

With his nest down in the gorses,  
And his song in the star-courses. 80

The nightingale did please  
To loiter beyond seas:  
Guess him in the Happy Islands,  
Learning music from the silence

Only the bee, forsooth,  
Came in the place of both,  
Doing honor, doing honor  
To the honey-dews upon her.

The skies looked coldly down  
As on a royal crown;  
Then with drop for drop, at leisure,  
They began to rain for pleasure. 90

Whereat the earth did seem  
To waken from a dream,  
Winter-frozen, winter-frozen,  
Her quiet eyes unclosing —

Said to the Rose, 'Ha, snow!  
And art thou fallen so?  
Thou, who wast enthronèd stately  
All along my mountains lately? 100

'Holla, thou world-wide snow!  
And art thou wasted so,  
With a little bough to catch thee,  
And a little bee to watch thee?'

— Poor Rose, to be misknown!  
Would she had ne'er been blown,  
In her loneliness, in her loneliness,  
All the sadder for that oneness!

Some word she tried to say,  
Some *no . . . ah wellaway!* 110  
But the passion did o'ercome her,  
And the fair frail leaves dropped from her.

— Dropped from her fair and mute,  
Close to a poet's foot,  
Who beheld them, smiling slowly,  
As at something sad yet holy, —

Said 'Verily and thus  
It chanceth too with us  
Poets singing sweetest snatches  
While that deaf men keep the watches: 120

'Vaunting to come before  
Our own age evermore,

In a loneliness, in a loneliness,  
And the nobler for that oneness.

'Holy in voice and heart,  
To high ends, set apart:  
All unmated, all unmated,  
Just because so consecrated.

'But if alone we be,  
Where is our empery?  
And if none can reach our stature,  
Who can mete our lofty nature? 130

'What bell will yield a tone,  
Swung in the air alone,  
If no brazen clapper bringing,  
Who can bear the sunnèd ringing? 140

'What angel but would seem  
To sensual eyes ghost-dim?  
And without assimilation  
Vain is interpenetration.

And thus, what can we do,  
Poor rose and poet too,  
Who both antedate our mission  
In an unprepared season? 150

'Drop, leaf! be silent, song!  
Cold things we come among:  
We must warm them, we must warm them,  
Ere we ever hope to charm them.

'Howbeit' (here his face  
Lightened around the place,  
So to mark the outward turning  
Of its spirit's inward burning) 160

'Something it is, to hold  
In God's worlds manifold,  
First revealed to creature-duty,  
Some new form of his mild Beauty.

'Whether that form respect  
The sense or intellect,  
Holy be, in mood or meadow,  
The Chief Beauty's sign and shadow! 170

'Holy, in me and thee,  
Rose fallen from the tree, —  
Though the world stand dumb around us,  
All unable to expound us.

'Though none us deign to bless,  
Blessèd are we, natheless;

## BERTHA IN THE LANE

## I

Put the broidery-frame away,  
For my sewing is all done:  
The last thread is used to-day,  
And I need not join it on.  
Though the clock stands at the noon  
I am weary. I have sewn,  
Sweet, for thee, a wedding-gown.

## II

Sister, help me to the bed,  
And stand near me, Dearest-sweet.  
Do not shrink nor be afraid,  
Blushing with a sudden heat!  
No one standeth in the street? —  
By God's love I go to meet,  
Love I thee with love complete.

## III

Lean thy face down; drop it in  
These two hands, that I may hold  
'Twixt their palms thy cheek and chin,  
Stroking back the curls of gold:  
'T is a fair, fair face, in sooth —  
Larger eyes and redder mouth  
Than mine were in my first youth.

## IV

Thou art younger by seven years —  
Ah! — so bashful at my gaze,  
That the lashes, hung with tears,  
Grow too heavy to upraise?  
I would wound thee by no touch  
Which thy shyness feels as such.  
Dost thou mind me, Dear, so much?

## V

Have I not been nigh a mother  
To thy sweetness — tell me, Dear?  
Have we not loved one another  
Tenderly, from year to year,  
Since our dying mother mild  
Said with accents undefiled,  
'Child, be mother to this child!'

## VI

Mother, mother, up in heaven,  
Stand up on the jasper sea,  
And be witness I have given  
All the gifts required of me, —

Blessèd still and consecrated  
In that, rose, we were created.

