

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Ada Cambridge

Table of Contents

<u>The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems</u>	1
<u>Ada Cambridge</u>	1
<u>The Hand in the Dark</u>	2
<u>SANCTUARIES</u>	11
<u>On Australian Hills</u>	11
<u>By a Norfolk Broad</u>	14
<u>At Sea</u>	17
<u>THE WATCHMAN AND THE NIGHT</u>	17
<u>The Watchman</u>	17
<u>The Night</u>	21
<u>THE FIELDFARES AND THE LIGHTHOUSE</u>	24
<u>The Winged Mariners</u>	24
<u>To-morrow</u>	25
<u>MIRAGE</u>	26
<u>Mirage</u>	26
<u>A PRAYER</u>	28
<u>A Prayer</u>	28
<u>SIC VOS NON VOBIS</u>	29
<u>Sic Vos Non Vobis</u>	29
<u>MOTHERHOOD</u>	30
<u>An Old Doll</u>	30
<u>Granny</u>	32
<u>The Virgin Martyr</u>	34
<u>MATES</u>	35
<u>Mates</u>	35
<u>THE VAIN QUESTION</u>	38
<u>The Vain Question</u>	38
<u>AT LONG LAST</u>	40
<u>At Long Last</u>	40
<u>THE MAGIC WAND</u>	41
<u>The Magic Wand</u>	41
<u>CRAVEN-HEART</u>	42
<u>Craven-Heart</u>	42
<u>THE FUTURE VERDICT</u>	42
<u>The Future Verdict</u>	42
<u>GOOD-BYE</u>	43
<u>Good-Bye</u>	43
<u>SONNETS</u>	43
<u>Influence</u>	43
<u>Individuality</u>	44
<u>Contentment</u>	44
<u>Vows</u>	45
<u>Desire</u>	45
<u>Outcast</u>	45
<u>Drunk</u>	46
<u>Fashion</u>	46
<u>The Mob</u>	46
<u>Wasted</u>	47

Table of Contents

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

<u>Honour</u>	47
<u>Despair</u>	48
<u>Faith</u>	48
<u>Peace</u>	48

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Ada Cambridge

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- The Hand in the Dark
- SANCTUARIES.
- On Australian Hills.
- By a Norfolk Broad.
- At Sea.
- THE WATCHMAN AND THE NIGHT.
- The Watchman.
- The Night.
- THE FIELDFARES AND THE LIGHTHOUSE
- The Winged Mariners.
- To-morrow.
- MIRAGE.
- Mirage.
- A PRAYER.
- A Prayer.
- SIC VOS NON VOBIS.
- Sic Vos Non Vobis.
- MOTHERHOOD.
- An Old Doll.
- Granny.
- The Virgin Martyr.
- MATES.
- Mates.
- THE VAIN QUESTION.
- The Vain Question.
- AT LONG LAST.
- At Long Last.
- THE MAGIC WAND.
- The Magic Wand.
- CRAVEN-HEART.
- Craven-Heart.
- THE FUTURE VERDICT.
- The Future Verdict.
- GOOD-BYE.
- Good-Bye.
- SONNETS.
- Influence.
- Individuality.
- Contentment.
- Vows.
- Desire.
- Outcast.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

- Drunk.
- Fashion.
- The Mob.
- Wasted.
- Honour.
- Despair.
- Faith.
- Peace.

The Hand in the Dark

How calm the spangled city spread below!
How cool the night! How fair the starry skies!
How sweet the dewy breezes! But I know
What, under all their seeming beauty, lies.

That million-fibred heart, alive, is wrung
With every grief that human creatures fear.
Could its dumb anguish find a fitting tongue
The very dead within their graves would hear.

It calls me from my rest, that voiceless wail
Of Lazarus at the gate my kith and kin
Whose cruise and cake, and staff and beacon, fail
The famished crowd, that cannot enter in.

How can I take my ease amid this pain,
These pangs, these tears, these crimes, that never cease?
While homeless children cry for bread in vain
How can I eat? How can I sleep in peace?

Poor comrades of the fight, that have no place!
Brothers and sisters, born to want and wrong.
Born weak and maimed, to run a hopeless race,
Lost at the start, against the hale and strong!

Poor scapegoats of the wilderness, that fast
For those who feast! And, ah, poor feasters too!
They also thirst and hunger at the last.
And this is Life and all the Race can do.

