas not a bird with plumage gay,
Filling the air with its morning lay;
'Twas not an eagle bold and strong,
Borne on the tempest's wing along.

22 THE SPARROW'S FALL.

Only a brown and weesome thing,
With drooping head and listless wing;
It could not drift beyond His sight
Who marshals the splendid stars of night.

Its dying chirp fell on His ears,
Who tunes the music of the spheres,
Who hears the hungry lion's call,
And spreads a table for us all.

Its mission of song at last is done,
No more will it greet the rising sun;
That tiny bird has found a rest
More calm than its mother's downy breast

Oh, restless heart, learn thou to trust
In God, so tender, strong and just;
In whose love and mercy everywhere
His humblest children have a share.

If in love He numbers ev'ry hair,
Whether the strands be dark or fair,
Shall we not learn to calmly rest,
Like children, on our Father's breast?

GOD BLESS OUR NATIVE LAND. 23

GOD BLESS OUR NATIVE LAND.

God bless our native land,
Land of the newly free,
Oh may she ever stand
For truth and liberty.

God bless our native land,
Where sleep our kindred dead,
Let peace at thy command
Above their graves be shed.

God help our native land,
Bring surcease to her strife,
And shower from thy hand
A more abundant life.

God bless our native land,
Her homes and children bless,
Oh may she ever stand
For truth and righteousness.

24 DANDELIONS.

DANDELIONS.

Welcome children of the Spring,
In your garbs of green and gold,
Lifting up your sun-crowned heads
On the verdant plain and wold.

As a bright and joyous troop
From the breast of earth ye came
Fair and lovely are your cheeks,
With sun-kisses all aflame.

In the dusty streets and lanes,
Where the lowly children play,
There as gentle friends ye smile,
Making brighter life's highway

Dewdrops and the morning sun,

Weave your garments fair and bright,
And we welcome you to-day
As the children of the light.

Children of the earth and sun.
We are slow to understand
All the richness of the gifts
Flowing from our Father's hand.

THE BUILDING. 25

Were our vision clearer far,
In this sin-dimmed world of ours,
Would we not more thankful be
For the love that sends us flowers?

Welcome, early visitants,
With your sun-crowned golden hair,
With your message to our hearts
Of our Father's loving care.

THE BUILDING.

"Build me a house," said the Master,
"But not on the shifting sand,
Mid the wreck and roar of tempests,
A house that will firmly stand.

"I will bring thee windows of agates,
And gates of carbuncles bright,
And thy fairest courts and portals
Shall be filled with love and light.

"Thou shalt build with fadeless rubies,
All fashioned around the throne,
A house that shall last forever,
With Christ as the cornerstone.

26 HOME, SWEET HOME.

"It shall be a royal mansion,
A fair and beautiful thing,
It will be the presence-chamber
Of thy Saviour, Lord and King.

"Thy house shall be bound with pinions
To mansions of rest above,
But grace shall forge all the fetters
With the links and cords of love.

"Thou shalt be free in this mansion
From sorrow and pain of heart,
For the peace of God shall enter,
And never again depart."

HOME, SWEET HOME.

Sharers of a common country,
They had met in deadly strife;
Men who should have been as brothers
Madly sought each other's life.

In the silence of the even,
When the cannon's lips were dumb,

HOME, SWEET HOME. 27

Thoughts of home and all its loved ones
To the soldier's heart would come.

On the margin of a river,
'Mid the evening's dews and damps,
Could be heard the sounds of music
Rising from two hostile camps.

One was singing of its section
Down in Dixie, Dixie's land,
And the other of the banner
Waved so long from strand to strand.

In the land where Dixie's ensign
Floated o'er the hopeful slave,
Rose the song that freedom's banner,
Starry-lighted, long might wave.

From the fields of strife and carnage,
Gentle thoughts began to roam,
And a tender strain of music
Rose with words of "Home, Sweet Home."

Then the hearts of strong men melted,
For amid our grief and sin
Still remains that "touch of nature,"
Telling us we all are kin.

28 THE PURE IN HEART SHALL SEE GOD.

In one grand but gentle chorus,

Floating to the starry dome,
Came the words that brought them nearer,
Words that told of "Home, Sweet Home."

For awhile, all strife forgotten,
They were only brothers then,
Joining in the sweet old chorus,
Not as soldiers, but as men.

Men whose hearts would flow together,
Though apart their feet might roam,
Found a tie they could not sever,
In the mem'ry of each home.

Never may the steps of carnage
Shake our land from shore to shore,
But may mother, home and Heaven,
Be our watchwords evermore.

THE PURE IN HEART SHALL SEE GOD.

They shall see Him in the crimson flush
Of morning's early light,
In the drapery of sunset,
Around the couch of night.

THE PURE IN HEART SHALL SEE GOD. 29

When the clouds drop down their fatness,
In late and early rain,
They shall see His glorious footprints
On valley, hill and plain.

They shall see Him when the cyclone
Breathes terror through the land;
They shall see Him 'mid the murmurs
Of zephyrs soft and bland.

They shall see Him when the lips of health,
Breath vigor through each nerve,
When pestilence clasps hands with death,
His purposes to serve.

They shall see Him when the trembling earth
Is rocking to and fro;
They shall see Him in the order
The seasons come and go.

They shall see Him when the storms of war
Sweep wildly through the land;

When peace descends like gentle dew
They still shall see His hand.

They shall see Him in the city
Of gems and pearls of light,

30 NOWHERE TO LAY HIS HEAD.

They shall see Him in his beauty,
And walk with Him in white.

To living founts their feet shall tend,
And Christ shall be their guide,
Beloved of God, their rest shall be
In safety by His side.

HE "HAD NOT WHERE TO LAY HIS HEAD."

The conies had their hiding-place,
The wily fox with stealthy tread
A covert found, but Christ, the Lord,
Had not a place to lay his head.

The eagle had an eyrie home,
The blithesome bird its quiet rest,
But not the humblest spot on earth
Was by the Son of God possessed.

Princes and kings had palaces,
With grandeur could adorn each tomb,
For Him who came with love and life,
They had no home, they gave no room.