'Oh, shame to poet's lays  
Sung for the dole of praise, — 170  
Heavily sung upon the highway  
With that *obolum da mihi!*

'Shame, shame to poet's soul  
Pining for such a dole,  
When Heaven-chosen to inherit  
The high throne of a chief spirit!

Sit still upon your thrones,  
O ye poetic ones!  
And if, sooth, the world deery you,  
Let it pass unchallenged by you. 180

'Ye to yourselves suffice,  
Without its flatteries.  
Self-contentedly approve you  
Unto Him who sits above you, —

'In prayers, that upward mount  
Like to a fair-sunnèd fount  
Which, in gushing back upon you,  
Hath an upper music won you, —

'In faith, that still perceives  
No rose can shed her leaves,  
Far less, poet fall from mission,  
With an unfulfilled fruition, — 190

'In hope, that apprehends  
An end beyond these ends,  
And great uses rendered duly  
By the meanest song sung truly, —

'In thanks, for all the good  
By poet understood,  
For the sound of seraphs moving  
Down the hidden depths of loving, — 200

'For sights of things away  
Through fissures of the clay,  
Promised things which shall be given  
And sung over, up in Heaven, —

'For life, so lovely-vain,  
For death, which breaks the chain,  
For this sense of present sweetness,  
And this yearning to completeness!'

Hope that blessed me, bliss that crowned,  
Love that left me with a wound,  
Life itself that turneth round !

## VII

Mother, mother, thou art kind,  
Thou art standing in the room,  
In a molten glory shrined  
That rays off into the gloom !  
But thy smile is bright and bleak  
Like cold waves — I cannot speak,  
I sob in it, and grow weak.

## VIII

Ghostly mother, keep aloof  
One hour longer from my soul,  
For I still am thinking of  
Earth's warm-beating joy and dole !  
On my finger is a ring  
Which I still see glittering  
When the night hides everything.

## IX

Little sister, thou art pale !  
Ah, I have a wandering brain —  
But I lose that fever-bale,  
And my thoughts grow calm again.  
Lean down closer — closer still !  
I have words thine ear to fill,  
And would kiss thee at my will.

## X

Dear, I heard thee in the spring,  
Thee and Robert — through the trees, —  
When we all went gathering  
Boughs of may-bloom for the bees.  
Do not start so ! think instead  
How the sunshine overhead  
Seemed to trickle through the shade.

## XI

What a day it was, that day !  
Hills and vales did openly  
Seem to heave and throb away  
At the sight of the great sky:  
And the silence, as it stood  
In the glory's golden flood,  
Audibly did bud, and bud.

## XII

Through the winding hedgerows green,  
How we wandered, I and you,  
With the bowery tops shut in,  
And the gates that showed the view !  
How we talked there; thrushes soft

Sang our praises out, or oft  
Bleatings took them from the croft:

## XIII

Till the pleasure grown too strong  
Left me muter evermore,  
And, the winding road being long,  
I walked out of sight, before,  
And so, wrapt in musings fond,  
Issued (past the wayside pond)  
On the meadow-lands beyond.

## XIV

I sate down beneath the beech  
Which leans over to the lane,  
And the far sound of your speech  
Did not promise any pain;  
And I blessed you full and free,  
With a smile stooped tenderly  
O'er the may-flowers on my knee.

## XV

But the sound grew into word  
As the speakers drew more near —  
Sweet, forgive me that I heard  
What you wished me not to hear.  
Do not weep so, do not shake,  
Oh, — I heard thee, Bertha, make  
Good true answers for my sake.

## XVI

Yes, and HE too ! let him stand  
In thy thoughts, untouched by blame.  
Could he help it, if my hand  
He had claimed with hasty claim?  
That was wrong perhaps — but then  
Such things be — and will, again.  
Women cannot judge for men.

## XVII

Had he seen thee when he swore  
He would love but me alone ?  
Thou wast absent, sent before  
To our kin in Sidmouth town.  
When he saw thee who art blest  
Past compare, and loveliest,  
He but judged thee as the rest.

## XVIII

Could we blame him with grave words,  
Thou and I, Dear, if we might ?  
Thy brown eyes have looks like birds  
Flying straightway to the light:  
Mine are older. — Hush ! — look out —

Up the street ! Is none without ?  
How the poplar swings about !

