

Gerald Massey (1828-1907)

1 *The Ballad of Babe Christabel*

When Danaë-Earth bares all her charms,
And gives the God her perfect flower,
Who, in the sunshine's golden shower,
Leaps warm into her amorous arms!

When buds are bursting on the brier, 5
And all the kindled greenery glows,
And life hath richest overflows,
And morning fields are fringed with fire:

When young Maids feel Love stir i' the blood, 10
And wanton with the kissing leaves
And branches, and the quick sap heaves,
And dances to a ripen'd flood;

Till, blown to its hidden heart with sighs,
Love's red rose burns i' the cheek so dear, 15
And, as sea-jewels upward peer,
Love-thoughts melt through their swimming eyes:

When Beauty walks in bravest dress,
And, fed with April's mellow showers,
The earth laughs out with sweet May-flowers,
That flush for very happiness: 20

And Spider-Puck such wonder weaves
O' nights, and nooks of greening gloom
Are rich with violets that bloom
In the cool dark of dewy leaves:

When Rose-buds drink the fiery wine 25
Of Dawn, with crimson stains i' the mouth,
All thirstily as yearning Youth
From Love's hand drinks the draught divine;

And honey'd plots are drowsed with Bees:
And Larks rain music by the shower, 30
While singing, singing hour by hour,
Song like a Spirit sits i' the Trees!

When fainting hearts forget their fears,
And in the poorest Life's salt cup
Some rare wine runs, and Hope builds up 35
Her rainbow over Memory's tears!

It fell upon a merry May morn,
I' the perfect prime of that sweet time
When daisies whiten, woodbines climb, —
The dear Babe Christabel was born. 40

All night the Stars bright watches kept,
Like Gods that look a golden calm;
The Silence dropt its precious balm,
And the tired world serenely slept.

The birds were darkling in the nest, 45
Or bosom'd in voluptuous trees:
On beds of flowers the panting breeze
Had kist its fill and sank to rest.

All night beneath the Cottage eaves,
A lonely light, with tremulous Arc, 50
Surged back a space the sea of dark,
And glanced among the glimmering leaves.

Without! the quiet heavens above
The nest of life, did lean and brood!
Within! the Mother's tears of blood 55
Wet the Gethsemane of her love!

And when the Morn with frolic zest,
Lookt through the curtains of the night,
There was a dearer dawn of light,
A tenderer life the Mother's prest! 60

Ah! bliss to make the brain reel wild!
The Star new-kindled in the dark —
Life that had flutter'd like a Lark —
Lay in her bosom a sweet Child!

How she had felt it drawing down 65
Her nesting heart more close and close, —
Her rose-bud ripening to a Rose,
That she should one day see full-blown!

How she had throb'd with hopes and fears,
And strain'd her inner eyes till dim, 70
To see the coming glory swim
Through the rich mist of happy tears;

For it, her woman's heart drank up,
And smiled at, Sorrow's darkest dole:
And now Delight's most dainty soul 75
Was crusht for her in one rich cup!

And then delicious languors crept,
Like nectar, on her pain's hot drouth,
And feeling fingers — kissing mouth —
Being faint with joy, the Mother slept. 80

Babe Christabel was royally born!
For when the earth was flusht with flowers,
And drencht with beauty in rainbow showers,
She came through golden gates of Morn.

No chamber arras-pictured round, 85
Where sunbeams golden gorgeous gloom,
And touch its glories into bloom,
And footsteps fall withouten sound,

Was her Birth-place that merry May-morn;
No gifts were heapt, no bells were rung, 90
No healths were crown'd, no songs were sung,

When dear Babe Christabel was born:

But Nature on the darling smiled,
And with her beauty's blessing crown'd:
Love brooded o'er the hallowed ground, 95
And there were Angels with the Child!

And May her kisses of love did blow
On amorous airs, that came to her
With gifts of Frankincense and Myrrh,
As came the Magi long ago 100

To worship Bethlehem's baby-King:
Spring-Birds made welcoming merriment,
And all the Flowers for welcome sent
The secret sweetness of the Spring.

With glancing lights and shimmering shade, 105
And cheeks that toucht and ripelier burn'd,
May-Roses in at the lattice yearn'd
A-tiptoe, and Good Morrow bade.