GO WORK IN MY VINEYARD. 31

The hands whose touch sent thrills of joy
Through nerves unstrung and palsied
frame,
The feet that travelled for our need,
Were nailed unto the cross of shame.

How dare I murmur at my lot,
Or talk of sorrow, pain and loss,
When Christ was in a manger laid,
And died in anguish on the cross.

That homeless one beheld beyond
His lonely agonizing pain,
A love outflowing from His heart,

That all the wandering world would gain.

GO WORK IN MY VINEYARD.

Go work in my vineyard, said the Lord,
And gather the bruised grain;
But the reapers had left the stubble bare,
And I trod the soil in pain.

32 GO WORK IN MY VINEYARD.

The fields of my Lord are wide and broad,
He has pastures fair and green,
And vineyards that drink the golden light
Which flows from the sun's bright sheen.

I heard the joy of the reapers' song,
As they gathered golden grain;
Then wearily turned unto my task,
With a lonely sense of pain.

Sadly I turned from the sun's fierce glare,
And sought the quiet shade,
And over my dim and weary eyes
Sleep's peaceful fingers strayed.

I dreamed I joined with a restless throng,
Eager for pleasure and gain;
But ever and anon a stumbler fell,
And uttered a cry of pain.

But the eager crowd still hurried on,
Too busy to pause or heed,
When a voice rang sadly through my soul,
You must staunch these wounds that bleed.

My hands were weak, but I reached them out
To feebler ones than mine,

RENEWAL OF STRENGTH. 33

And over the shadows of my life
Stole the light of a peace divine.

Oh! then my task was a sacred thing,
How precious it grew in my eyes!
'Twas mine to gather the bruised grain
For the "Lord of Paradise."

And when the reapers shall lay their grain
On the floors of golden light,
I feel that mine with its broken sheaves
Shall be precious in His sight.

Though thorns may often pierce my feet,
And the shadows still abide,
The mists will vanish before His smile,
There will be light at eventide.

RENEWAL OF STRENGTH.

The prison-house in which I live
Is falling to decay,
But God renews my spirit's strength,
Within these walls of clay.

34JAMIE'S PUZZLE.

For me a dimness slowly creeps
Around earth's fairest light,
But heaven grows clearer to my view,
And fairer to my sight.

It may be earth's sweet harmonies
Are duller to my ear,
But music from my Father's house
Begins to float more near.

Then let the pillars of my home
Crumble and fall away;
Lo, God's dear love within my soul
Renews it day by day.

JAMIE'S PUZZLE.

There was grief within our household
Because of a vacant chair.
Our mother, so loved and precious,
No longer was sitting there.

JAMIE'S PUZZLE. 35

Our hearts grew heavy with sorrow,
Our eyes with tears were blind,
And little Jamie was wondering,
Why we were left behind.

We had told our little darling,
Of the land of love and light,
Of the saints all crowned with glory,
And enrobed in spotless white.

We said that our precious mother,
Had gone to that land so fair,
To dwell with beautiful angels,
And to be forever there.

But the child was sorely puzzled,
Why dear grandmamma should go
To dwell in a stranger city,
When her children loved her so.

But again the mystic angel
Came with swift and silent tread,
And our sister, Jamie's mother,
Was enrolled among the dead.

To us the mystery deepened,
To Jamie it seemed more clear;

36 TRUTH.

Grandma, he said, must be lonesome,
And mamma has gone to her.

But the question lies unanswered
In our little Jamie's mind,
Why she should go to our mother,
And leave her children behind;

To dwell in that lovely city,
From all that was dear to part,
From children who loved to nestle
So closely around her heart.

Dear child, like you, we are puzzled,
With problems that still remain;
But think in the great hereafter
Their meaning will all be plain.

TRUTH.

A rock, for ages, stern and high,
Stood frowning 'gainst the earth and sky,
And never bowed his haughty crest

When angry storms around him prest.
Morn, springing from the arms of night,
Had often bathed his brow with light.

TRUTH. 37

And kissed the shadows from his face
With tender love and gentle grace.

Day, pausing at the gates of rest,
Smiled on him from the distant West,
And from her throne the dark-browed Night
Threw round his path her softest light.
And yet he stood unmoved and proud,
Nor love, nor wrath, his spirit bowed;
He bared his brow to every blast
And scorned the tempest as it passed.

One day a tiny, humble seed--
The keenest eye would hardly heed--
Fell trembling at that stern rock's base,
And found a lowly hiding-place.
A ray of light, and drop of dew,
Came with a message, kind and true;
They told her of the world so bright,
Its love, its joy, and rosy light,
And lured her from her hiding-place,
To gaze upon earth's glorious face.

So, peeping timid from the ground,
She clasped the ancient rock around,
And climbing up with childish grace,
She held him with a close embrace;

38 DEATH OF THE OLD SEA KING.

Her clinging was a thing of dread;
Where'er she touched a fissure spread,
And he who'd breasted many a storm
Stood frowning there, a mangled form;
A Truth, dropped in the silent earth,
May seem a thing of little worth,
Till, spreading round some mighty wrong,
It saps its pillars proud and strong,
And o'er the fallen ruin weaves
The brightest blooms and fairest leaves.

DEATH OF THE OLD SEA KING.

'Twas a fearful night--the tempest raved
With loud and wrathful pride,
The storm-king harnessed his lightning steeds,
And rode on the raging tide.

The sea-king lay on his bed of death,
Pale mourners around him bent;
They knew the wild and fitful life
Of their chief was almost spent.

His ear was growing dull in death
When the angry storm he heard,

DEATH OF THE OLD SEA KING. 39

The sluggish blood in the old man's veins
With sudden vigor stirred.

"I hear them call," cried the dying man,
His eyes grew full of light;
"Now bring me here my warrior robes,
My sword and armor bright.

"In the tempest's lull I heard a voice,
I knew 'twas Odin's call.
The Valkyrs are gathering round my bed
To lead me unto his hall.

"Bear me unto my noblest ship,
Light up a funeral pyre;
I'll walk to the palace of the braves
Through a path of flame and fire."

Oh! wild and bright was the stormy light
That flashed from the old man's eye,
As they bore him from the couch of death
To his battle-ship to die,

And lit with many a mournful torch
The sea-king's dying bed,
And like a banner fair and bright
The flames around him spread.

