

Robert W. Buchanan (1841-1901)

3 *The Ballad of Mary the Mother*

Shepherds, wake, 'tis Christmas tide!
(*Over the snow the bleak winds blow!*)
Follow, with yonder Star for guide,
On Christmas day in the morning.

'The way is dark, the way is long, 5
We cheer the way with a blithesome song.

'Thro' the valley and over the hill,—
Hush, now hush, for the Star stands still!

'It stands so still and it shines so clear—
This is the place! Our Lord is here!' 10

Ye who have gifts, your gifts unfold—
Wood of Lebanon, gems, and gold.

Kneel, and shrive ye of your sin—
Then lift the latch, and enter in. . . .

Alack, why stand ye weeping there? . . . 15
'The fire is out, and the hearth is bare!

'Far have we wander'd thro' wintry gloom—
To seek His cradle, and lo! His tomb!

'Still overhead the Star shines clear,
But only the dust of the dead lies here: 20

'Ashes and dust in a frozen shroud,
Wherefore we wonder and weep aloud!

‘Here He was born who long since died
 (*Over the snow the bleak winds blow!*)
 Dark is the field this wintertide 25
On Christmas day in the morning.’

’Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
 Came wandering footsore,
 And stood, with her rags around her,
 Outside the synagogue door. 30

‘O, who art thou, thou woeful woman,
 And what may thine errand be?’
 ‘I am Mary, the Mother of thy Lord,
 And I come from Galilee.’

‘Stand back, stand back, whoever thou art, 35
 Thou canst not enter here,
 Thy Son is doing His Father’s work
 Among His brethren dear.

‘O woman, thou canst not enter now,’
 The grim door-keeper said, 40
 ‘Thy Son is pouring the Wine of Life,
 And breaking the holy Bread.’

’Twas Mary, the gentle Mother,
 Smiled, and laid bare her breast.
 ‘Twas here he drank, and ’twas here he lay 45
 Both waking and at rest.

‘Go in, and tell him his Mother waits
 Out here among the crowd’—
 And as she spake, from far within
 She heard Him praying aloud. 50

'Twas one went in to the synagogue
When the deep prayer was done,—
'Rabbi, a woman is at the door,
Who saith Thou art her Son.

'Her bare feet bleed from the thorny ways 55
'Twixt here and Galilee,
And with the woman Thy brethren come,
And they would speak with Thee.'

The Lord stretch'd out His gentle hands
To His disciples dear: 60
'These are my mother, these are my brethren,
None else may enter here!

'I know no brethren, I know no mother,
Save those who believe on Me!
Who eat with Me of the Bread of Life 65
My mother and brethren be!'

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
Stood at the open door;
'Twas Jesus passed on His Heavenward way
And left her weeping sore. 70

His eyes were fixed on the far-off skies
As He left her there bereaven,
He turned away from His mother's face
To His Father's face in Heaven.

As He wandered on from door to door 75
She followed Him from afar;
His face was bright as the moon in Heaven,
And hers like a lonely star.

It was Mary, the woeful Mother,
Wept as she watched Him go 80

Through the town, and up the height
That looks on the sea below;

And His feet were as swift as the wind,
And His eyes were as bright as fire,
And the face He turn'd to the shining Heaven 85
Was wan with His heart's desire;

And His dress was of white, white wool,
And His breast and His feet were bare,
And the light came down like His Father's Hand
And lay on His golden hair! 90

And she heard His voice from afar
Crying o'er land and sea:
'Father, my Father which art in Heaven,
Shine down and strengthen me!'

* * *

It was Mary, the woeful Mother, 95
Sat weeping on a stone,—
It was Mary, the dark-eyed Maiden,
Found her weeping alone.

'O why dost thou weep so sadly,
And why is thy grey head bowed?' 100
(And the smile came through her great black eyes
Like the light through a summer cloud.)

'Rise up, thou weariful woman,
Rise up and come with me—
Thou shalt sit this day in my palace bower 105
And I will sit at thy knee;

'And when my maidens have wash'd thy feet,
And the feast is over and done,

Thou shalt loosen thy lips and open thy heart
And tell me of thy Son!' 110

It was Mary, the woeful Mother,
Rose, weeping bitterlie,
And leaning on Mary the Maiden,
Hied to her bower by the sea.

As they walked through the fields of corn 115
The birds were singing their song,
But the voice of the Lord above them
Rang out more clear and strong;

And they saw the crowd on the mountain
Gathering with glad acclaim, 120
And the Lord was standing above them
And blessing those who came.

* * *

In the bower of Mary the Maiden
There's a high seat and a low,
And the white-robed serving maidens 125
Are moving to and fro.

With dishes of gold and silver
The banquet they prepare,
And the scent of myrrh and roses
Is filling the air. 130

With white wine and with red wine
The brimming gourds o'erflow;
And the Mother sits on the high seat,
And the Maid on the seat below.

When the virgins have wash'd and anointed 135
The weariful Mother's feet,

When over her head they have broken
A box of ointments sweet;

When her mouth of the food hath eaten,
And her lips have touched the wine, 140
She looketh on Mary the Maiden,
And dryeth her tear-wet eyne.

'On thee and thine, my daughter,
All peace and blessings be!
The God of Israël bless thee 145
For thy sweet charitie!'

As fair as the Hûleh lily
That blooms in the summer beam,
Was Mary the Maiden, wearing
Her robe of the silken seam; 150

And on her hair and her bosom
Were jewels and gems of price,
And round her neck there was hanging
A charm with a strange device:

A heart of amber, and round it 155
Ruby and emerald bands,
And over it, wrought in crystal,
Two little wingèd hands!

White and warm was her bosom
That rose and fell below, 160
And light on her face was playing,
Deep, like the after-glow;

With the waves of her heaving bosom
That strange light went and came,
Now dim and dark with the shadow of earth, 165
Now flush'd with a heavenly flame;

And the warmth of the glad green meadows,
The scent of the Night and the Day,
Flow'd up from Mary the Maiden
To Mary the old and grey. 170

'O wherefore, my namesake Mary,
Art thou so good to me,—
The woeful woman who wedded
With Joseph of Galilee?

'Poor is my lot and lowly, 175
Sad is my heart and sore,—
I am not worthy, my daughter,
To enter thy palace door!'

'Twas Mary, the dark-eyed Maiden,
The beautiful shining one, 180
Answer'd, 'I love thee, Mother,
For the Rabbi's sake, thy Son!

'To the fairest and best of mortals
Thy womb hath given birth,—
Like the moon on the troubled waters 185
He walketh the waves of Earth!

'White as a statue of marble
Wrought in some Grecian land,
Fair as a palm-tree growing
Green, 'mid the desert sand, 190

'Monarch of men he shineth
Bright as the morning star,
A God, and of Godhead fashion'd,
Not mortal as others are!

'There's a storm in my snow-white bosom 195

Only his touch can still,—
There's a void in my heart, O Mother,
Only his love can fill!

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
Bent down and kissed her brow: 200
'God help thee, Mary, my daughter,
And all such maids as thou!

'His love is not for the things of earth,
His blessing for things of clay,—
A voice from a Land beyond the grave 205
Is calling my Son away!

'How should he stoop to a love like thine
Who hath no love for me?
In my womb he grew, from my womb he fell,
And I nurst him on my knee.' 210

'Twas Mary, the dark-eyed Maiden,
Smiled through her night-black hair,—
'I met his eyes as he passed this day,
And methought he found me fair!

'There is never a man of the sons of men 215
Who would not smile on me,
But if thy Son is more than a man,
Alack for me and thee!

'But if thy Son is Joseph's son,
E'en as his brethren be, 220
Why, I am Mary of Magdala!
And a King might mate with me.'