## XIX

And that hour — beneath the beech,  
When I listened in a dream,  
And he said in his deep speech  
That he owed me all *esteem*, —  
Each word swam in on my brain  
With a dim, dilating pain,  
Till it burst with that last strain.

## XX

I fell flooded with a dark,  
In the silence of a swoon.  
When I rose, still cold and stark,  
There was night; I saw the moon  
And the stars, each in its place,  
And the may-blooms on the grass  
Seemed to wonder what I was.

## XXI

And I walked as if apart  
From myself, when I could stand,  
And I pitied my own heart,  
As if I held it in my hand —  
Somewhat coldly, with a sense  
Of fulfilled benevolence,  
And a 'Poor thing' negligence.

## XXII

And I answered coldly too,  
When you met me at the door;  
And I only *heard* the dew  
Dripping from me to the floor:  
And the flowers, I bade you see,  
Were too withered for the bee, —  
As my life, henceforth, for me.

## XXIII

Do not weep so — Dear, — heart-warm !  
All was best as it befell.  
If I say he did me harm,  
I speak wild, — I am not well.  
All his words were kind and good —  
*He esteemed me*. Only, blood  
Runs so faint in womanhood !

## XXIV

Then I always was too grave, —  
Like the saddest ballad sung, —  
With that look, besides, we have  
In our faces, who die young.  
I had died, Dear, all the same;

Life's long, joyous, jostling game  
Is too loud for my meek shame.

## XXV

We are so unlike each other,  
Thou and I, that none could guess  
We were children of one mother,  
But for mutual tenderness.  
Thou art rose-lined from the cold,  
And meant verily to hold  
Life's pure pleasures manifold.

## XXVI

I am pale as crocus grows  
Close beside a rose-tree's root;  
Whosoe'er would reach the rose,  
Treads the crocus underfoot.  
I, like may-bloom on thorn-tree,  
Thou, like merry summer-bee, —  
Fit that I be plucked for thee !

## XXVII

Yet who plucks me ? — no one mourns,  
I have lived my season out,  
And now die of my own thorns  
Which I could not live without.  
Sweet, be merry ! How the light  
Comes and goes ! If it be night,  
Keep the candles in my sight.

## XXVIII

Are there footsteps at the door ?  
Look out quickly. Yea, or nay ?  
Some one might be waiting for  
Some last word that I might say.  
Nay ? So best ! — so angels would  
Stand off clear from deathly road,  
Not to cross the sight of God.

## XXIX

Colder grow my hands and feet.  
When I wear the shroud I made,  
Let the folds lie straight and neat,  
And the rosemary be spread,  
That if any friend should come,  
(To see *thee*, Sweet ! ) all the room  
May be lifted out of gloom.

## XXX

And, dear Bertha, let me keep  
On my hand this little ring,  
Which at nights, when others sleep,  
I can still see glittering !  
Let me wear it out of sight,

In the grave, — where it will light  
All the dark up, day and night.

## XXXI

On that grave drop not a tear !  
Else, though fathom-deep the place,  
Through the woollen shroud I wear  
I shall feel it on my face.  
Rather smile there, blessed one,  
Thinking of me in the sun,  
Or forget me — smiling on !

## XXXII

Art thou near me ? nearer ! so —  
Kiss me close upon the eyes,  
That the earthly light may go  
Sweetly, as it used to rise  
When I watched the morning-gray  
Strike, betwixt the hills, the way  
He was sure to come that day.

## XXXIII

So, — no more vain words be said !  
The hosannas nearer roll.  
Mother, smile now on thy Dead,  
I am death-strong in my soul.  
Mystic Dove alit on cross,  
Guide the poor bird of the snows  
Through the snow-wind above loss !

## XXXIV

Jesus, Victim, comprehending  
Love's divine self-abnegation,  
Cleanse my love in its self-spending,  
And absorb the poor libation !  
Wind my thread of life up higher,  
Up, through angels' hands of fire !  
I aspire while I expire.

## THAT DAY

## I

I STAND by the river where both of us  
stood,  
And there is but one shadow to darken the  
flood ;  
And the path leading to it where both used  
to pass,  
Has the step but of one, to take dew from  
the grass, —  
One forlorn since that day.