40 SAVE THE BOYS.

But they heard no cry of anguish
Break through that fiery wall,
With rigid brow and silent lips
He was seeking Odin's hall.

Through a path of fearful splendor,

While strong men held their breath,
The brave old man went boldly forth
And calmly talked with death.

SAVE THE BOYS.

Like Dives in the deeps of Hell
I cannot break this fearful spell,
Nor quench the fires I've madly nursed,
Nor cool this dreadful raging thirst.
Take back your pledge--ye come too late!
Ye cannot save me from my fate,
Nor bring me back departed joys;
But ye can try to save the boys.

Ye bid me break my fiery chain,
Arise and be a man again,

SAVE THE BOYS. 41

When every street with snares is spread,
And nets of sin where'er I tread.
No; I must reap as I did sow.
The seeds of sin bring crops of woe;
But with my latest breath I'll crave
That ye will try the boys to save.

These bloodshot eyes were once so bright;
This sin-crushed heart was glad and light;
But by the wine-cup's ruddy glow
I traced a path to shame and woe.
A captive to my galling chain,
I've tried to rise, but tried in vain--
The cup allures and then destroys.
Oh! from its thralldom save the boys.

Take from your streets those traps of hell
Into whose gilded snares I fell.
Oh! freemen, from these foul decoys
Arise, and vote to save the boys.
Oh, ye who license men to trade
In draughts that charm and then degrade,
Before ye hear the cry, Too late,
Oh, save the boys from my sad fate.

42 NOTHING AND SOMETHING.

NOTHING AND SOMETHING.

It is nothing to me, the beauty said,
With a careless toss of her pretty head;
The man is weak if he can't refrain
From the cup you say is fraught with pain.
It was something to her in after years,
When her eyes were drenched with burning
tears,
And she watched in lonely grief and dread,
And startled to hear a staggering tread.

It is nothing to me, the mother said;
I have no fear that my boy will tread
In the downward path of sin and shame,
And crush my heart and darken his name.
It was something to her when that only son
From the path of right was early won,
And madly cast in the flowing bowl
A ruined body and sin-wrecked soul.

It is nothing to me, the young man cried:
In his eye was a flash of scorn and pride;
I heed not the dreadful things ye tell:
I can rule myself I know full well.

NOTHING AND SOMETHING. 43

It was something to him when in prison he lay
The victim of drink, life ebbing away;
And thought of his wretched child and wife,
And the mournful wreck of his wasted life.

It is nothing to me, the merchant said,
As over his ledger he bent his head;
I'm busy to-day with tare and tret,
And I have no time to fume and fret.
It was something to him when over the wire
A message came from a funeral pyre--
A drunken conductor had wrecked a train,
And his wife and child were among the slain.

It is nothing to me, the voter said,
The party's loss is my greatest dread;
Then gave his vote for the liquor trade,
Though hearts were crushed and drunkards
made.
It was something to him in after life,
When his daughter became a drunkard's wife
And her hungry children cried for bread,
And trembled to hear their father's tread.

Is it nothing for us to idly sleep
While the cohorts of death their vigils keep?

To gather the young and thoughtless in,
And grind in our midst a grist of sin?

44 VASHTI.

It is something, yes, all, for us to stand
Clasping by faith our Saviour's hand;
To learn to labor, live and fight
On the side of God and changeless light.

VASHTI.

She leaned her head upon her hand
And heard the King's decree--
"My lords are feasting in my halls;
Bid Vashti come to me.

"I've shown the treasures of my house,
My costly jewels rare,
But with the glory of her eyes
No rubies can compare.

"Adorn'd and crown'd I'd have her come,
With all her queenly grace,
And, 'mid my lords and mighty men,
Unveil her lovely face.

"Each gem that sparkles in my crown,
Or glitters on my throne,

VASHTI. 45

Grows poor and pale when she appears,
My beautiful, my own!"

All waiting stood the chamberlains
To hear the Queen's reply.
They saw her cheek grow deathly pale,
But light flash'd to her eye:

"Go, tell the King," she proudly said,
"That I am Persia's Queen,
And by his crowds of merry men
I never will be seen.

"I'll take the crown from off my head
And tread it 'neath my feet,
Before their rude and careless gaze

My shrinking eyes shall meet.

"A queen unveil'd before the crowd!--
Upon each lip my name!--
Why, Persia's women all would blush
And weep for Vashti's shame!

"Go back!" she cried, and waved her hand,
And grief was in her eye:
"Go, tell the King," she sadly said,
"That I would rather die."

46 VASHTI.

They brought her message to the King;
Dark flash'd his angry eye;
'Twas as the lightning ere the storm
Hath swept in fury by.

Then bitterly outspoke the King,
Through purple lips of wrath --
"What shall be done to her who dares
To cross your monarch's path?"

Then spake his wily counsellors--
"O King of this fair land!
From distant Ind to Ethiop,
All bow to thy command.

"But if, before thy servants' eyes,
This thing they plainly see,
That Vashti doth not heed thy will
Nor yield herself to thee,

"The women, restive 'neath our rule,
Would learn to scorn our name,
And from her deed to us would come
Reproach and burning shame.

"Then, gracious King, sign with thy hand
This stern but just decree,

THANK GOD FOR LITTLE CHILDREN. 47

That Vashti lay aside her crown,
Thy Queen no more to be."

She heard again the King's command,
And left her high estate;
Strong in her earnest womanhood,
She calmly met her fate,

And left the palace of the King,
Proud of her spotless name--
A woman who could bend to grief,
But would not bow to shame.

THANK GOD FOR LITTLE CHILDREN.

Thank God for little children,
Bright flowers by earth's wayside,
The dancing, joyous lifeboats
Upon life's stormy tide.

Thank God for little children;
When our skies are cold and gray,
They come as sunshine to our hearts,
And charm our cares away.

48 THANK GOD FOR LITTLE CHILDREN.

I almost think the angels,
Who tend life's garden fair,
Drop down the sweet wild blossoms
That bloom around us here.

It seems a breath of heaven
Round many a cradle lies,
And every little baby
Brings a message from the skies.

Dear mothers, guard these jewels.
As sacred offerings meet,
A wealth of household treasures
To lay at Jesus' feet.