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
Answered again, and said:
'The love of the world is not for him, 225

Nor the happy bridal bed!

‘He has cast away all women of earth
Even as he casts out me,—
In my womb he grew, from my womb he fell,
And I nurst him on my knee.’ 230

’Twas Mary, the dark-eyed Maiden,
Frown’d, answering scornfullie—
‘Nay, rather than be another’s bride
I would his leman be.

‘Rather than mate with Herod the King 235
Or Cæsar himself, his lord,
I’d be thy Son’s, and ask no more
Than a kindly look or word.

’T’d make my bed across his feet,
I’d be his handmaiden,— 240
There is no other lord for me
’Mong all the sons of men.

‘Yea, though thy Son be Joseph’s son,
Who toileth for his bread,
For one warm kiss of his rosy mouth 245
Gladly I’d die,’ she said.

’Twas Mary the Mother answer’d:
‘Thy woe is even as mine;
Fain would I see my Son stoop down
To a human love like thine. 250

‘Hast thou not heard, O Mary,
The wondering people say
“He is Moses or Eli risen again,
Or a greater even than they”?

‘Hast thou not heard them whisper low 255
Who follow him night and day—
“The seed within his mother’s womb
Came from no human clay”?

‘Hast thou not heard that, ere I wed
My husband leal and true, 260
My womb was full of a wondrous life
That quicken’d ere I knew;

‘And how my mate was wroth and thought
To thrust me from his side,
And how an angel in the night 265
Came to his bed and cried:

*‘Forbear to know the woman thy wife,
Yet put her not away,
She is quick with child of the Holy Ghost,
And hath known no man of clay; 270*

*‘Behold it was written long ago,
Ere thy life’s thread was spun,
“A Virgin shall conceive of God,
Quicken, and bear a Son!”’*

It was the dark-eyed Mary 275
Sprang up her height and cried:
‘Is this thing true, and is thy Son
He that was prophesied?’

’Twas Mary, the Mother, raised her hands,
And wept and tore her hair,— 280
‘Woe worth the day that I was born,
Or ever a child did bear!

‘Hearken to me, my daughter,
Sit down and hearken to me;

But breathe not, out in the world of men, 285
The thing I tell to thee.

‘For the sands of my life run low,
And the thread of my woe is out-worn,
And the Lord hath smitten the Mother down
By the hand of her eldest-born. 290

‘Twas but a little hand
When my babe lay here at rest,
A weak little hand, like a rose-leaf,
That felt for my milky breast.

‘Hearken to me, my daughter, 295
And when my tale is done,
We’ll kneel in the night together
And pray for the man my Son!’

* * *

Green leaf and blossom,
White flower and red, 300
The whole world is gladdening
Where Love’s feet tread!

There’s light in the morning,
There’s life for the young,
’Tis then the songs of Eden 305
On every bough are sung!

The young maid is listening,
Her lover by her side, —
Heaven the earth encircles,
The bridegroom his bride. 310

Green leaf and blossom,
White flower and red, —

*The whole world is gladdening
Where Love's feet tread!*

* * *

'The God of Israël passeth 315
From world to world on high,
The seas and the mighty mountains
Quake as He passeth by;

'No eye hath looked upon Him,
No soul hath fathom'd His ways, 320
His face is veil'd, though His breathing
Filleth our nights and days;

'His Hand is a Hand in the darkness,
His Voice is a Voice in the gloom,
But seed of Jehovah hath never 325
Been sown in a woman's womb.

'Yet the Light that blindeth the vision
Comes from the worlds He made,
And fire of the flesh He fashion'd
Maketh the soul afraid. 330

'I wander'd happy and lonely
By wood and meadow and stream,
And the joy of my youth was upon me
And twined me away in a dream.

'And my love's voice said "Thou art fairest, 335
Thine eyes are the eyes of the dove,
Thy breasts are roses and lilies,"
And I heark'd to the voice of my love!

'Yea, the joy of my life was upon me,
And the light of my youth in my eyes, 340

And a breath like the breath of the morning
Woke me in Paradise!

‘By the beautiful waters of Marah
We pitch’d our tent in the sun,
And we drank of the waters rejoicing, 345
And lo! our dreaming was done;

‘For the taste of the waters was bitter,
And the bright sun shone no more,
And I sat alone in the gloaming,
And the day of my dream was o’er; 350

‘Then I rose in my sorrow, casting
Ashes and dust on my head,
For the seal of my womb was broken,
And the flower of my youth had fled.

‘Yet no one wist of the wonder 355
As home to our house I came,
Only the God of our fathers
Knew of His daughter’s shame.

‘And I dwelt in the house of my people
And veil’d my face like a maid, 360
But ever when men came wooing
I fled to my chamber and prayed.

‘Morning and eve to the fountain,
Between the night and the day,
I went with the village maidens 365
Bearing my pitcher of clay.

And a man from a neighbouring village
Saw me, and thought me fair,
And lo! when I journeyed homeward,
I found him waiting there; 370

‘And while he spake with my father
His eyes grew large on me;
And the man was stately and gentle,
With a voice like the sough of the sea.

‘And my father gave me unto him, 375
With goats and kine for a dower,
And I fled to my lonely chamber
And wept for many an hour.

‘For the eye of my God was upon me 380
While I wept and sorrow’d apart,
And a little hand in the darkness
Was lifting the latch of my heart!

‘Would I had died in the night-time,
Would I had ne’er been born,—
I feared the eyes of the bridegroom, 385
And sorrow’d from night till morn.

‘Then came the hour of the bridal,
The feast and the bridal song,—
O, weak is the heart of a woman,
But the Law and the Lord are strong! 390

‘As he bare me home to his dwelling
’Twas summer in all the land,
But my heart was broken within me
By the touch of that little hand.

‘As we stood in the bridal chamber 395
He offered me bread and wine,
And I feared the light of his loving
As his eyes grew large on mine;

‘And I fell at his feet, and weeping

Pour'd out the gourd of my shame, 400
And the wrath of the Lord around him
Like fire-flaught went and came!

'And at first he hunger'd in anger
To thrust me beyond his door,
But the mercy of God came on him 405
Though his soul was stricken sore.

'And at last, when his wrath was over,
His face grew gentle and mild,
And he spake as a gentle father
Might speak to an erring child. 410

'O blessings upon the bridegroom
Who shielded his bride from wrong—
The heart of a woman is feeble,
But the strength of a man is strong!

'The mighty God of our fathers 415
Bless him in life or death,—
Wisest and best of mortals
Was Joseph of Nazareth!

'He shielded me in my sorrow,
He calm'd my spirit to rest, 420
He found the sheep that had wander'd
And warm'd it on his breast.

'And when my travail was over,
And the night of the birth-pang done,
He lifted the Babe from my bosom 425
And said, "Behold our Son!"

'Yea, over the babe and the mother
The balm of his love he poured,
And he named the new-born JESUS

Which meaneth "Sent by the Lord." 430

'And I clave to my mate and master,
The tenderest man among men,
Yea, I grew to his breast in gladness,
His wife and his handmaiden!

'And after my cleansing he knew me, 435
Yea, gave me the bridegroom's embrace,
And children were born unto us
To gladden our dwelling-place.'

* * *

'Twas Mary, the grey-hair'd Mother,
Bowed down her woeful head; 440
'Twas Mary, the dark-eyed Maiden,
Reach'd up her arms and said:

'God's grace and blessing, Mother,
Wrap thee from head to feet!
The ways of the world are weary, 445
But the kiss of a mouth is sweet!

'Now tell me who was the lover
Who brought thee such glad pain?
Some mighty lord of the City?
Some chief of the lonely plain?' 450

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
Moan'd to herself and said:
'His name will never be utter'd,
Darkness hideth his head!