Vain, vain the listening ear, the questioning gaze.
Shoreless, unplumbed, the ether-ocean lies

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Above these roofs, beyond the smoke and haze
The Infinite alive with watching eyes.

To see our orb of sorrow whirling there
The tiny swarm of struggling things, that curse
Their subject province, and yet calmly dare
To claim the kingship of the Universe.

Dread cloud of witnesses to earth's disgrace!
Earth is my trust I am afraid to look
Those still and stern accusers in the face,
And haste to hide in my familiar nook.

My little nook where is it? Have I none?
I grow confused betwixt the sea and shore.
I had some lamps to guide me one by one
They flashed and failed, and now I have no more.

Where am I? Oh, where am I? I can feel
To feel my torment but I cannot see,
I cannot hear. My brain begins to reel,
My heart to faint. **Almighty, speak to me!**

Help me! Or, in Thy pity, take me hence
While feeling heart and thinking brain are whole,
Or give me any rag of carnal sense,
So it suffice to wrap my naked soul!
* * * * *

No word. No sign. Yet something in the air
Soothes, like a cool hand on a fevered brow.
Replenished, from the ashes of despair
I rise renewed. **Belovèd, where art thou?**

She sleeps. She stirs. She hears the lightest fall
Of foot familiar with her chamber floor.
Her spirit answers to my spirit's call:
Come home! Come home! And I am saved once more.

Bringing no leaf of hope, alone and late,
Spent and wing-weary, famished for a crumb,
The wandering dove heads back to nest and mate.
My Love and Comforter, I come! I come!

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Here is the welcome threshold of my ark,
My island—home amid the trackless flood.
Her hand shuts out the Silence and the Dark;
Her pulse thrills life into my fainting blood.

She draws me down upon that couch of bliss,
Her faithful arms, her tender mother—breast;
I clasp her close, those sweetest lips I kiss,
And, at long last, I have my hour of rest.
* * * * *

Thou, too, my love, hast wandered far and wide,
And hast come home, where all thy wanderings cease.
The door is shut. Thy mate is at thy side.
Here is thy long—sought pillow. Sleep in peace.

Heed not the patter of the weeping eaves,
The groan of branches bending to the rain,
The sad tap—tapping of dead autumn leaves,
Like ghostly fingers, on the window—pane.

The wind—borne echoings, from east and west,
Of weeping woe and wailing agony;
All night they cry round thy beleaguered nest,
But fear them not, for thou art safe with me.

Let the sad world spin on, a trail of shame
Amongst the myriad worlds. Whate'er befalls,
The great God knows that we are not to blame.
Our world is here, within our chamber walls.

In this asylum, secret and apart,
Whereof we keep the one and only key,
Rest thee, poor tired heart, upon my heart,
As all my weary being rests in thee.

Good—night! Good—night! Sleep deep and well, my bride.
The fight goes on, but we have won release.
Our wounds are healed, our tears are shed and dried.
Let the storms rage they cannot break our peace.
* * * * *

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Peace is it peace? What is that form of fear
That looms ahead? What distillation sours
The joy of life when thou, alive, art near,
And nought seems wanting to the perfect hours?

What chills my passion when I love thee most,
And dims my eyes, and veils thy face, and slips,
An unseen shadow, like a creeping ghost,
Betwixt my hungering kisses and thy lips?

What, amid richest plenty, starves me thus?
What is it steals my soul's content, and thine
That sits a guest at marriage—feast with us,
And mixes poison with the food and wine?
* * * * *

A vision comes. A graveyard, all alone,
A small green mound, a withered funeral wreath;
Love's last drear symbol of a graven stone,
And Life and I but worthless dust beneath.

There weep the dews, and winds of winter blow;
The soft breeze rustles in the bending grass;
The cold rain falls there, and the drifting snow.
But tears fall not, nor lover's footsteps pass.

Bees hum all day amid the young spring leaves;
The rooks call loudly from the elm—tree bough;
The sparrows twitter in the old church eaves;
But no voice cries for me, or calls me, now.

Bright beams of morning compass me about;
The stars shine o'er me, and the pale moonlight;
But I, that lit and warmed thee, am gone out
Like a burnt candle, in eternal night.

Earth to the earth upon this churchyard slope,
Ashes to ashes, nothing to the nought;
No tryst between us, and no star of hope
To light the path so passionately sought.

And still the sands between thy fingers run

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Desires, delights, ambitions, days and years,
Rich hours of life for thee, though mine are done
Too full for vain regrets, too brief for tears.