THE MARTYR OF ALABAMA.

"Tim Thompson, a little negro boy, was asked to dance for the amusement of some white toughs. He refused, saying he was a church member. One of the men knocked him down with a club and then danced upon his prostrate form. He then shot the boy in the hip. The boy is dead; his murderer is still at large."--News Item.

He lifted up his pleading eyes,
And scanned each cruel face,

Where cold and brutal cowardice
Had left its evil trace.

It was when tender memories
Round Beth'lem's manger lay,

(49)

50 THE MARTYR OF ALABAMA.

And mothers told their little ones
Of Jesu's natal day.

And of the Magi from the East
Who came their gifts to bring,
And bow in rev'ence at the feet
Of Salem's new-born King.

And how the herald angels sang
The choral song of peace,
That war should close his wrathful lips,
And strife and carnage cease.

At such an hour men well may hush
Their discord and their strife,
And o'er that manger clasp their hands
With gifts to brighten life.

Alas! that in our favored land,
That cruelty and crime
Should cast their shadows o'er a day.
The fairest pearl of time.

A dark-browed boy had drawn anear
A band of savage men,
Just as a hapless lamb might stray
Into a tiger's den.

THE MARTYR OF ALABAMA. 51

Cruel and dull, they saw in him
For sport an evil chance,
And then demanded of the child
To give to them a dance.

"Come dance for us," the rough men said;
"I can't," the child replied,
"I cannot for the dear Lord's sake,
Who for my sins once died."

Tho' they were strong and he was weak,

He wouldn't his Lord deny.
His life lay in their cruel hands,
But he for Christ could die.

Heard they aright? Did that brave child
Their mandates dare resist?
Did he against their stern commands
Have courage to insist?

Then recklessly a man (?) arose,
And dealt a fearful blow.
He crushed the portals of that life,
And laid the brave child low.

And trampled on his prostrate form,
As on a broken toy;

52 THE MARTYR OF ALABAMA.

Then danced with careless, brutal feet,
Upon the murdered boy.

Christians! behold that martyred child!
His blood cries from the ground;
Before the sleepless eye of God,
He shows each gaping wound.

Oh! Church of Christ arise! arise!
Lest crimson stain thy hand,
When God shall inquisition make
For blood shed in the land.

Take sackcloth of the darkest hue,
And shroud the pulpits round;
Servants of him who cannot lie
Sit mourning on the ground.

Let holy horror blanch each brow,
Pale every cheek with fears,
And rocks and stones, if ye could speak,
Ye well might melt to tears.

Through every fane send forth a cry,
Of sorrow and regret,
Nor in an hour of careless ease
Thy brother's wrongs forget.

THE NIGHT OF DEATH. 53

Veil not thine eyes, nor close thy lips,
Nor speak with bated breath;

This evil shall not always last,
The end of it is death.

Avert the doom that crime must bring
Upon a guilty land;
Strong in the strength that God supplies,
For truth and justice stand.

For Christless men, with reckless hands,
Are sowing round thy path
The tempests wild that yet shall break
In whirlwinds of God's wrath.

THE NIGHT OF DEATH.

'Twas a night of dreadful horror,--
Death was sweeping through the land;
And the wings of dark destruction
Were outstretched from strand to strand

Strong men's hearts grew faint with terror,
As the tempest and the waves

54 THE NIGHT OF DEATH.

Wrecked their homes and swept them down-
ward,
Suddenly to yawning graves.

'Mid the wastes of ruined households,
And the tempest's wild alarms,
Stood a terror-stricken mother
With a child within her arms.

Other children huddled 'round her,
Each one nestling in her heart;
Swift in thought and swift in action,
She at least from one must part.

Then she said unto her daughter,
"Strive to save one child from death."
"Which one?" said the anxious daughter,
As she stood with bated breath.

Oh! the anguish of that mother;
What despair was in her eye!
All her little ones were precious;
Which one should she leave to die?

Then outspoke the brother Bennie:

"I will take the little one."
"No," exclaimed the anxious mother;
"No, my child, it can't be done."

THE NIGHT OF DEATH. 55

"See! my boy, the waves are rising,
Save yourself and leave the child!"
"I will trust in Christ," he answered;
Grasped the little one and smiled.

Through the roar of wind and waters
Ever and anon she cried;
But throughout the night of terror
Never Bennie's voice replied.

But above the waves' wild surging
He had found a safe retreat,
As if God had sent an angel,
Just to guide his wandering feet.

When the storm had spent its fury,
And the sea gave up its dead
She was mourning for her loved ones,
Lost amid that night of dread.

While her head was bowed in anguish,
On her ear there fell a voice,
Bringing surcease to her sorrow,
Bidding all her heart rejoice.

"Didn't I tell you true?" said Bennie,
And his eyes were full of light,

56 MOTHER'S TREASURES.

"When I told you God would help me
Through the dark and dreadful night?"

And he placed the little darling
Safe within his mother's arms,
Feeling Christ had been his guardian,
'Mid the dangers and alarms.

Oh! for faith so firm and precious,
In the darkest, saddest night,
Till life's gloom-encircled shadows
Fade in everlasting light.

And upon the mount of vision
We our loved and lost shall greet,

With earth's wildest storms behind us,
And its cares beneath our feet.

MOTHER'S TREASURES.

Two little children sit by my side,
I call them Lily and Daffodil;
I gaze on them with a mother's pride,
One is Edna, the other is Will.

Both have eyes of starry light,
And laughing lips o'er teeth of pearl.

MOTHER'S TREASURES. 57

I would not change for a diadem
My noble boy and darling girl.

To-night my heart o'erflows with joy;
I hold them as a sacred trust;
I fain would hide them in my heart,
Safe from tarnish of moth and rust.

What should I ask for my dear boy?
The richest gifts of wealth or fame?
What for my girl? A loving heart
And a fair and a spotless name?

What for my boy? That he should stand
A pillar of strength to the state?
What for my girl? That she should be
The friend of the poor and desolate?

I do not ask they shall never tread
With weary feet the paths of pain.
I ask that in the darkest hour
They may faithful and true remain.

I only ask their lives may be
Pure as gems in the gates of pearl,
Lives to brighten and bless the world--
This I ask for my boy and girl.