'He is gone like the dew of the morning, 455
He is fled with the flowers of the May,
His name on the sands of the desert

Was written and blown away.

'I clave to my lord and master,
And peace and joy were mine, 460
For the blissful milk of the mother
Flow'd in my breast like wine;

'For the lips of my babe drew from me
The poison and the pain,
Till the weariful heart within me 465
Gladden'd and leapt again!

'A maid's love, O my daughter,
Is a pearl that men may buy,
But the love of a new-made mother
Is a rainbow in the sky! 470

'All peace of earth and of heaven
Are gather'd in her embrace—
Smiling the little one lieth
And looketh up in her face!

'His lips are lilies and roses, 475
His scent is sweeter than myrrh,
He draweth bliss from her bosom
And breatheth it back to her!

'Still as a star on my bosom
My little first-born lay, 480
And like a fountain around him
My love flow'd day by day!

'Clear as the summer heavens
I saw his blue eyes shine!
Never on mortal bosom 485
Shone babe so bright as mine!

‘The days flow’d on like a murmuring brook
That gladdeneth in the sun,—
For I heard the music of earth and heaven
From the mouth of my little one! 490

‘Brighter and fairer my first-born grew,
And O, but it was sweet
To hold him up with a finger touch
When he stood upon his feet;

‘I could hold him up with a finger touch, 495
He was so light and frail,—
But now he hath the might of a man
How should my strength avail?

‘Yet even in those sweet far-off days,
So bright and now so dim, 500
Meseem’d the bairns his playfellows
Were different from him!

‘He seem’d not as other children
That play in the summer beam,—
With the sound of their mirth around him 505
He stood and look’d up in a dream!

‘And while from hillock to hillock
They flew with laugh and cry,
He watch’d the white clouds passing
Over the still blue sky! 510

‘So grave and yet so gentle,
So still and yet so blest,—
It seemed some fountain of wonder
Flow’d in his baby breast.

‘And one by one in the darkness 515
The new-born waken’d and cried,

And I gladden'd, a fruitful Mother,
Forgiven and purified!

'For lo! he gladden'd among them,
The fairest and goodliest, 520
And still that fountain of wonder
Flow'd in his gentle breast!

'And so he grew in the dwelling
And brighten'd from day to day.
And the Light of the Lord was on us, 525
And the Angels looked our way!

* * *

*There's a cry of little ones in the bield,
And a patter of feet on the floor;
The Sun is splashing o'er farm and field
To the golden pool at the door! 530
The earth is twining flowers in her hair,
And there's some for you and me;
Smile, Babe!—leap, Babe!—rock'd upon Mother's
knee!*

*Of all the joys that the years can bring
There is never a joy like this, — 535
Flowers to bloom, birds to sing,
And the bud of a mouth to kiss!
Our good-man looks smiling on,
And a proud good-man is he!
Smile, Babe!—leap, Babe!—happy on Mother's
knee; 540*

*Clear as a fountain by our fireside
The cry of the young is heard,
Answer'd over the whole world wide
By the cry of lamb and bird!*

It's home-time now in the happy world 545
And it's Heaven with my bairns and me!
Smile, Babe!—leap, Babe!—rock'd upon Mother's
knee!

Round and around our house they run,
A laughing, barefoot band—
Bright at the door the merry Sun 550
With a golden nod doth stand!
And it's oh! for the peace of Heaven and Home,
And the light on my bairns and me!
Smile, Babe!—leap, Babe!—happy on Mother's knee!

* * *

As the flower of the Hûleh lily 555
Shineth after the rain,
The face of Mary the Mother
Smiled, and grew bright again!

For the milk of the glad young mother
Seem'd flowing in her breast, 560
And once again to her nipples
A little mouth seem'd prest;

And her great grey eyes half closing
Were dim with the happy dew,
And her red lips trembled and open'd 565
As the quick glad breath came thro'!

'The peace of God was upon me,
The smile of God at my door,
My soul was a summer fountain
That filleth and floweth o'er! 570

'Fairer and fairer my first-born grew
Till he was seven years old,

And his eyes had the glint o' the waters blue
And his hair the sunset's gold.

'His voice was low as the voice o' the dove 575
That cries in a shady place,
And the light of a love that was more than love
Flowed from his shining face;

'For he loved all things that the Lord hath made
Who maketh great and small, 580
And he folded his little hands and prayed
That God might guard them all!

'But ever of all God's creatures
He loved the weak things best,—
The lamb that leaps in the meadows 585
Would come and lie in his breast;

'The doves that dwell on the house-tops
Would gather about his feet,
And the hungry dogs would lick his hands
As he walk'd i' the sun-scorch'd street! 590

'And he loved the folk who were sick and weak,
Whom God had stricken sore,
Yea, the tears would roll adown his cheek
For pity of the poor;

'And sad was the heart of my little one, 595
And his eyes grew wet and dim,
When the spotted lepers crawl'd i' the sun
And held out hands to him! . . .

'In the synagogue of his fathers
He heard the Rabbis preach, 600
And better than play or pleasure
He loved their stately speech;

‘Yea, even as the wild bee gathers
Its honey from flower to flower,
He gathered the words of wisdom 605
For many a happy hour.

‘But best he loved (God bless him,
And cherish him night and day)
The wandering men of the desert
Who silently fast and pray. 610

‘For when from the holy places
One of these wights footsore,
With scoop of brass, and apron
Of linen, would pass our door,

‘My good-man, merrily toiling 615
Within at the carpenter’s board,
Would bid the pilgrim enter
And rest, in the name of the Lord;

‘And when he had made ablution
He’d enter and bless the place, 620
The silence of God around him,
The light of God on his face;

‘And Jesus would gaze upon him,
Till he reach’d out hands and smiled,
And murmur’d, “The God of Jacob 625
Preserve the little child!”

‘Then silently like a shadow
He’d rise and wander away,
But the Light of God and His Silence
Would dwell on the child all day. 630

* * *

‘Oft, as he spelt his letters,
Resting the scroll on my knee,
He’d close the scroll in his little hand
And sigh, and question me—

‘And ’twas “O, mother,” and “why, mother, 635
Do mortals weary and die?
Surely our Father in Heaven
Heareth His children cry?”

‘The tales that a thousand mothers
Tell to their sons, I told,— 640
Of the chosen race of Israël
And the weariful days of old;

‘And how in the land of bondage
We wail’d beneath God’s hand,
Till the prophet came to set us free
645
And we gain’d the Golden Land;

‘Dumbly he’d stand and listen
While I those tales did tell,
And o’er and o’er he’d have me sing
The psalms of Israë! 650

‘O sweet he was as the summer rain
That falleth on desert ways,
But ever the cry of human pain
Troubled his nights and days!

‘And ’twas “O, mother,” and “why, mother, 655
Are folks so weary and sad?
The sick folk die, and the lepers cry,
Though the sun shines bright and glad!”

‘And he’d stand and muse apart
Like an old man bent with years, 660
And the well of wonder within his heart
Fill’d, like an eye with tears!

* * *

‘And so my little one grew,
The whitest lamb in the fold,
But the shadow dwelt in his eyes of blue 665
And his ways were strange and old. . . .

‘We came to the Holy City,
And the streets were bright and gay,
And lo! from the hour my bairn was born
’Twas thirteen years and a day. 670

‘The Temple stood with its gates of gold
On the heights of Jerusalem,
And the children gather’d like lambs i’ the fold
And the Elders question’d them;

‘And we missed the child in the holy place, 675
And wondering, sought for him,
And lo! he stood with a shining face
In the halls of the Sanhedrim!

‘And the Priests and Rabbis gathered round,
And smooth’d their beards and smiled, 680
To hear the words of wisdom sound
From the lips of a little child.