I have lost all, but thou dost hold and save,
Adding new treasure to thy rifled store;
While weeds grow long on the deserted grave
Where sleeps thy mate who may be thine no more.
* * * * *

This is the fate I fear, the ghost I see,
The dream I dream at night, the thought I dread
That thus 'twill be someday with thee and me,
Thou fain to live while I am doubly dead.

Thou still defiant of our common foe,
I vanquished quite the once-resplendent crown
Of all thy joys become a dragging woe,
To be lopped off lest it should weigh thee down.

I, once thy sap of life, a wasteful drain
On thy green vigour, like a rotten branch;
I, once thy health, a paralysing pain,
A bleeding wound, that thou must haste to stanch.

Because the dead are dead the past is gone;
Because dear life is sweet and time is brief,
And some must fall, and some must still press on,
Nor waste scant strength in unavailing grief.
* * * * *

I blame thee not. I know what must be must.
Nor shall I suffer when apart from thee.
I shall not care, when I am mouldering dust,
That once quick love is in the grave with me.

Cast me away thou knowest I shall not fret;
Take thy due joys I shall not bear the cost.
I, that am thus forgotten, shall forget,
Nor shed one tear for all that I have lost.

Not then the sting of death, the day of dole,
When corpse of love lies under funeral pall;

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

'Tis now I wear the sackcloth on my soul,
Bereaved and lonely, while possessed of all.
* * * * *

If thou wert dead, beloved, should I turn
Deaf heart to memory when of thee she spake?
Should I, when this pure fire had ceased to burn,
Seek other hearths for sordid comfort's sake?

No, no! Yet I am mortal, I am weak,
And any fire is warm in wintry cold.
Alas! alas! The fateful years will wreak
Their own stern will on ours, when all is told.

Tell us, O Thou that cast behold us grope,
Whole-souled, incessant, through these realms unknown
For but one touch of a substantial hope,
How can we keep our dear selves for our own?

Whence did we come? And is it there we go?
We look behind night hides our place of birth;
The blank ahead hides Heaven, for aught we know;
But what is Heaven to us, whose home is Earth?

Flesh may be gross the husk that holds the seed;
Jewels of gold worth more than common bread;
But we are flesh, and common bread our need.
Angels in glory, we should still be dead.

What is the infinite Universe to him
Who has no home? Eternal Future seems,
Like the eternal Past, unreal and dim,
The airy region of a poet's dreams.

What spirit-essence, howsoe'er divine,
Can our lost selves restore from dusty grave?
Her mortal mind and body hers and mine
Make all the joys I know, and all I crave.

No fair romance of transcendental bliss,
No tale of palms and crowns, my dull heart stirs,
That only hungers for a woman's kiss,
And asks no life that is not one with hers.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

No such Hereafter do I ask to see;
No such pale hope my sinking soul exalts;
I want no sexless angel only thee,
My human love, with all thy human faults.

Just as thou art not beautiful or wise,
But prone to simple sins and sad unrest
With thy warm lips and arms, and thy sweet eyes,
Sweeter for tears they weep upon my breast.

Just as thou art, with thy soft household ways,
Thy noble failures and thy poor success,
Thy love that fits me for my strenuous days;
A mortal woman neither more nor less.
* * * * *

And thou must pass, with these too rapid hours,
To that great deep wherefrom we both were brought;
Thy sentient flesh must turn to grass and flowers,
To birds and beasts, to dust to air to nought.

I know the parable. The great oaks grow
To their vast stature from an acorn grain,
And mightiest man was once an embryo.
But how can nothing bring thee forth again?

And is the new oak tree the old oak tree?
And is the son the father? And would'st thou,
If thou could'st rise from nothing, be to me
The precious self that satisfies me now?

Words! Words! A tale a fairy legend, drawn
From lore of babes, that men must cast away;
Faith of the primal dreamer and the dawn,
Eluding vision in the light of day.

Here in our little island—home we bide
Our few brief years the years that we possess.
Beyond, the Infinite on every side
Holds what no man may know, though all may guess.

We may remain a lasting miracle.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Ay, well we may. Our island–home is rife
With marvels greater than the tongue can tell,
And all things teem and travail with new life.

We may awake, ineffably alive,
Divinely perfect, in some higher sphere:
But still not **we** shall wake the we who strive,
Who love and learn, who joy and suffer, here.