No purple and fine linen might
Be hoarded up for her sweet sake: 110
But Mother's love shall clothe and make
The little wearer richly dight!

Wide worlds of worship are their eyes,
Their loyal hearts are worlds of love,
Who fondly clasp the stranger Dove, 115
And read its news from Paradise.

Their looks praise God — souls sing for glee:
They think if this old world had toil'd
Through ages to bring forth their child,
It hath a glorious destiny. 120

O happy Husband! happy Wife!
The rarest blessing Heaven drops down,

The sweetest blossom in Spring's crown,
Starts in the furrows of your life!

God! what a towering heights ye win, 125
Who cry, "Lo my beloved Child!"
And, life on life sublimely piled,
Ye touch the heavens and peep within!

Look how a star of glory swims
Down aching silences of space, 130
Flushing the Darkness till its face
With beating heart of light o'erbrims!

So brightening came Babe Christabel,
To touch the earth with fresh romance,
And light a Mother's countenance 135
With looking on her miracle.

With hands so flower-like soft, and fair,
She caught at life, with words as sweet
As first spring violets, and feet
As faery-light as feet of air. 140

The Father, down in Toil's mirk mine,
Turns to his wealthy world above,
Its radiance, and its home of love;
And lights his life like sun-struck wine.

The Mother moves with queenlier tread: 145
Proud swell the globes of ripe delight
Above her heart, so warm and white
A pillow for the baby-head!

Their natures deepen, well-like, clear,
Till God's eternal stars are seen, 150
For ever shining and serene,
By eyes anointed Beauty's seer.

A sense of glory all things took, —
The red Rose-Heart of Dawn would blow,
And Sundown's sumptuous pictures show 155

Babe-Cherubs wearing their Babe's look!

And round their peerless one they clung,
Like bees about a flower's wine-cup;
New thoughts and feelings blossom'd up,
And hearts for very fulness sung 160

Of what their budding Babe should grow,
When the Maid crimson'd into Wife,
And crown'd the summit of some life,
Like Phosphor, with morn on its brow!

And they should bless her for a Bride, 165
Who, like a splendid saint alit
In some heart's seventh heaven, should sit,
As now in theirs, all glorified!

But O! 't was all too white a brow
To flush with Passion that doth fire 170
With Hymen's torch its own death-pyre, —
So pure her heart was beating now!

And thus they built their Castles brave
In faery lands of gorgeous cloud;
They never saw a little white shroud, 175
Nor guess'd how flowers may mask the grave.

She grew, a sweet and sinless Child,
In shine and shower, — calm and strife;
A Rainbow on our dark of Life,
From Love's own radiant heaven down-smiled! 180

In lonely loveliness she grew, —
A shape all music, light, and love,
With startling looks, so eloquent of
The spirit burning into view.

At Childhood she could seldom play 185
With merry heart, whose flashings rise

Like splendour-wingéd butterflies
From honey'd hearts of flowers in May:

The fields with bloom flamed out and flusht,
The Roses into crimson yearn'd, 190
With cloudy fire the wall-flowers burn'd,
And blood-red Sunsets bloom'd and blusht —

And still her cheek was pale as pearl, —
It took no tint of Summer's wealth
Of colour, warmth, and wine of Health: — 195
Death's hand so whitely pressed the Girl!

No blushes swarm'd to the Sun's kiss
Where violet-veins ran purple light,
So tenderly thro' Parian white,
Touching you into tenderness. 200

A spirit-look was in her face,
That shadow'd a miraculous range
Of meanings, ever rich and strange,
Or lighten'd glory in the place.

Such mystic lore was in her eyes, 205
And light of other worlds than ours,
She lookt as she had fed on flowers,
And drunk the dews of Paradise.

Her brow — fit home for daintiest dreams —
With such a dawn of light was crown'd, 210
And reeling ringlets shower'd round,
Like sunny sheaves of golden beams:

And she would talk so weirdly-wild,
And grow upon your wonderings,
As tho' her stature rose on wings! 215
And you forgot she was a Child.

Ah! she was one of those who come
With pledgéd promise not to stay
Long, ere the Angels let them stray

To nestle down in earthly home: 220

And, thro' the windows of her eyes,
We often saw her saintly soul,
Serene, and sad, and beautiful,
Go sorrowing for lost Paradise.