‘Proud and glad was my heart that day
For joy of the little one!
And blithe and merry we rode away 685
When the Holy Feast was done! . . .

‘Stronger and fairer my first-born grew
And in our field he stayed,
For now he toil’d at the bench and knew
My good-man’s gentle trade! 690

‘And his voice chimed cheerily all day long
To the chime of the busy plane,
And as I sat and heark’d to his song
My heart was glad again!

‘For methought “My shame hath passed away, 695
My Son grows strong and tall,—
The God of Israël be his stay
Wherever his feet may fall!

“The God of Israël grant him life
And be his light and guide,— 700
And when he taketh a maid to wife
May their seed be multiplied!

“May their days be long in a fruitful land
Under the summer skies,
And ere I sleep may he hold my hand 705
And close my happy eyes.”

‘O the light o’ the Lord shone bright indeed
Upon our dwelling-place!
For methought my seed was a goodly seed
To quicken and grow apace! 710

‘And I saw my Son’s seed multiply
And gladden from day to day,
And I heard my children’s children cry
Like voices far away!

‘The life of man is a tale thrice told, 715
His joy is a flower full blown—

When our Son was nineteen summers old,
He toil'd at the bench alone!

'The weight of years on his hair so grey,
The sleep-dust in his eyne, 720
My good-man Joseph passed away
While I held his hand in mine;

'Gently he beckon'd the first-born near
And gazed in his face and said:
"O, Jesus, look to thy mother dear 725
When I lie cold and dead!"

"Twas darkness then in the lowly bield
For many and many a day;
For he who had been my strength and shield
Was taken and hid away. 730

'My children gathered around my knee
And I bowed my widow'd head,
But gently my first-born smiled on me
And my grief was comforted.

'O, blessed be the name of the Lord! 735
He taketh and giveth again,
His wrath is fire and a flaming sword,
But His love is summer rain;

'The flesh of the stricken He healeth up,
The sick He maketh sound,— 740
When our grief is full as a brimming cup
He poureth it on the ground.

'The peace of God on my spirit fell
For joy of the man my Son,—
At his father's board he wrought full well 745
Till his daily task was done.

‘There was never a man of woman born
Was half so fair as he,—
Like the sound of a fountain night and morn
Was the voice of my Son to me. 750

‘And evermore when his toil was o’er
He loved to wander away,
To comfort the sick and cheer the poor,
Or to muse apart and pray.

‘And in the synagogue he’d teach 755
Among the Rabbis old,
And he gather’d wisdom, and lo! his speech
Grew stranger twentyfold;

‘But ever I murmur’d day and night,
“Never was Son like mine; 760
O, may his days be long and bright,
And his flesh a fruitful vine.”

* * *

‘Out of the lonely desert
Preaching Jochanan came,
And stood in the shallows of Jordan 765
Naming the one God’s Name.

‘Wild as the horse of the desert
No man may saddle and ride,
Over his naked shoulders
A cloak o’ the camel’s hide; 770

‘He cried aloud to the people
Who gather’d on the strand:
“Repent! repent; for the Kingdom
Of Heaven is close at hand!”

‘And men and women and children, 775
From morn to evenfall,
Flock’d to the Prophet’s bidding
And he baptised them all;—

‘With water he baptised them
Under the open sky, 780
And lo! on the second morning
The man, my Son, stood nigh!

‘And lo! as they met together
The eyes of John were dim,
For as morning star unto evening star 785
Was the man, my Son, to him!

‘Yet with water he baptised him,
And lo! when it was done,
The hunger and thirst of Godhead
Grew in the soul of my Son; 790

‘And he wandered away from the people
Into a desert place,
And there alone with the Silence
He fasted and hid his face;

‘And the stars of Heaven beheld him, 795
And the wild beasts hovered near,
But the eye of man did not see him
And the ear of man did not hear;

‘And he ate not and he drank not,
But fasted and prayed, and so 800
The flesh on his bones was wasted,
And the light of his life burnt low.

‘And when I again beheld him

I trembled and sobbed aloud,
For the dews of Death were upon him 805
And his face seem'd set in a shroud!

“O where hast thou been, my Jesus,
And why is thy look so wild?”
He stood like a ghost in the doorway
And look'd in my face and smiled; 810

‘And his smile was loving and gentle,
Tho’ his face was ashen grey,
But his eyes were gazing through me
At something far away!

“O where hast thou been, my Jesus, 815
And what didst thou hear and see?”
“I heard the winds of the night,” he said,
“And the Silence spake to me!”

“Alas and alas, my Jesus,
And what didst thou see and hear?” 820
“I saw the Dead in their shrouds pass by
And the Souls of the Dead stood near!

“And I heard the beasts of the desert
Moaning like human things,
And the Spirit of Darkness cover'd my head 825
And wrapt me 'neath his wings.

“But I knelt and prayed that my Father in heaven
Would shrive me of my sin,
And the Gates of Heaven swung open wide
To show the lights within; 830

“And a Face looked out of the Golden Gates,
And the Spirit of Darkness fled,
And the Hand of God like a Father's hand

Was placed upon my head.

“And the Voice of God, like a Father’s voice, 835
Came down the dark to me,—
‘Go forth, go forth in thy Father’s Name,
For He hath chosen thee.’”

“Alas, and alas, my Jesus,
What didst thou see and hear? 840
The words thou speakest are dark and strange
And fill my soul with fear.

“The Master of Earth and Heaven
Hath neither feet nor hands,—
The wind of His breath is as the blast 845
That bloweth the desert sands.

“His face no eye hath looked on,
His voice no ear hath heard,—
And yet His face is the Light o’ Life,
And His voice is a wingèd Word.” 850

‘Sadly he gazed upon me,
With great eyes dim with pain,
And the face of my Son burn’d bright through tears,
Like a rainbow through the rain.

“Come in and rest, my Jesus, 855
Thy spirit is weary and worn,
Come in and sleep in thy father’s house
Where thou, my child, wast born;

“And I, thy mother, will sit beside
Thy bed, and sing to thee 860
The song I sang when I sang and rock’d
Thy cradle with my knee.”

‘Sadly he gazed upon me,
Folding his hands in prayer,—
“My Father’s house is wide as the world, 865
And high as the heavens up there.

“My Father’s house is wide as the world,
And I was born therein,—
My Father calleth me out of Heaven
To cleanse it of its sin. 870

“Never again shall my Father’s Son
Rest in a narrow bed,—
To and fro, and up and down,
His weariful feet must tread.

“Never again shall my Father’s Son 875
Hark to thy cradle song,—
To and fro, and up and down,
He goes, for the way is long.”

“Hearken to me, my Jesus,
Stay, and hearken to me; 880
Thy sisters and brethren who sit within
Would break their bread with thee.

“Come in, come in, and sit at the board,
Where my first-born should be,
And I, thy mother, will wash thy feet, 885
And stand and wait on thee!”

‘Sadly he gazed upon me,
Frowning he turned away,—
“Who break with me the Bread of Life,
My sisters and brethren are they! 890

“No brethren dwell in my Father’s house
Save those who eat His Bread,

No mother's love can save the quick
Or wake and shrive the dead!

“And woe is me for my brethren dear 895
Who o'er the wide world stray,
And woe is me for the witless love
That withereth in a day!

“Lo! there be beds in my Father's house
Many as waves o' the sea,— 900
From bed to bed my feet must pass
Till the sleepers wakened be!

“Lo! there be boards in my Father's house
Where men feast merrily,—
From board to board my feet must pass 905
Till all shall follow Me!”

‘He turn'd away with a weary moan
From the bield where he was born,
And as he wander'd from door to door
His townsfolk laughed in scorn! 910

‘For strange he seemed as a witless wight
Whose soul and sense are dim,
And his eyes were bright with a vacant light
And the children mock'd at him!