What then our hope, if any hope there be?
A something vague and formless and unknown,
That some strange beings, yet unborn, shall see.
Alas! And all we cry for is our own.

Only to be ourselves not cast abroad
In space and time, for either bliss or woe;
Only to keep the treasures we have stored.
And they must pass away. And we must go.

How can we bear it? How can we submit?
Like a wild beast imprisoned, in our pain
We rave and rage for some way out of it,
And bruise and bleed against the bars in vain.

All, all is dark. Beyond our birth and death
At either end the same unyielding door.
We live, we love, while we draw human breath;
And then we die. And then? We know no more.
* * * * *

Ah, but look up, above these roofs and spires,
To where the stars shine down like watching eyes.
Conceive the tumult of those spinning fires!
Behold the vastness of those midnight skies!

And count the value of this speck of earth
Amid the countless Whole; and measure Man
That on this speck but yesterday had birth,
And claims all God with the prodigious plan.

Man, but a phase of planetary change,
That once was not, and will give place anon
To other forms, more beautiful and strange

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

To pass in turn till Earth herself is gone.

Earth, that is next to nothing in the sum
Of things created a brief mote in space,
With all her aeons past and yet to come.
How we miscalculate our size our place!

Yet are we men details of the design,
Set to our course, like circling sun and star;
Mortal, infinitesimal, yet divine
Of that divine which made us what we are.

And yet this world, this microscopic ball,
This cast-up grain of sand upon the shore,
This trivial shred and atom of the ALL,
Is still our Trust, that we must answer for.

A lighthouse in the Infinite, with lamps
That we must trim and feed until we die;
A lonely outpost of the unseen camps
That we must keep, although we know not why.

The workman and the soldier have the word;
Theirs to obey, and not to question. Thus
We stand to orders that we never heard,
Bound to our little part. Enough for us.

The warm sap runs; the tender leaves unfold;
Ant helps his brother ant; birds build and sing;
The patient earthworm aids the pregnant mould
To fruit in autumn and to bud in spring.

Not less am I in wisdom and in will
Than ants and worms. I am full-furnished too
My arduous errand hither to fulfil.
I know my work, and what a man can do.

Maker of all! Enough that Thou hast given
This tempered mind, this brain without a flaw.
Enough for me to strive, as I have striven,
To make them serve their purpose and Thy law.

* * * * *

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

But, oh, my soul's companion! Thee I seek
For daily courage to support my lot.
In thee hath Nature made me strong or weak.
My human comforter, forsake me not!

My nobler self, in whom I live my best,
Strengthen me! Raise me! Lead me to the last!
Lay thy dear head upon my throbbing breast,
Give me thy hands, that I may hold thee fast!

Come close come closer! Let me feel thy heart,
Thy pulsing heart, thy breathing lips, on mine.
O love, let **only** death and graveyard part
If they must part my flesh and soul from thine!

Be thou my purer eyes, my keener ears,
My finer conscience, clean and unafraid,
Till these few, swift, inexorable years
Have borne us both beyond the reach of aid.

My rod and staff upon this lonely way,
My beacon-lamp till need of light is past;
Till the great Shadow, lengthening day by day,
Spreads over all and quenches us at last.

SANCTUARIES.

On Australian Hills.

Earth, outward tuning on her path in space
This pensive southern face,
Swathing its smile and shine
In that soft veil that day and darkness twine,
The silver-threaded twilight thin and fine,
With April dews impearled,
Looms like another and diviner world.

Here April brings her garnered harvest-sheaf,
Her withered autumn leaf,
Tintings of bronze and brass;
Her full-plumed reeds, her mushroom in the grass,
Her furrowed fields, where plough and sower pass,

SANCTUARIES.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Her laden apple bough.
All are transfigured and transmuted now.

The eastward ranges, so unearthly blue,
Bloom with their richest hue;
Slowly each rose-flushed crest
Deepens to violet where the shadows rest,
Darkens and darkens to the paling west;
The waning sun-fires die;
The first star swims in the pellucid sky.

Soundless to listening ear, on grass and flowers,
The footfall of the hours;
Formless and void to sight
The evolutions of invading night,
The creeping onslaught and the gradual flight,
Until the field is won,
And we look forth to see that day is done.

Then, from their grave of darkness, wood and lawn
Wake to a second dawn.
From unseen wells below
The pearly moon-tides rise and overflow,
Till vale and peak and wide air-spaces glow
In the transfiguring stream,
And earth and life are but a heavenly dream.