## II

The flowers of the margin are many to see ;  
None stoops at my bidding to pluck them  
for me.

The bird in the alder sings loudly and  
long, —  
My low sound of weeping disturbs not his  
song,

As thy vow did, that day.

## III

I stand by the river, I think of the vow ;  
Oh, calm as the place is, vow-breaker, be  
thou !

I leave the flower growing, the bird unre-  
proved ;

Would I trouble thee rather than them, my  
beloved, —

And my lover that day ?

## IV

Go, be sure of my love, by that treason for-  
given ;

Of my prayers, by the blessings they win  
thee from Heaven ;

Of my grief — (guess the length of the  
sword by the sheath's)

By the silence of life, more pathetic than  
death's !

Go, — be clear of that day !

## LOVED ONCE

## I

I CLASSED, appraising once,  
Earth's lamentable sounds, — the well-a-  
day,

The jarring yea and nay,  
The fall of kisses on unanswering clay,  
The sobbed farewell, the welcome mourn-  
fuller, —

But all did leaven the air  
With a less bitter leaven of sure despair  
Than these words — ' I loved ONCE.'

## II

And who saith ' I loved ONCE ' ?  
Not angels, — whose clear eyes, love, love  
for see,

Love, through eternity,  
And by To Love do apprehend To Be.

Not God, called LOVE, his noble crown-  
name casting,

A light too broad for blasting:  
The great God, changing not from ever-  
lasting,  
Saith never ' I loved ONCE.'

## III

Oh, never is ' Loved ONCE '  
Thy word, Thou Victim-Christ, misprized  
friend !

Thy cross and curse may rend,  
But having loved Thou lovest to the end.  
This is man's saying — man's: too weak to  
move

One spherèd star above,  
Man desecrates the eternal God-word Love  
By his No More, and Once.

## IV

How say ye ' We loved once,'  
Blasphemers ? Is your earth not cold  
enow,

Mourners, without that snow ?  
Ah friends, and would ye wrong each other  
so ?

And could ye say of some whose love is  
known,

Whose prayers have met your own,  
Whose tears have fallen for you, whose  
smiles have shown

So long, — ' We loved them ONCE ' ?

## V

Could ye ' We loved her once '  
Say calm of me, sweet friends, when out of  
sight ?

When hearts of better right  
Stand in between me and your happy  
light ?

Or when, as flowers kept too long in the  
shade,

Ye find my colors fade,  
And all that is not love in me decayed ?  
Such words — Ye loved me ONCE !

## VI

Could ye ' We loved her once '  
Say cold of me when further put away  
In earth's sepulchral clay,

When mute the lips which deprecate to-  
day ?

Not so ! not then — least then ! When  
life is shriven

And death's full joy is given, —  
Of those who sit and love you up in heaven  
Say not ' We loved them once.'

## VII

Say never ye loved ONCE:  
God is too near above, the grave beneath,  
And all our moments breathe  
Too quick in mysteries of life and death,  
For such a word. The eternities avenge  
Affections light of range.  
There comes no change to justify that  
change,  
Whatever comes — Loved ONCE !

## VIII

And yet that same word ONCE  
Is humanly acceptive. Kings have said,  
Shaking a discrowned head,  
' We ruled once,' — dotards, ' We once  
taught and led,'

Cripples once danced i' the vines, and bards  
approved,

Were once by scornings moved:  
But love strikes one hour — LOVE ! Those  
never loved

Who dream that they loved ONCE.

## A RHAPSODY OF LIFE'S PROGRESS

' Fill all the stops of life with tuneful breath.'  
— *Poems on Man*, by CORNELIUS MATHEWS.

## I

WE are born into life — it is sweet, it is  
strange.

We lie still on the knee of a mild Mystery  
Which smiles with a change ;

But we doubt not of changes, we know not  
of spaces,

The Heavens seem as near as our own  
mother's face is,

And we think we could touch all the stars  
that we see ;

And the milk of our mother is white on  
our mouth ;

And, with small childish hands, we are  
turning around

The apple of Life which another has found ;  
It is warm with our touch, not with sun of  
the south,

And we count, as we turn it, the red side  
for four.

O Life, O Beyond,

Thou art sweet, thou art strange ever-  
more !