‘We followed him slowly as up the street 915
Slowly he went his way,
And we saw him enter the synagogue,
For 'twas the Sabbath day;

‘And silently he enter'd in
And stood in the midst o' the crowd, 920
And his head was raised as they named the Name,
Tho' all the rest were bowed!

‘And he took the scroll in his thin white hand
While the Elders gather’d round,
And he read the lesson, and named the Name, 925
And sat down to expound;

‘The first words that he utter’d there
Were gentle and soft and low,
And the sound of his voice was as the sound
Of a fountain’s ebb and flow; 930

‘The next words that he utter’d there
Were wild and strange and loud,
And the sound of his voice was as the sound
Of the riven thunder-cloud;

‘The next words that he utter’d there 935
Were drown’d in fierce acclaim,
For the Elders rose and tore their beards
And the folk shriek’d out in shame!

‘Around my Son like an angry sea
They gather’d shrieking shrill, 940
And his face was calm as a patient star
And his pale lips murmur’d still:

‘Again he utter’d the Name of Names
Nor knelt on bended knee,
But his eyes looked up as if they saw 945
The Face no man may see.

‘With curses and blows they thrust him forth
Into the open street,
And spectral pale he stood at the door
Like a corpse in his winding sheet. 950

“Come home, come home, my Jesus,

Come home with me," I cried,
And gently I sought to guide him home,
But he pushed my hand aside.

"No home have I but my Father's Home, 955
And thither my feet must fare,—
My Father's Home is as wide as the world,
And high as the heavens up there."

* * *

Thou shalt not see, thou shalt not hear,
Yet I, the Lord thy God, am near. 960

Thou shalt not hear, thou shalt not see,
Yet I, thy God, abide with thee.

My Spirit stirs around thee (saith
The Lord), thy nostrils drink my breath.

So near am I both night and day, 965
And yet my throne is worlds away.

Seek not to unveil or fathom Me,—
But shut thine eyes, and bend thy knee.

Juggle not with the Law Divine,
Nor seek my Heavens for a sign. 970

I am veil'd for ever, I am dumb,
And yet my thunders go and come.

Father and Lord I am indeed,
And yet have neither Son nor seed.

Thou shalt not hear, thou shalt not see, 975
Yet I, thy God, abide with thee.

*Let it suffice thee that I reign,—
Beware to take my Name in vain.*

*Go then thy ways,—though I am near,
Thou shalt not see, thou shalt not hear.* 980

* * *

It was Mary, the woeful Mother,
Cried, weeping bitterlie,
‘My days are dark, for the Lord my God
Hath taken my Son from me!

‘He walked by the lonely waters, 985
And saw the ships go by,
And he cried aloud, and the men o’ the ships
Heard, and answer’d his cry!

‘And the sound of his voice could still the pain
In the hearts of the tempest-blown, 990
For he spoke of the waters no ship may gain
And the land no man hath known!

‘And the men o’ the sea forsook their nets
And, gathering one by one,
Sat by the waters of Galilee 995
And heark’d to the man, my Son.

‘And his voice was soft as the rain
That falleth cool on the grass,
And his face was like the moon in the sky
That watches the Tempest pass! 1000

‘And the souls of the men o’ the sea
Close to my Son did creep,
And he reached out hands and counted them

As a Shepherd counteth his sheep!

‘Alone I bode in the lonely house 1005
And his blessing reached not me,—
I heard his voice like a sea-bird’s cry
Far out on a sunless sea!

‘And the elders flocking about our house
Cried, “Woe to him and thee! 1010
The mad folk gather to hear thy Son
And his mouth speaks blasphemy!

“He prophesieth and raveth loud
Out there by Galilee,
With woven hands and with magic spells, 1015
He lures the men o’ the sea!

“He eateth and drinketh unpurified,
He breaketh the Sabbath day:
He is Eli or Moses risen, he saith,
Or a greater even than they!” 1020

‘Nay then, the words they spake were sore
For a mother’s ear to hear,
And I cried: “He is holy and pure of heart,
And such to the Lord are dear!

“Fair as a lily-flower, my Son 1025
Hath grown to the height of man—
Ah, never yet grew a flower so fair
On earth, since the earth began!”

‘Yet ever the wonderful rumour grew,
And men began to tell 1030
Of mighty magic in secret wrought
Wherever my Son’s foot fell:

‘How the lame man walked, and the blind man saw,
And the dumb man spake and heard,
How the waxen man laid out for dead 1035
Had bitten his shroud and stirred!

‘Nay then, my heart was sick with fear
And I feared for the man, my Son,
For I wist such wonders are often wrought
By will of the Evil One! 1040

“He casteth down Devils by Beelzebub,
Who is Prince of Devils,” they said,
And I turn’d my face to the wall, and cast
Ashes and dust on my head.

‘For my buried shame had risen again 1045
And haunted my soul forlorn,
As I prayed for the soul of the man, my Son,
Even Jesus my first-born.

‘Suddenly through the streets o’ the town
I heard the laugh and the cry, 1050
And follow’d by throngs of stranger folk
Jesus, my Son, went by.

‘And those who follow’d were ragged and poor,
And many were gaunt and gray,
And I cried his name as he passed our door 1055
But his face was turned away.

‘And the townsfolk mock’d him as he walked
Swiftly from street to street,
But when he came to the edge o’ the town
He shook the dust from his feet. 1060

“Never was Prophet honoured yet
By those of his own countrie,—

Woe to the town where I was born
And the folk who mock at me!"

'And he wandered up and over the hills, 1065
And his feet were swift as wind,
And I join'd the throng o' the sick and poor
That crept and crawl'd behind;

'And down to the shore of the lonely Sea
Of Galilee he came, 1070
And the throngs of woeful women and men
Gather'd and called his name.'

* * *

It was Mary, the gentle Mother,
To Mary the Maiden cried,—
'Like waves o' the sea, the people 1075
Flow'd on the mountain side;

'And even as a rock in the waters
The man, my Son, stood there,
And the light of the still blue Heaven
Slept on his golden hair. 1080

'When he reached out hands and bless'd them,
They were hush'd as waves o' the sea,
And their faces were dark with yearning
As they listen'd on bended knee:

'For his voice was sweet as a fountain 1085
Or the voice of the turtle dove,
As he told of a Heavenly Kingdom
And the love that is more than love;

'And the burden of earth was uplifted
By the touch of a magic hand, 1090

And the folk beheld as they hearkened
The gleam of the Promised Land:

‘A land of milk and of honey,
Golden and bright and blest,
Where the wicked would cease from troubling 1095
And the weary would be at rest!

‘Then the peace of God flowed round me
And the days of my woe seemed done,
As I listened happy and smiling,
To the voice of the man, my Son! 1100

‘Kind were his words and gentle,
Bright was his face and mild,—
Happy he seem’d and loving
As when he was a child!

“Come to me, ye who hunger, 1105
Come, and be straightway fed!
For lo! I bring from the Father
Not ashes and dust, but bread!

“Come to me, ye who are weeping,
And all your tears shall cease, 1110
For lo! I bring from the Father,
Not trouble and pain, but peace!

“Come to me, ye who are stricken,
Who sicken and fight for breath,
For lo! I bring from the Father 1115
Eternal Life, not Death!”

‘Sweet as a fountain’s falling
The music filled our ears:
‘Your Father in Heaven loves you
And fain would dry your tears! 1120

“Your loving Father in Heaven
Hearth his children’s cries—
Let him who is sick, then, gladden,
Let him who hath fallen rise!”

‘And the wind of his words went swiftly 1125
Over the wondering crowd,
And like waves of the sea uprising
They wept and they sob’d aloud!