58 THE REFINER'S GOLD.

I ask to clasp their hands again
'Mid the holy hosts of heaven,

Enraptured say: "I am here, oh! God,
"And the children Thou hast given."

THE REFINER'S GOLD.

He stood before my heart's closed door,
And asked to enter in;
But I had barred the passage o'er
By unbelief and sin.

He came with nail-prints in his hands,
To set my spirit free;
With wounded feet he trod a path
To come and sup with me.

He found me poor and brought me gold,
The fire of love had tried,
And garments whitened by his blood,
My wretchedness to hide.

The glare of life had dimmed my eyes,
Its glamour was too bright.
He came with ointment in his hands
To heal my darkened sight.

THE REFINER'S GOLD. 59

He knew my heart was tempest-tossed,
By care and pain oppressed;
He whispered to my burdened heart,
Come unto me and rest.

He found me weary, faint and worn,
On barren mountains cold;
With love's constraint he drew me on,
To shelter in his fold.

Oh! foolish heart, how slow wert thou
To welcome thy dear guest,
To change thy weariness and care
For comfort, peace and rest.

Close to his side, oh! may I stay,
Just to behold his face,
Till I shall wear within my soul
The image of his grace.

The grace that changes hearts of stone
To tenderness and love,
And bids us run with willing feet

Unto his courts above.

60 A STORY OF THE REBELLION.

A STORY OF THE REBELLION.

The treacherous sands had caught our boat,
And held it with a strong embrace
And death at our imprisoned crew
Was sternly looking face to face.

With anxious hearts, but failing strength,
We strove to push the boat from shore;
But all in vain, for there we lay
With bated breath and useless oar.

Around us in a fearful storm
The fiery hail fell thick and fast;
And we engirded by the sand,
Could not return the dreadful blast.

When one arose upon whose brow
The ardent sun had left his trace,
A noble purpose strong and high
Uplighting all his dusky face.

Perchance within that fateful hour
The wrongs of ages thronged apace;
But with it came the glorious hope
Of swift deliverance to his race.

Of galling chains asunder rent,
Of severed hearts again made one,

A STORY OF THE REBELLION. 61

Of freedom crowning all the land
Through battles gained and victories won.

"Some one," our hero firmly said,
"Must die to get us out of this;"
Then leaped upon the strand and bared
His bosom to the bullets' hiss.

"But ye are soldiers, and can fight,
May win in battles yet unfought;
I have no offering but my life,
And if they kill me it is nought."

With steady hands he grasped the boat,
And boldly pushed it from the shore;

Then fell by rebel bullets pierced,
His life work grandly, nobly o'er.

Our boat was rescued from the sands
And launched in safety on the tide;
But he our comrade good and grand,
In our defence had bravely died.

BURIAL OF SARAH.

He stood before the sons of Heth,
And bowed his sorrowing head;

62 BURIAL OF SARAH.

"I've come," he said, "to buy a place
Where I may lay my dead.

"I am a stranger in your land,
My home has lost its light;
Grant me a place where I may lay
My dead away from sight."

Then tenderly the sons of Heth
Gazed on the mourner's face,
And said, "Oh, Prince, amid our dead,
Choose thou her resting-place.

"The sepulchres of those we love,
We place at thy command;
Against the plea thy grief hath made
We close not heart nor hand."

The patriarch rose and bowed his head,
And said, "One place I crave;
'Tis at the end of Ephron's field,
And called Machpelah's cave.

"Entreat him that he sell to me
For her last sleep that cave;
I do not ask for her I loved
The freedom of a grave."

BURIAL OF SARAH. 63

The son of Zohar answered him,
"Hearken, my lord, to me;
Before our sons, the field and cave
I freely give to thee."

"I will not take it as a gift,"
The grand old man then said;
"I pray thee let me buy the place
Where I may lay my dead."

And with the promise in his heart,
His seed should own that land,
He gave the shekels for the field
He took from Ephron's hand.

And saw afar the glorious day
His chosen seed should tread,
The soil where he in sorrow lay
His loved and cherished dead.

GOING EAST.

She came from the East a fair, young bride,
With a light and a bounding heart,
To find in the distant West a home
With her husband to make a start.

64 GOING EAST.

He builded his cabin far away,
Where the prairie flower bloomed wild;
Her love made lighter all his toil,
And joy and hope around him smiled.

She plied her hands to life's homely tasks,
And helped to build his fortunes up;
While joy and grief, like bitter and sweet,
Were mingled and mixed in her cup.

He sowed in his fields of golden grain,
All the strength of his manly prime;
Nor music of birds, nor brooks, nor bees,
Was as sweet as the dollar's chime.

She toiled and waited through weary years
For the fortune that came at length;
But toil and care and hope deferred,
Had stolen and wasted her strength.

The cabin changed to a stately home,
Rich carpets were hushing her tread;
But light was fading from her eye,
And the bloom from her cheek had fled.

Slower and heavier grew her step,
While his gold and his gains increased;

GOING EAST. 65

But his proud domain had not the charm
Of her humble home in the East.

Within her eye was a restless light,
And a yearning that never ceased,
A longing to see the dear old home
She had left in the distant East.

A longing to clasp her mother's hand,
And nestle close to her heart,
And to feel the heavy cares of life
Like the sun-kissed shadows depart.

Her husband was adding field to field,
And new wealth to his golden store;
And little thought the shadow of death
Was entering in at his door.

He had no line to sound the depths
Of her tears repressed and unshed;
Nor dreamed 'mid plenty a human heart
Could be starving, but not for bread.

The hungry heart was stilled at last;
Its restless, baffled yearning ceased.
A lonely man sat by the bier
Of a corpse that was going East.

66 THE HERMIT'S SACRIFICE.

THE HERMIT'S SACRIFICE.

From Rome's palaces and villas
Gaily issued forth a throng;
From her humbler habitations
Moved a human tide along.

Haughty dames and blooming maidens,
Men who knew not mercy's sway,
Thronged into the Coliseum
On that Roman holiday.

From the lonely wilds of Asia,
From her jungles far away,
From the distant torrid regions,
Rome had gathered beasts of prey.