Our Lamb in mystic meadows play'd: 225
In some celestial sleep she walkt
Her dream of life, and low we talkt,
As of her waking heart-afraid.

In Earth she took no lusty root,
Her beauty of promise to disclose, 230
And round into the Woman-Rose,
And climb into Life's crowning fruit.

She came — like music in the night
Floating as heaven in the brain,
A moment oped, and shut again, 235
And all is dark where all was light.

She came, — as comes the light of smiles
O'er earth, and every budding thing
Makes quick with beauty — alive with Spring;
Then goeth to Hesperian Isles. 240

Midnight was trancéd solemnly
Thinking of dawn: Her Star-thoughts burn'd!
The Trees like burden'd Prophets yearn'd,
Rapt in a wind of prophecy:

When, like the Night, the shadow of Woe 245
On all things laid its hand death-dark,
Our last hope went out like a spark,
And a cry smote heaven like a blow!

We sat and watcht by Life's dark stream,
Our love-lamp blown about the night, 250

With hearts that lived as lived its light,
And died as died its precious gleam.

In Death's face hers flasht up and smiled,
As smile the young flowers in their prime,
I' the face of their grey murderer Time, 255
And Death for true love kist our child.

She thought our good-night kiss was given,
And like a lily her life did close;
Angels uncurtain'd that repose,
And the next waking dawn'd in heaven. 260

With her white hands claspt she sleepeth; heart is husht, and lips are cold;
Death shrouds up her heaven of beauty, and a weary way I go,
Like the sheep without a Shepherd on the wintry norland wold,
With the face of Day shut out by blinding snow.

O'er its widow'd nest my heart sits moaning for its young that 's fled 265
From this world of wail and weeping, gone to join her starry peers;
And my light of life 's o'ershadow'd where the dear one lieth dead,
And I 'm crying in the dark with many fears.

All last night-tide she seemed near me, like a lost beloved Bird,
Beating at the lattice louder than the sobbing wind and rain; 270
And I call'd across the night with tender name and fondling word;
And I yearn'd out thro' the darkness, all in vain.

Heart will plead, "Eyes cannot see her: they are blind with tears of pain;"
And it climbeth up and straineth, for dear life to look and hark
While I call her once again: but there cometh no refrain, 275
And it droppeth down, and dieth in the dark.

In this dim world of clouding cares,
We rarely know, till wildered eyes
See white wings lessening up the skies,
The Angels with us unawares. 280

And thou hast stolen a jewel, Death!
Shall light thy dark up like a Star,
A Beacon kindling from afar
Our light of love, and fainting faith.

Thro' tears it gleams perpetually, 285
And glitters thro' the thickest glooms,
Till the eternal morning comes
To light us o'er the Jasper Sea.

With our best branch in tenderest leaf,
We 've strewn the way our Lord doth come; 290
And, ready for the harvest-home,
His Reapers bind our ripest sheaf.

Our beautiful Bird of light hath fled:
Awhile she sat with folded wings —
Sang round us a few hoverings — 295
Then straightway into glory sped.

And white-wing'd Angels nurture her;
With heaven's white radiance robed and crown'd,
And all Love's purple glory round,
She summers on the Hills of Myrrh. 300

Thro' Childhood's morning-land, serene
She walkt betwixt us twain, like Love;
While, in a robe of light above,
Her better Angel walkt unseen,

Till Life's highway broke bleak and wild; 305
Then, lest her starry garments trail
In mire, heart bleed, and courage fail,
The Angel's arms caught up the child.

Her wave of life hath backward roll'd
To the great ocean; on whose shore 310
We wander up and down, to store
Some treasures of the times of old:

And aye we seek and hunger on
 For precious pearls and relics rare,
 Strewn on the sands for us to wear
At heart, for love of her that 's gone. 315

O weep no more! there yet is balm
 In Gilead! Love doth ever shed
 Rich healing where it nestles, — spread
O'er desert pillows, some green Palm! 320

Strange glory streams thro' Life's wild rents,
 And thro' the open door of Death
 We see the heaven that beckoneth
To the Beloved going hence.

God's ichor fills the hearts that bleed; 325
 The best fruit loads the broken bough;
 And in the wounds our sufferings plough,
Immortal Love sows sovereign seed.

(From *The Ballad of Babe Christabel with Other Lyrical Poems*.
Fourth Edition, Revised and Enlarged. London, 1854)