‘Then one shriek’d loudly, “Rabbi!
Heal me, lest I die!” 1130
And lo! with a thousand voices
They echo’d that woeful cry!

‘Ragged, and worn, and weary
They gathered under the skies,—
And the blind men groped unto him 1135
Rolling their sightless eyes!

‘And the little afflicted children
Close to his knees upcrept,
But the lepers stood afar off
And reach’d out hands and wept! 1140

‘Pale as a man of marble
He stood on the lone hillside,
And wept as he gazed upon them,
And lifted up hands and cried:

“The Light I bring from the Father 1145
Shineth in secret ways,—
Only the Hand that smiteth
And slayeth, hath power to raise!

“And yet the sick shall be healèd,

And the blind shall surely see, 1150
For my Father's door is open
To those who follow me!

“Weep not, but be of comfort!
Fret not, your woes shall cease!
For lo! I bring from the Father 1155
Love, and exceeding Peace!”

‘But still they gather’d and murmur’d
With piteous woes and cries:
And the blind cried, “Master, heal us!”
Rolling their sightless eyes! 1160

‘But e’en as they flock’d around him
And reached out hands and cried,
He girded up his raiment
And passed from the mountain side.

‘Swift through the clamouring people 1165
He walked, nor gazed on them,
While they thronged to look upon him
And to touch his raiment-hem;

‘And the blind folk groped in the sunlight,
And the sick folk wept in woe, 1170
And the lepers gazed from afar off
And wail’d, as they watched him go!’

* * *

’Twas Mary, the dark-eyed Maiden,
Reach’d out her hands and cried:
‘These things thou sawest, O Mother, 1175
These things and nought beside?

‘Was not the sick man healèd?

Did not the blind man see?
Such wonders were wrought, 'tis rumour'd,
Out yonder by Galilee! 1180

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
Answer'd in soul's despair,—
'Woe worth the day that I was born
Or ever a Son did bear!

'How shall the hand of a mortal 1185
Give back what God hath ta'en—
If the hand of a man could dry our tears
No man would weep again!

'The sick would sicken no longer,
The blind would gladden and see,— 1190
But man is dust, and what God hath bound
No man that is dust shall free! . . .

'When darkness over the mountain
Fell, for the day was done,—
Silently down the mountain side 1195
I followed the man, my Son;

'And I found him standing alone,
On the shore of a stormy sea,—
With hair and raiment backward blown
He prayed, and he marked not me; 1200

'And his hands were raised to the sky
Where the angry storm-clouds drave,
'Father, Father," I heard him cry,
'Stretch down thy hand and save!

"That the blind may see, that the sick be heal'd, 1205
That my word may wake the Dead!"
And the storm roll'd on, and the thunders peal'd,

And the lightning flash'd and fled.

“Father, Father, if I indeed
Thy dread commandments keep, 1210
Help me to heal the hearts that bleed,
To dry the eyes that weep.

“Wearily over the whole world wide
My stricken brethren lie;—
Father in Heaven, look down,” he cried, 1215
“Succour them, since they die!”

‘And lo! he fell on his face and prayed
Alone on the lone sea-shore,
And I watch’d him, trembling and afraid,
Till he stirred and rose once more. 1220

‘And, lo! the storm of the night had fled,
Softly the night-wind blew,
And the clouds were opened overhead,
And the stars were shining through.

‘And the light, like a hand snow-white, 1225
Lay on his golden hair,
As he walked on the shore at the dead o’ night
And found me waiting there.

‘Face to face in the silence
We stood by the sleeping sea,— 1230
“Woman,” he said, “what brings thee here,
And wherefore seekest thou Me?”

‘Then my heart broke in my bosom,
And I sank on my bended knee,—
“I am Mary, thy Mother, and all night long 1235
My tears have flowed for thee.

“I heard thy voice on the mountain side
Sweet as the wood-dove’s cry,
And the doors of Heaven seemed opening wide
And the Spirit of God went by!” 1240

‘Gently he gazed upon me
As I knelt upon my knee,—
“God bless thee, Mary, my Mother,
Dost thou believe on Me?

“I have prayed, and my prayer is answer’d, 1245
I have wept, but my tears are done,
My Father in Heaven hath heard my prayer,
And, lo! we twain are One.

“Even as the love of the Father
The love of the Son shall be; 1250
Even with hands of the Father
The Son shall set men free.

“Greater than I is the Father,
And yet we twain are One!”
Weeping I rose to my feet and gazed 1255
In the face of the man, my Son.

“Alas, alas, my Jesus!
Thy riddle is hard to read,—
The God of Israël dwelleth afar,
And hath neither Son nor seed!” 1260

“No eye of a mortal fathom can
The waters of Death and Doom,—
Seed art thou of a mortal man,
And grew in thy mother’s womb!

“Come home, come home, my Jesus, 1265
And dwell in peace with me—

The Lord is the Lord of Heaven and Hell,
Thy mother hath only thee.”

‘Sadly he gazed upon me,
Frowning he turn’d away, 1270
“Woe to thee, woman of little faith,
In the dawn of my Judgment Day!

“I have no brethren, I have no mother,
Save those who believe on Me!
Son of my Father am I, and no other 1275
Judgeth the lost, and thee!”

‘Sadly he gazed upon me
With eyes all woe-begone,
Full of the hunger of Godhead
That gleam’d in the eyes of John! 1280

‘But when I clutched at his raiment,
He wept and turned from me,
And passed on shipboard, and sailed away
With the wild-eyed men o’ the sea;

‘And his voice rang out once more 1285
From the deck of the ship, and lo!
The sick and blind flocked down to the shore,
And wail’d as they watch’d him go!

‘And swiftly into the Night
He flew, as a sea-bird flies, 1290
And the lepers gathered upon the height,
And wail’d to the empty skies.’

* * *

The Leper said:

‘Lord God, if Thou art just,

Heap earth upon my head, 1295
Bury me, dust to dust!
I did not crave to be,
Yet lo, I crawl i' the sun,
And if Thou healest not me,
Slay me and set me free— 1300
So let Thy Will be done!'

The Blind Man said:
Lord God, I seek the Light—
Wherever my cold feet tread,
'Tis night, eternal night. 1305
Darkly I've sought for Thee,
Dear Lord, since life begun,
But since I still must be,
God, give me eyes to see—
So let Thy Will be done!' 1310

The Mad Man said:
Lord God, uplift Thy hand!
Demons and spectres dread
Fill me at Thy command!
I loathe Thy works and Thee, 1315
O Thou Almighty One,
I did not crave to be—
Slay me, or set me free,
So let Thy Will be done!'

God said: 1320
'Peace! for your cry is vain,—
I weave of quick and dead
An ever lengthening chain.
Peace! from my Law and Me
No man escapeth,—none,— 1325
Long as the earth and sea
Endure, these things shall be,—
For so My Will is done!'

* * *

'Twas Mary, the gentle Mother,
Listen'd with lips apart, 1330
While the voice from the lonely mountain
Flow'd thro' her empty heart.

'Fairer he is and gentler
Than other mortals be,
But his thoughts are yonder in Heaven, 1335
Not here on the earth with me.

'I would to God he were lying
A babe on my breast this day,—
The light of his eyes is the light o' love,
But it shineth so far away! 1340

'I hear a voice still crying
Aloud to the sons of men,
But the cry of the babe on my bosom
Will never be heard again!

'Rabbi the people call him, 1345
Rabbi and Master and King;
He breaketh bread on the mountain,
While I sit famishing!

'Twas Mary, the dark-eyed Maiden,
Gazed from the bower and said: 1350
'He healeth the spots of the Leper,
He raiseth up the Dead!