Lions restless, roaring, rampant,
Tigers with their stealthy tread,
Leopards bright, and fierce, and fiery,
Met in conflict wild and dread.

Fierce and fearful was the carnage
Of the maddened beasts of prey,
As they fought and rent each other
Urged by men more fierce than they.

Till like muffled thunders breaking
On a vast and distant shore,

THE HERMIT'S SACRIFICE. 67

Fainter grew the yells of tigers,
And the lions' dreadful roar.

On the crimson-stained arena
Lay the victims of the fight;
Eyes which once had glared with anguish,
Lost in death their baleful light.

Then uprose the gladiators
Armed for conflict unto death,
Waiting for the prefect's signal,
Cold and stern with bated breath.

"Ave Caesar, morituri,
Te, salutant," rose the cry
From the lips of men ill-fated,
Doomed to suffer and to die.

Then began the dreadful contest,
Lives like chaff were thrown away,
Rome with all her pride and power
Butchered for a holiday.

Eagerly the crowd were waiting,
Loud the clashing sabres rang;
When between the gladiators
All unarmed a hermit sprang.

68 THE HERMIT'S SACRIFICE.

"Cease your bloodshed," cried the hermit,
"On this carnage place your ban;"
But with flashing swords they answered,
"Back unto your place, old man."

From their path the gladiators
Thrust the strange intruder back,
Who between their hosts advancing
Calmly parried their attack.

All undaunted by their weapons,
Stood the old heroic man;
While a maddened cry of anger
Through the vast assembly ran.

"Down with him," cried out the people,
As with thumbs unbent they glared,
Till the prefect gave the signal
That his life should not be spared.

Men grew wild with wrathful passion,
When his fearless words were said
Cruelly they fiercely showered
Stones on his devoted head.

Bruised and bleeding fell the hermit,
Victor in that hour of strife;

SONGS FOR THE PEOPLE. 69

Gaining in his death a triumph
That he could not win in life.

Had he uttered on the forum
Struggling thoughts within him born,
Men had jeered his words as madness,
But his deed they could not scorn.

Not in vain had been his courage,
Nor for naught his daring deed;
From his grave his mangled body
Did for wretched captives plead.

From that hour Rome, grown more thoughtful,
Ceased her sport in human gore;
And into her Coliseum
Gladiators came no more.

SONGS FOR THE PEOPLE.

Let me make the songs for the people,
Songs for the old and young;
Songs to stir like a battle-cry
Wherever they are sung.

Not for the clashing of sabres,
For carnage nor for strife;

70 SONGS FOR THE PEOPLE.

But songs to thrill the hearts of men
With more abundant life.

Let me make the songs for the weary,
Amid life's fever and fret,
Till hearts shall relax their tension,
And careworn brows forget.

Let me sing for little children,
Before their footsteps stray,
Sweet anthems of love and duty,
To float o'er life's highway.

I would sing for the poor and aged,
When shadows dim their sight;
Of the bright and restful mansions,
Where there shall be no night.

Our world, so worn and weary,
Needs music, pure and strong,
To hush the jangle and discords
Of sorrow, pain, and wrong.

Music to soothe all its sorrow,
Till war and crime shall cease;
And the hearts of men grown tender
Girdle the world with peace.

LET THE LIGHT ENTER. 71

LET THE LIGHT ENTER.

The dying words of Goethe.

"Light! more light! the shadows deepen,
And my life is ebbing low,
Throw the windows widely open:
Light! more light! before I go.

"Softly let the balmy sunshine
Play around my dying bed,
E'er the dimly lighted valley
I with lonely feet must tread.

"Light! more light! for Death is weaving
Shadows 'round my waning sight,

And I fain would gaze upon him
Through a stream of earthly light."

Not for greater gifts of genius;
Not for thoughts more grandly bright,
All the dying poet whispers
Is a prayer for light, more light.

Heeds he not the gathered laurels,
Fading slowly from his sight;
All the poet's aspirations
Centre in that prayer for light.

72 AN APPEAL TO MY COUNTRYWOMEN.

Gracious Saviour, when life's day-dreams
Melt and vanish from the sight,
May our dim and longing vision
Then be blessed with light, more light.

AN APPEAL TO MY COUNTRYWOMEN.

You can sigh o'er the sad-eyed Armenian
Who weeps in her desolate home.
You can mourn o'er the exile of Russia
From kindred and friends doomed to roam.

You can pity the men who have woven
From passion and appetite chains
To coil with a terrible tension
Around their heartstrings and brains.

You can sorrow o'er little children
Disinherited from their birth,
The wee waifs and toddlers neglected,
Robbed of sunshine, music and mirth.

For beasts you have gentle compassion;
Your mercy and pity they share.
For the wretched, outcast and fallen
You have tenderness, love and care.

AN APPEAL TO MY COUNTRYWOMEN. 73

But hark! from our Southland are floating
Sobs of anguish, murmurs of pain,
And women heart-stricken are weeping
Over their tortured and their slain.

On their brows the sun has left traces;
Shrink not from their sorrow in scorn.
When they entered the threshold of being
The children of a King were born.

Each comes as a guest to the table
The hand of our God has outspread,
To fountains that ever leap upward,
To share in the soil we all tread.

When ye plead for the wrecked and fallen,
The exile from far-distant shores,
Remember that men are still wasting
Life's crimson around your own doors.

Have ye not, oh, my favored sisters,
Just a plea, a prayer or a tear,
For mothers who dwell 'neath the shadows
Of agony, hatred and fear?

Men may tread down the poor and lowly,
May crush them in anger and hate,

74 AN APPEAL TO MY COUNTRYWOMEN.

But surely the mills of God's justice
Will grind out the grist of their fate.

Oh, people sin-laden and guilty,
So lusty and proud in your prime,
The sharp sickles of God's retribution
Will gather your harvest of crime.

Weep not, oh my well-sheltered sisters,
Weep not for the Negro alone,
But weep for your sons who must gather
The crops which their fathers have sown.

Go read on the tombstones of nations
Of chieftains who masterful trod,
The sentence which time has engraven,
That they had forgotten their God.

'Tis the judgment of God that men reap
The tares which in madness they sow,
Sorrow follows the footsteps of crime,
And Sin is the consort of Woe.