And now we hear the fairy-echoes fall
Where distant curlews call,
And how the silence thrills
With the night-voices of the glens and hills,
Rustling in reeds and tinkling in the rills,
Bubbling in creek and pool
Where frogs are wooing in the shallows cool.

And more than these, in this delicious time,
The melody sublime
That inward spirit hears
The faint and far-off music of the spheres,
Immortal harmonies, too fine for ears
Dulled in the dusty ways,
Deaf with the din of the laborious days.

Whereto, responsive as the vibrant wire
Of some aeolian lyre

SANCTUARIES.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Fanned by celestial wings,
The summoned soul in mystic concord brings
The deep notes latent in its trembling strings,
 Joining the choir divine
Of all the worlds that in the ether shine.

O sacred hour! O sweet night, calm and fair!
 Thou dost rebuke despair;
 Thou dost assuage the pain
Of passionate spirit and distempered brain,
And with thy balms, distilled like gentle rain,
 Dost heal the fret and smart
And nerve the courage of this coward's heart.

And lift me up, a Moses on the Mount
 To the pure source and fount
 Of law transcending law,
Of life that hallows life. I know no more
Of life's great Giver than I knew before,
 But these His creatures tell
That He is living, and that all is well.
* * * * *

Oh, to be there to-night!
To see that rose of sunset flame and fade
 On ghostly mountain height,
The soft dusk gathering each leaf and blade
 From the departing light,
Each tree-fern feather of the wildwood glade.

From arid streets to pass
Down those green aisles where golden wattles bloom,
 Over the fragrant grass,
And smell the eucalyptus in a gloom
 That is as clear as glass,
The dew-fresh scents of bracken and of broom . . .

These city clamours mute,
To hear the woodland necromancers play
 Each his enchanted lute;
That dear bird-laugh, so exquisitely gay,
 The magpie's silver flute
In vesper carol to the dying day.

To hear the live wind blow,

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

The delicate stir and whisper of the trees
As light breaths come and go,
The brooklet murmuring to the vagrant breeze,
The bull-frog twanging low
His deep-toned mandolin to chime with these.

And then the whispering rills,
The hushed lone wheel, or hoof, or axeman's tool;
The brooding dark that stills
The sweet Pan-piping of the grove and pool;
The dimly glimmering hills;
The sleeping night, so heavenly clean and cool.

Oh, for that mother-breast
That takes the broken spirit for repair,
The worn-out brain for rest
That healing silence, that untainted air,
That Peace of God Blest, blest
The very memory that I once was there.

The thought that someday yet,
In flesh, not dreams, I may return again,
And at those altars, set
In the pure skies, above the smoky plain,
Remember and forget
The joy of living and its price of pain

That sullied earth reserves
Such spacious refuge virgin and apart,
That wasting life preserves
Such sweet retreat for the distracted heart,
Such fount of strength for nerves
Torn in the ruthless struggle of the mart

That Government divine
O'er all this reek of blunders and of woes
Keeps an unravaged shrine
Not here, not there, but in the souls of those
Who neither weep nor whine,
But trust the guidance of the One Who Knows.

By a Norfolk Broad.

One hour ago the crimson sun, that seemed so long a-drowning, sank.

By a Norfolk Broad.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

The summer day is all but done. Our boat is moored beneath the bank.
I bask in peace, content, replete my faithful comrade at my feet.

The water-violet shuts its eye; the water-lily petals close;
So in the evening light we lie and dream in undisturbed repose.
How far all petty cares have flown! How calm the fretful world has grown!

We only hear the gentle breeze, in bender sighs and whispers, pass
Through osier beds and alder trees, and rustling flags and bending grass;
The song of blackbird in the hedge, the quack of wild-duck in the sedge.

The distant bark of farmhouse dogs, the piping of a clear-voiced thrush,
The murmurous babble of the frogs, of rippling stream in reed and rush;
The splash of pike and bream that rise to flitting moths and dragon-flies.

Far from the haunts of striving men, the toil and moil, the dust and din,
At home, at peace, in this lone fen, with these our dumb and gentler kin;
In Mother Nature's arms at rest, we drink the nectar of her breast.

The fragrance of these dewy hours, the perfume that the rich earth yields,
Sweetbriar and bean and clover-flowers, the incense of the quiet fields;
The new-cut hay, so sweet and fresh . . . what balm to spirit and to flesh!