'And lo! as he passeth the gateway
With ragged throngs behind,
Out of the lanes are crawling 1355
The sick and the halt and the blind;

'E'en as a King of the people
He passeth on his way,
And whoso toucheth his raiment-hem
Is straightway healed, they say! 1360

'Their bread he multiplieth,
He turneth their water to wine—
Surely this Man, O Mother,
Is more than flesh of thine?'

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother, 1365
Bowed down her head and cried,—
'The God of Israël bless him
From morn to eventide!

'Flesh of my flesh, O Mary,
Bone of my bone, is he,— 1370
In my womb he grew, from my womb he fell,
And I nursed him on my knee.

'From place to place he passeth,
Stately and tall, like one
Who walketh on thrones to his kingdom, 1375
And yet . . . he is my Son!

'Gladly my soul would greet him
Though he were thricefold King,
But ever behind him as he walks
The Shadow is following! 1380

'Man is a spark in the darkness,
His days are only a breath,
The wings of the Lord are wide as the world
And the shadow thereof is Death.'

'Twas Mary, the grey-haired Mother, 1385

Rose trembling on her feet—
 ‘The ways of the world are many,
 But yonder, all ways meet!

‘The wings of the Lord are mighty
 And shadow all things that be,— 1390
 I hear their sounds in the silence
 Deep as the sound of the Sea.

‘The heart of the Temple is cloven,
 The high-priest waileth aloud,
 The wrath of the Lord is growing, 1395
 Black as the thunder-cloud.

‘The rose and the Hûleh lily
 Bloom but a little space,—
 After his day man sleepeth,
 Alone in a lonely place. 1400

‘Never the dead that sleepeth
 Shall slip his shroud and rise—
 His ears are sealèd for ever,
 Darkness filleth his eyes.’

’Twas Mary, the dark-eyed Maiden, 1405
 Stood at the gate and cried:
 ‘O, hark! they hail him as sent of God,
 Promised and prophesied!’

’Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
 Stood up and tore her hair: 1410
 ‘Woe worth the day that I was born
 Or ever a son did bear.

‘The God of Israë! crieth
 “There is no God save Me!”
 The Elders of Israë! gather in wrath 1415

Like waves of a stormy sea.'

'Twas Mary, the dark-eyed Maiden,
Gazed from the gate and cried:
'Thy Son shall wear a crown on his head,
Yea, and a sword at his side. 1420

'The people cry he is Lord and King,
Tho' he be Son of thine,—
O would that I were the Queen o' the King,
Or even his concubine!

'There is never a man of the sons of men 1425
Who is half so fair as he,—
Be he seed of a mortal or son of God,
He is Master of men and me.'

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
Sank to her knees and said: 1430
'Look forth, look forth, and tell me now
Whither my Son's feet tread?'

'Twas Mary, the dark-eyed Maiden,
Laughed merrily, answering:
'His face is turned to Jerusalem, 1435
And there they will crown him King.

'Be he seed of a mortal or son of God,
The folk will crown him there.'
'Twas Mary the Mother shrieked aloud,
And wept and tore her hair! 1440

'I hear a Voice he cannot hear,
That crieth "Forbear! forbear!"
I see a Hand he cannot see
That holdeth a sword in the air!

'The Elders of Israël gather in wrath 1445
Like waves of a stormy sea!
The God of Israël crieth aloud,
"There is no God but me!"

'The God of Israël crieth aloud
As He to our fathers cried— 1450
"The soul of a man is the breath of a mouth,
But I, the Lord, abide!"

* * *

*The Lord and the Law are One
And nought can sunder them!
Wherever their swift feet run 1455
The worlds rock under them!*

*Wherever the Lord hath pass'd
The Law fulfilleth Him,
E'en Death lies low at last,
For a mightier stilleth him! 1460*

*One, the Law and the Lord,
That passes and interpasses
Sure, as the sweep of a sword,
Still, as the growth of the grasses!*

*Two, yet ever the same, 1465
Life and Death for their token—
The Lord that hath no name,
And the Law ne'er broken!*

*No miracles come of these
Whose miracles are for ever, 1470
Their mystery no man sees,
It is uttered never.*

Life and Death and Birth
Betoken their ministration,
On the Earth, and over the Earth, 1475
And through all Creation.

The Law and the Lord are One,
And nought can sunder them!
Wherever their Will is done,
All things bow under them! 1480

Think not with prayer or praise,
When the grave gapes wide for thee,
To stop the sun on its ways
Or turn God aside for thee!

He is Lord to the furthest sun, 1485
With His strength He thrilleth him,
But the Law and the Lord are One,
And His Work fulfilleth Him!

* * *

As they parted His raiment among them,
For His vesture casting lots, 1490
On the clouds of the night burnt brands of light
Like crimson leper-spots;

But the storm of the night was over
And the wild winds ceased to cry,
Yea, all was still on the skull-shaped hill 1495
As the Spirit of Death crept by.

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
Lay prone beneath the Tree,
And Mary the Maid knelt down and prayed
With Mary of Bethany. 1500

And the light came out of the skies
And struck the Cross on the hill . . .
And Jesus moaned and open'd His eyes,
And the heart of the world stood still!

On His head the thorny crown, 1505
His body bleeding and bare,
He woke on the Cross, and gazing down
Beheld His Mother there!

And 'Mother! Mother dear!'
He murmured smiling sweet,— 1510
And Mary arose, and creeping near
Sobbed, and embraced His feet.

And 'Mother! Mother dear!'
Softly He sighed again,
And over His wounds, as she sobbed to hear, 1515
Her wild tears ran like rain!

Not to His Father in Heaven,
Not to the empty skies,—
To Mary the Mother He looked, and no other
Blest, with His dying eyes. 1520

The love of the Lord of Heaven
Is a dream that passeth by,
But the love of a mortal Mother
Is a love that doth not die!

The sword of the Lord of Heaven 1525
Husheth His children's cry,
But the love of a mortal Mother
Shines on, tho' God goes by!

Gently He gazed upon her
Who had loved Him last and first,— 1530

Then darken'd again with the cruel pain,
And murmur'd low, 'I thirst!'

As they set the sponge on a spear
And moisten'd His mouth, He said,
Smiling down on His mother dear, 1535
'Lo, it is finishèd!'

And He bowed His head on His breast
And utter'd a woeful cry,
And the weariful Mother's lips were prest
To His wounds,—while God went by! 1540

* * *

'Twas Mary, the happy Mother,
Smiled and knelt on her knee,
And bared her breast and opened her arms
As they drew Him down from the Tree.

She pillow'd His head on her bare breastbone 1545
And gave Him kisses three—
'In my womb he grew, from my womb he fell,
God giveth him back to me!'

And over the cold still waxen face
Rain'd down her locks o' grey, 1550
And the heavens were black, but the gates of Heaven
Were opening far away;

And the birth-star looked from the gates o' Death
As she rock'd the corse on her knee,
And the Earth lay silently down to watch 1555
In the still bright arms o' the Sea.

On the breast of Mary the Mother
He rock'd beneath the Tree,

And Mary the Maiden sat at His feet
With Mary of Bethany; 1560

And, lo! they croon'd His cradle-song
As she rock'd Him on her knee,—
There was Mary the Mother, and Mary the Maiden,
And Mary of Bethany.

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother, 1565
Wept as she sang, and cried:
'My little one sleeps upon my breast,
For, lo! 'tis the eventide.

'And round and round my cold breastbone
I feel the white milk stir!' 1570
And she wept aloud, and the Maries twain
Wept, and drew close to her.

'Now dry thine eyes, O Mother dear,
Smile and be comforted,—
Thy Son doth sleep, but thy Son shall wake 1575
To judge both Quick and Dead.