THEN AND NOW. 75

THEN AND NOW.

"Build me a nation," said the Lord.
The distant nations heard the word,
Build me a nation true and strong,
Bar out the old world's hate and wrong;
For men had traced with blood and tears
The trail of weary wasting years,
And torn and bleeding martyrs trod
Through fire and torture up to God.

While in the hollow of his hand
God hid the secret of our land,
Men warred against their fiercest foes,
And kingdoms fell and empires rose,
Till, weary of the old world strife,
Men sought for broader, freer life,
And plunged into the ocean's foam
To find another, better home.

And, like a vision fair and bright
The new world broke upon their sight.
Men grasped the prize, grew proud and strong,
And cursed the land with crime and wrong.
The Indian stood despoiled of lands,
The Negro bound with servile bands,
Oppressed through weary years of toil,
His blood and tears bedewed the soil.

76 THEN AND NOW.

Then God arose in dreadful wrath,
And judgment streamed around his path;
His hand the captive's fetters broke,
His lightnings shattered every yoke.
As Israel through the Red sea trod,
Led by the mighty hand of God,
They passed to freedom through a flood,
Whose every wave and surge was blood.

And slavery, with its crime and shame,
Went down in wrath and blood and flame
The land was billowed-o'er with graves
Where men had lived and died as slaves.
Four and thirty years--what change since
then!
Beings once chattles now are men;
Over the gloom of slavery's night,
Has flashed the dawn of freedom's light.

To-day no mother with anguish wild
Kneels and implores that her darling child

Shall not be torn from her bleeding heart,
With its quivering tendrils rent apart.
The father may soothe his child to sleep,
And watch his slumbers calm and deep.
No tyrant's tread will disturb his rest
Where freedom dwells as a welcome guest.

THEN AND NOW. 77

His walls may be bare of pictured grace,
His fireside the lowliest place;
But the wife and children sheltered there
Are his to defend and guard with care.
Where haughty tyrants once bore rule
Are ballot-box and public school.
The old slave-pen of former days
Gives place to fanes of prayer and praise.

To-night we would bring our meed of praise
To noble friends of darker days;
The men and women crowned with light,
The true and tried in our gloomy night.
To Lundy, whose heart was early stirred
To speak for freedom an earnest word;
To Garrison, valiant, true and strong,
Whose face was as flint against our wrong.

And Phillips, the peerless, grand and brave,
A tower of strength to the outcast slave.
Earth has no marble too pure and white
To enrol his name in golden light.
Our Douglass, too, with his massive brain,
Who plead our cause with his broken chain,
And helped to hurl from his bloody seat
The curse that writhed and died at his feet.

78 THEN AND NOW.

And Governor Andrew, who, looking back,
Saw none he despised, though poor and black;
And Harriet Beecher, whose glowing pen
Corroded the chains of fettered men.
To-night with greenest laurels we'll crown
North Elba's grave where sleeps John Brown,
Who made the gallows an altar high,
And showed how a brave old man could die.
And Lincoln, our martyred President,
Who returned to his God with chains he had rent.*
And Sumner, amid death's icy chill,
Leaving to Hoar his Civil Rights Bill.
And let us remember old underground,

With all her passengers northward bound,
The train that ran till it ceased to pay,
With all her dividends given away.
Nor let it be said that we have forgot
The women who stood with Lucretia Mott;
Nor her who to the world was known
By the simple name of Lucy stone.
A tribute unto a host of others
Who knew that men though black were
 brothers,
Who battled against our nation's sin,
Whose graves are thick whose ranks are thin.
Oh, people chastened in the fire,
To nobler, grander things aspire;

MACEO. 79

In the new era of your life,
Bring love for hate, and peace for strife;
Upon your hearts this vow record
That ye will build unto the Lord
A nobler future, true and grand,
To strengthen, crown and bless the land.
A higher freedom ye may gain
Than that which comes from a riven chain;
Freedom your native land to bless
With peace, and love and righteousness,
As dreams that are past, a tale all told,
Are the days when men were bought and sold;
Now God be praised from sea to sea,
Our flag floats o'er a country free.

MACEO.

Maceo dead! a thrill of sorrow
 Through our hearts in sadness ran
When we felt in one sad hour
 That the world had lost a man.

He had clasped unto his bosom
 The sad fortunes of his land--
Held the cause for which he perished
 With a firm, unfaltering hand.

80 MACEO.

On his lips the name of freedom
 Fainted with his latest breath.
Cuba Libre was his watchword

Passing through the gates of death.

With the light of God around us,
Why this agony and strife?
With the cross of Christ before us,
Why this fearful waste of life?

Must the pathway unto freedom
Ever mark a crimson line,
And the eyes of wayward mortals
Always close to light divine?

Must the hearts of fearless valor
Fail 'mid crime and cruel wrong,
When the world has read of heroes
Brave and earnest, true and strong?

Men to stay the floods of sorrow
Sweeping round each war-crushed heart;
Men to say to strife and carnage--
From our world henceforth depart.

God of peace and God of nations,
Haste! oh, haste the glorious day

MACEO. 81

When the reign of our Redeemer
O'er the world shall have its sway.

When the swords now blood encrusted,
Spears that reap the battle field,
Shall be changed to higher service,
Helping earth rich harvests yield.

Where the widow weeps in anguish,
And the orphan bows his head,
Grant that peace and joy and gladness
May like holy angels tread.

Pity, oh, our God the sorrow
Of thy world from thee astray,
Lead us from the paths of madness
Unto Christ the living way.

Year by year the world grows weary
'Neath its weight of sin and strife,
Though the hands once pierced and bleeding
Offer more abundant life.

May the choral song of angels
Heard upon Judea's plain

Sound throughout the earth the tidings
Of that old and sweet refrain.

82 ONLY A WORD.

Till our world, so sad and weary,
Finds the balmy rest of peace--
Peace to silence all her discords--
Peace till war and crime shall cease.

Peace to fall like gentle showers,
Or on parched flowers dew,
Till our hearts proclaim with gladness:
Lo, He maketh all things new.

"FISHERS OF MEN."

I had a dream, a varied dream:
Before my ravished sight
The city of my Lord arose,
With all its love and light.