And those white fulls, inland for food; and that still heron, carved in jet;
That paddling water-hen and brood, those swifts and swallows, hunting yet;
All these soft creatures, wild and free, how lovely and how kind they be!

Kind to that monster of the gun, that ravager of earth and sky,
From whom the fledgelings hide and run the immemorial enemy!
Ah, but this hand of their dread lord hath sheathed the devastating sword.

Tell them, my comrade, in thy tongue, that I come not to rob and strike.
Tell these shy hearts, so wronged and wrung, that all men's hearts are not alike.
In the Dark Ages of thy race, thou hast foretaste of light and grace.

Thou, love-enfranchised, that canst sleep unharmed, unharried, at my door,
Wolf-brother, taught to guard the sheep, teach them that man is something more
Than instrument of woe and death to half the creatures that have breath.

* * * * *

The western glories fade and pass. The twilight deepens more and more.

By a Norfolk Broad.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

A thin mist, like a breath on glass, veils shining mere and distant shore.
The moor-hen's family is fed. The heron hies him home to bed.

No hum of gnat or bee is heard; no pipe of thrush on hawthorn bough;
No cry of any beast or bird to stir the solemn stillness now,
Though earth and air and stream are rife with latent energies of life.

Silent the otter where he prowls, the gliding polecat and her prey;
Silent the soft-winged mousing owls, the flickering bats, like imps at play.
War, death, the fighters and the fight all ghostly shadows of the night.

What means that questioning paw of thine? those wistful eyes upon my face?
Ah, hunter! Dost thou sniff and whine? Art still a-quiver for the chase?
Peace peace! Lie down again, old hound. This place to-night is holy ground.

The clocks strike ten. The last, last gleam of lingering day has disappeared.
On field and marsh and quiet stream a few stars shine. The mist has cleared.
The willows of the further shore stand outlined on the sky once more.

How clear the blackness, leaf and bark, the plumes upon those bulbous stumps!
A pallid fragment of the dark shows fine-etched flag and osier clumps.
Sharper and sharper in the glow the iris and the bulrush grow.

A faint dawn glimmers on the sedge, the grassy banks, the flowery meads;
A bright disc shows its radiant edge, the round moon rises from the reeds;
The sleeping lilies take the light; their steel-dark bed turns silver-white.

That path of glory, widening, streams across the mere to where we sit.
My sight swims in its dazzling beams; spirit and brain are steeped in it
Dost thou not answer to the touch? Listen, my dog, that knows so much:

There may be lovelier worlds than this, a heavenly country, vast and fair,
Where saints and seraphs dwell in bliss I do not know I do not care.
While in my human flesh I live I ask no more than earth can give.

Ethereal essences may roam Elysian Fields beyond the grave,
But we, my dog, will saunter home, to all we love and all we crave.
God sees us thankful for our lot. The Unborn Day concerns us not.

At Sea.

When the investing darkness growls,And deep reverberates to deep;When keyhole whines and chimney howls,And all the roofs and windows weep;Then, through the doorless walls of sleep,The still-sealed ear and shuttered sight,Phantoms of memory steal and creep,The very ghosts of sound and light
Dream-visions and dream-voices of a bygone night.

I see again, I hear again,Where lightnings flash and house-eaves drip,A flying swirl of waves and rain That storm-path between Sound and Rip.I feel the swaying of the shipIn every gust that rocks the trees,And taste that brine upon my lipAnd smell the freshness of the breeze
That sped us through the welter of those racing seas.

I hear the menace of the callTo rope and rivet, wheel and mast,In the swift onrush of the squall,The challenge of the thundering blastTo daring men as it sweeps past;And in my dream I have no dread.Rivet and rope are firm and fast,The clear lights shining, green and red,
The quiet eyes of sentry watching overhead.

What epic battles pass unsung!It was a war of gods befellOn that wild night when we were young.They rode, like cavalry of hell,The mighty winds, the monstrous swell,On their white horses, fierce and fleet;They stood at bay, invincible,Where pulsed beneath our sliding feet
The faithful iron heart that never lost a beat.

How the sharp sea-spume lashed and stung!How the salt sea-wind tugged and tareAnd clawed and mauled us where we clung,With panting breasts and streaming hair,To our frail eyrie in mid-air!How we exulted in the fight With neither haste nor halt to dareThose Titans furies in their might,
Undaunted and unswerving in our insect flight!