'Thy Son hath promised to wake again,
And the folk shall bring his crown,—
The clay thou nursest is not thy Son,
But thy Son is looking down.' 1580

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
Pressed tight her mouth to His:
'My Son is sleeping upon my breast,
And his red, red mouth I kiss.

'By the milk that stirreth around my heart 1585
I know my little one;
By the flesh that was woven in my womb I know
The flesh and the bone of my Son.

'I hold him now, I clasp him now,
He is mine for evermore, 1590
For the sun hath sunken upon his wrath,
And the day of his Dream is o'er.

'Never more will he open his eyes
To waken and weep!
Never more will the wind and the rain 1595
Trouble his sleep!

'The heart of the Temple is cloven,
The High Priest teareth his hair,
But God is good, He giveth me back
The fruit that my womb did bear! 1600

'Yea, God is good, for my Son is mine
To cherish and clasp and keep,—
And I too, holding him in my arms,
Shall croon myself to sleep!

'Twas Mary, the bright-eyed Maiden, 1605
Rose up her height and cried:
'The womb of the night is cloven with light!
He liveth, and hath not died!

'He liveth, Lord and Master of men,
And he shall rise and reign! 1610
For man is dust, and the hand of a man
Smiteth at God in vain!

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
Raised up her face and cried:
'Go by! the seal of thy God lies here 1615
On the lids of the Crucified!

'Go by, for I loved my child too well

To bid him waken and weep—
My God is good, and the hand of God
Giveth my little one sleep! 1620

'Twas Mary of Bethany weeping cried,
'Hush, for I hear a tread!
They're coming hither over the hill
To seek and bury the dead;

'And one uplifteth a torch on high 1625
To light them as they go,
And they who follow are bearing a shroud
Of linen white as snow!'

* * *

And now they've embalm'd His white bodie
With myrrh and spices sweet, 1630
And round and round they've lapt the folds
Of the long, long winding sheet;

And they've bound up tight His bearded chin
With waesome linen bands,
And over His frozen breast they've spread 1635
His yellow waxen hands;

And they've borne Him up to the black hillside
To His lonesome Sepulchre,
And they've set Him down in the narrow place,
And still He doth not stir 1640

'Now come away, thou woeful woman,
And leave him sleeping alone,
Let us close the mouth of his Sepulchre
And seal it with a stone!'

'Twas Mary the Mother kissed His cheeks 1645

And sobbed in soul's despair,—
And the torchlight lay like a bloody hand
Upon her poor grey hair.

And from over the hill the stars looked down
With dim sad tearful eyes, 1650
For the cry of the Mother's broken heart
Rang through the empty skies.

(It rang to the foot of the Throne of God
Where all the wide world's woe,
The dole of a million broken hearts, 1655
Melts like a flake of snow.)

'Twas Mary the Maiden weeping cried:
'Come forth, O Mother dear!'
'Twas Mary the Mother answered, 'Nay!
Go thou and leave me here! 1660

'Go forth, go forth, and on your head
All peace and blessing be,
But leave me here with the little Son
I nurst upon my knee!

'There's room here at thy side, my Son, 1665
There's room here with thee,
And O! to hold thee in my arms
Is more than Heaven to me!

'And thou shalt sleep, and calm as thine
My own deep sleep shall be! 1670
For ever and for evermore
I'll rest, my Son, with thee!

They have led her forth from the lonesome place,
Despite her woeful moan,
They have closed the mouth of the Sepulchre 1675

And sealed it with a stone;

And down the hill to Jerusalem
They pass, but leave the three—
There is Mary the Mother, and Mary the Maiden,
And Mary of Bethany. 1680

'Twas Mary, the dark-eyed Maiden,
First dried her weeping eyes:
'O Mother dear, we'll keep watch here,
For lo! he will arise!

'Master and Lord of men was he, 1685
And he will wake again,—
Yea, ere he died he prophesied
That he would rise and reign!

'He is not dead, but only sleeps,
And soon shall rule again— 1690
O Mother dear, we'll keep watch here,
Till he doth rise and reign!

'Twas Mary the Mother answered not,
But sat like a frozen thing,
Her dim dark eyes on the door o' the Tomb, 1695
Vacant and famishing.

* * *

The first night they sat waiting there
The great Deep thunder'd loud,
And the lightning Snakes crept in and out
Their soot-black caves of cloud; 1700

The next night they sat waiting there
Came Silence strange and chill,
And the stars hung watching out of heaven,

And the heart o' the world stood still;

The third night they sat waiting there 1705
The winds began to cry,
And a cold snow fell from the frozen stars,
And the Spirit of Death went by!

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
Rose to her feet and said: 1710
'The gate of the Tomb is sealèd fast,
And the Light of the world hath fled.

'Never again shall the man, my Son,
Brighten the night or the day—
The soul of a man is the breath of a mouth, 1715
And lo! it passeth away!

'And it's O! for the kiss of his mouth,
And the touch of his hand,—aye me!
My day is dark, for the Lord my God
Hath taken my child from me! 1720

'And it's O! for his long, long sleep,
Alone in a lonely place,—
My Son is dead, for the wrath of the Lord
Hath fallen and hidden his face.

'O had ye left me lying there, 1725
At his side or at his feet,
In peace, in peace like a fount that falls,
My heart had ceased to beat!

Then Mary, the gentle Maiden,
Answer'd her cry and said: 1730
'Wait on, wait yet, for a heavenly sign
That our Lord is quick, not dead!

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
 Stood up and rent her hair:
'Woe worth the day that I was born 1735
 Or ever a son did bear!

'How shall the hand of a mortal
 Gather the sheaves of the Lord?
The hand of a man is ashes and dust,
 God's hand is fire and a sword! 1740

'How shall the seed of a woman
 Master Euroclydon?
A woman's seed is as thistlebloom,
 And lo, with a breath 'tis gone!

'My son was fair as a lily, 1745
 His hair was of golden sheen,
But the lilies of Sharon perish
 When the winds of the Lord blow keen!

'What man shall stand in the whirlwind
 Where only the Lord may stand? 1750
The feet of the Lord are on the Dead,
 And the Quick blow round like sand!

'Twas Mary, the woeful Mother,
 Crept down from Calvary,
Held up by Mary the Maiden 1755
 And Mary of Bethany;

And over the hill the Dawn's bright feet
 Plash'd in the Night's cold springs,
And a lark rose, shaking the drops o' pearl
 From the tips of his dewy wings; 1760

And the heart of the world throb'd deep and strong
 As on Creation's Day,

And the skies that roof the happy earth
Were as blue and as far away!

* * *

Shepherd dear, the winds blow cold, 1765
'Tis dark, so dark, on the wintry wold,—
Waken and gather thy flocks to fold!

Over the stormy hills they roam,
Feebly crying they go and come,
With never a Shepherd to help them home. 1770

Shepherd dear, ere the day was done,
Around thy feet in the summer sun
They flock'd, and were counted one by one;

Thy white hands blast them, Shepherd dear,
And thy voice said sweetly: 'Be of cheer!' 1775
The fold is open, and I am here.'

Now, alas! the light hath fled,
The heavens are starless overhead,—
We listen still for thy voice, thy tread.

So cold, so still, this wintertide, 1780
Thou sleepest, who wast once their guide,—
Thy crook lies broken at thy side.

The cold snow falls, the shrill winds cry,
The flocks are scatter'd, they droop and die,
And there's never a star in the wintry sky. 1785

Alas! thou dost not see or hear!
In the frozen sheepfold, Shepherd dear,
Thou sleepest on, while we weep in fear.

Shepherd, Shepherd, the winds blow cold!

'Tis dark, so dark, on the wintry wold,—

1790

Waken, and gather thy flocks to fold.

1897

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