The music of a myriad harps
Flowed out with sweet accord;
And saints were casting down their crowns
In homage to our Lord.

"FISHERS OF MEN." 83

My heart leaped up with untold joy,
Life's toil and pain were o'er;
My weary feet at last had found
The bright and restful shore.

Just as I reached the gates of light,
Ready to enter in,
From earth arose a fearful cry
Of sorrow and of sin.

I turned, and saw behind me surge
A wild and stormy sea;
And drowning men were reaching out
Imploring hands to me.

And ev'ry lip was blanched with dread,
And moaning for relief;
The music of the golden harps
Grew fainter for their grief.

Let me return, I quickly said,
Close to the pearly gate;
My work is with these wretched ones,
So wrecked and desolate.

An angel smiled and gently said:
This is the gate of life,
Wilt thou return to earth's sad scenes,
Its weariness and strife,

84 SIGNING THE PLEDGE.

To comfort hearts that sigh and break,
To dry the falling tear,
Wilt thou forego the music sweet
Entrancing now thy ear?

I must return, I firmly said,
The strugglers in that sea
Shall not reach out beseeching hands
In vain for help to me.

I turned to go; but as I turned
The gloomy sea grew bright,
And from my heart there seemed to flow
Ten thousand cords of light.

And sin-wrecked men, with eager hands
Did grasp each golden cord;
And with my heart I drew them on
To see my gracious Lord.

Again I stood beside the gate.
My heart was glad and free;
For with me stood a rescued throng
The Lord had given me.

THE LOST BELLS. 85

THE LOST BELLS.

Year after year the artist wrought
With earnest, loving care,
The music flooding all his soul
To pour upon the air.

For this no metal was too rare,
He counted not the cost;
Nor deemed the years in which he toiled
As labor vainly lost.

When morning flushed with crimson light
The golden gates of day,
He longed to fill the air with chimes
Sweet as a matin's lay.

And when the sun was sinking low
Within the distant West,
He gladly heard the bells he wrought
Herald the hour of rest.

The music of a thousand harps
Could never be so dear
As when those solemn chants and thrills
Fell on his list'ning ear.

He poured his soul into their chimes,
And felt his toil repaid;
He called them children of his soul,
His home a'near them made.

86 THE LOST BELLS.

But evil days came on apace,
War spread his banner wide,
And from his village snatched away
The artist's love and pride.

At dewy morn and stilly eve
The chimes no more he heard;
With dull and restless agony
His spirit's depths was stirred.

A weary longing filled his soul,
It bound him like a spell;
He left his home to seek the chimes--
The chimes he loved so well.

Where lofty fanes in grandeur rose,
Upon his ear there fell
No music like the long lost chimes
Of his beloved bell.

And thus he wandered year by year.
Touched by the hand of time,
Seeking to hear with anxious heart
Each well remembered chime.

And to that worn and weary heart
There came a glad surcease:
He heard again the dear old chimes,
And smiled and uttered peace.

THE LOST BELLS. 87

"The chimes! the chimes!" the old man cried,
"I hear their tones at last;"
A sudden rapture filled his heart,
And all his cares were past.

Yes, peace had come with death's sweet calm,
His journeying was o'er,
The weary, restless wanderer
Had reached the restful shore.

It may be that he met again,
Enfolded in the air,
The dear old chimes beside the gates
Where all is bright and fair;

That he who crossed and bowed his head
When Angelus was sung
In clearer light touched golden harps
By angel fingers strung.

88 "DO NOT CHEER, MEN ARE DYING."

"DO NOT CHEER, MEN ARE DYING," SAID
CAPT. PHILLIPS, IN THE SPANISH-
AMERICAN WAR.

Do not cheer, for men are dying
From their distant homes in pain;
And the restless sea is darkened
By a flood of crimson rain.

Do not cheer, for anxious mothers
Wait and watch in lonely dread;
Vainly waiting for the footsteps
Never more their paths to tread.

Do not cheer, while little children
Gather round the widowed wife,
Wondering why an unknown people
Sought their own dear father's life.

Do not cheer, for aged fathers
Bend above their staves and weep,
While the ocean sings the requiem
Where their fallen children sleep.

Do not cheer, for lips are paling
On which lay the mother's kiss;
'Mid the dreadful roar of battle

How that mother's hand they miss!

"DO NOT CHEER, MEN ARE DYING." 89

Do not cheer: once joyous maidens,
Who the mazy dance did tread,
Bow their heads in bitter anguish,
Mourning o'er their cherished dead.

Do not cheer while maid and matron
In this strife must bear a part;
While the blow that strikes a soldier
Reaches to some woman's heart.

Do not cheer till arbitration
O'er the nations holds its sway,
And the century now closing
Ushers in a brighter day.

Do not cheer until the nation
Shall more wise and thoughtful grow
Than to staunch a stream of sorrow
By an avalanche of woe.

Do not cheer until each nation
Sheathes the sword and blunts the spear,
And we sing aloud for gladness:
Lo, the reign of Christ is here,

And the banners of destruction
From the battlefield are furled,
And the peace of God descending
Rests upon a restless world.

90 THE BURDENS OF ALL.

THE BURDENS OF ALL.

We may sigh o'er the heavy burdens
Of the black, the brown and white;
But if we all clasped hands together
The burdens would be more light.
How to solve life's saddest problems,
Its weariness, want and woe,
Was answered by One who suffered
In Palestine long ago.

He gave from his heart this precept,
To ease the burdens of men,
"As ye would that others do to you
Do ye even so to them."

Life's heavy, wearisome burdens
Will change to a gracious trust
When men shall learn in the light of God
To be merciful and just.

Where war has sharpened his weapons,
And slavery masterful had,
Let white and black and brown unite
To build the kingdom of God.
And never attempt in madness
To build a kingdom or state,
Through greed of gold or lust of power,
On the crumbling stones of hate.

The burdens will always be heavy,
The sunshine fade into night,
Till mercy and justice shall cement
The black, the brown and the white.
And earth shall answer with gladness,
The herald angel's refrain,
When "Peace on earth, good will to men"
Was the burden of their strain.

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of The Project Gutenberg Etext of Poems by Frances E. W. Harper

By angel fingers strung.

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