No lap of exquisite repose!A mortar wherein souls are brayed;An anvil ringing to the blows Whereby true men are shaped, and madeDivinely strong and unafraid.Such gallant sailor-men there be Never unready or dismayed,Though 't's the face of death they see
In cyclone, fire and fog, and white surf on the lee.

Not only in the sylvan bower,On dreaming hill, by sleeping mere, The holy place the sacred hour.Beset by every form of fear,Darkness ahead and danger near,Sorely hard-driven and hard-prest,But still unspent and of good cheer He finds them who can pass the test,
Who never winks an eye and never stays to rest.

THE WATCHMAN AND THE NIGHT.

The Watchman.

I.

Through jewelled windows in the walls
The tender daylight smiles;
Majestic music swells and falls

At Sea.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

A down the stately aisles;
Shadows of carven roof and rood,
Of stony saints and angels, brood
 Above the altar—glow;
They cannot dim the shining face
Of one conspicuous in his place
 Amid the forms below.

He that was once my little boy,
 With merry voice and look,
My babe, that quarrelled with his toy
 And tore his hated book;
But yesterday a laughing lad,
In his dear worldly garments clad,
 Talking of college wins,
Wickets, and bumping boats, and goals,
And not of shepherd and lost souls
 His sermons and their sins.

The same, he kneels there, pale and awed,
 In cloud of prayer and hymn,
And we are to behold our Lord
 Made manifest in him;
To sit, his pupils, and be taught,
Who knows not what the years have brought
 To mothers and to men;
To take him for our heaven—sent guide
On seas he never voyaged wide
 And wild beyond his ken.

With all the lore of schools, and none
 Of stern and suffering life,
A child with wooden sword and gun,
 Unarmed for vital strife;
His mind a bud of spring, unblown,
Its flowering a shape as yet unknown,
 Its fruit awaiting birth
A seedling of a thousand strains,
A parasite of dead men's brains,
 Though sprung from living earth.

There, in his proud belief, he stands,
 This simple boy of mine,
Transformed by necromantic hands
 To something half divine
All in a moment, in a breath,
An oracle of life and death,

At Sea.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

A judge above us all!
What spell is this that has him fast,
When age of miracle is past,
And past beyond recall?

O knight of dreams, in fairy mail!
If for his sake I pray,
It is that fairy arms may fail
And tough steel win the day
Aye, though his dear heart take the thrust,
And he be trampled in the dust.
But mother fears forbode
(May God have mercy and forefend!)
A tamer journey and an end
Upon an easier road.

A long fulfilling of the vow
Within the vow he spake
To close the gates of knowledge now,
And no more dare to take
The broad highways of marching thought
By his unfettered brothers sought,
Who follow every clue
On every line, where'er it leads,
Heedless of heresies or creeds,
To find the Right and True.

The mother-love, so apt for woe,
Visions the joyless track
Where the beloved feet may go
And nevermore come back;
The boy become a thinking man,
That has outgrown the changeless plan
Once fitted to his shape;
The traveller, confident, serene,
Caught in an ambush unforeseen,
Whence there is no escape.

Struggling a little overborne
Perplexed persuaded spent
With dim self-pity and self-scorn
Supine in discontent.
No no escape, by any arts,
Save through a score of bleeding hearts
A stair too steep to climb;
Wherefore be wise and hide the chains,
Drug conscience, with its pangs and pains.

At Sea.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Give peace, Lord, in our time!

O waste of precious force and fire!
The sacred passion pales.
The soaring pinions droop and tire.
Our standard-bearer fails
To keep his battle-flag aloft;
The strong young arm is slack and soft;
The eager feet are slow;
The shining mail is dulled with rust
Of contact with mediæval dust,
And will not bear a blow.

And under harness so decayed,
What ravage unrevealed?
What moral textures soiled and frayed
And moral sores unhealed?
He must not know that dares not tell.
Hush! It is nothing. All is well.
Peace in our time, O Lord!
And leave the fighting for the heirs.
The blood of sacrifice be theirs
Who cannot shirk the sword.

O boy of mine, that played the game,
And never learned to cheat,
Nor knew such word or thought as shame
In victory or defeat!
Will he be found, when he grows old,
Passing off spurious coin for gold,
Selling dry husks for grain
The pottage of the Esau's bowl
That bought the birthright of a soul
His all-sufficient gain?

The image and the robes of what
He seems to serve and seek
But veils although he knows it not
On Mammon's brazen cheek;
His bishop's smile, his patron's nod,
The homage of his flock, his god;
His sensuous worship drest
In forms and colours rich and rare
The spirit's sanctuary bare
Heart emptily at rest

Let organ music swell and peal,
And priests and people pray;
Let those who can at altar kneel
I have no heart to stay.
I cannot bear to see it done
The hands whose work has scarce begun
Locked in these gyves of lead
The living spirit gagged and bound,
And tethered to one plot of ground
A prisoner of the dead.

The Night.

II.

Watchman, what of the night? See you a streak of light?
Whither, O Captain of the quest,
The course we steer for Port of Rest?

How shall he answer he Who never put to sea?
Within his tabernacle wall
He cannot even hear us call.

Behind the jealous door That he must pass no more,
And whence he scarcely dares to look,
He keeps his eyes upon his book.

The little candles, lit Where the disciples sit,
Light their small refuge round about,
But show no gleam to those without

Spirits that cannot dwell In such an airless cell,
Sniffing the sea-winds from afar,
Glimpsing the light of moon and star.

We must fare forth, unsped, From homely board and bed;
We must set sail for port unknown,
On an uncharted course, alone.

Push off. We have to go, Whether we choose or no.
The Call, though faint and far away,
Has reached us, and we must obey.

* * * * *

O but the night is dark Beyond that only ark!
The salt sea-winds blow keen and cold
Outside the shelter of the fold!

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Boom of the deep—sea swell, Solemn as funeral bell
Silence transcending sound, to make
High courage falter and heart quake

What will the voyage cost? We are already lost
Who turn from land and love, to face
This blank immensity of space.

Push out. We have to go, Whether we fear or no.
And why stand shivering and appalled?
We go because the Voice has called.

Noah's inspired dove Took wing to find her love.
The sea is His safe as the land
Within the hollow of His hand.

Here are the breakers pull Before the boat is full!
'Ware the sharp reefs that line the shore!
Row for the open evermore!
* * * * *

O but the night is dark! Never the faintest spark
Where surf and shore and cities were!
And not a whisper in the air.

The open heart of grace, It is a lonely place!
No light on any onward track!
Too far too late for turning back!

Where is that little ark Those candles in the dark
The Rock of Ages cleft for me
The Cross uprising in the sea

Where to the drowning grope With yearning faith and hope,
And cling as to their mother's breast,
And find safe shelter and sweet rest?

Gone, gone for ever gone! And still we must press on.
Steady, true soul, too brave to fret!
Press on we are not drowning yet.
* * * * *

The night is soft and still That was so wild and chill;
The bosom of the mighty deep
Breathes like a tired child asleep.

So peaceful, so profound, The silence spread around!
The very breakers of the shore
Moan to the listening ear no more.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Night but the stars are out. Darkness of dread and doubt,
The way so lonely and so rough,
Have cleared a little, but enough.

We know not where we are Light cannot reach so far,
But show us we have lost and gained
As the compelling Voice ordained.

Gone, gone beyond recall, Candle and prisoning wall,
Last echo of the hue and cry,
Last glint of an accusing eye.

Too late for looking back Over the darkening track.
How should the life-taught soul return
That cannot unlive or unlearn?
* * * * *

Changed, changed, for ever changed, Since hitherward we ranged,
To vision in a space so vast,
All the perspectives of the past.

How infinitely small The once so broad and tall
The aims, the pursuit and the strife
Shut in the sheltered grooves of life!

Those terrifying laws, The wrangles and the wars
Of church with church and state with state
The things men love, the things men hate

Money and gauds and fame, And neighbours' scorn and blame
The passion of desire and haste
To gather, to possess, to waste

How infinitely high, Broad as the sea and sky,
The loyalty of man to man,
Once almost missing from the plan

The elemental law That codes and creeds ignore,
Of duty to the trust we hold
For heirs unborn and years untold
* * * * *

Night and the drifting soul Still without path or goal.
Yet was the voyage worth the cost.
We are not drowned. We are not lost.

'T'is I. Be not afraid. Moonlight and stars may fade.
One walks the ocean and the night.
We have no further need of light.

What matters where we go? We do not ask to know.
He called us, and we came. The quest
For us is ended, and we rest.

THE FIELDFARES AND THE LIGHTHOUSE

The Winged Mariners.

Through the wild night, the silence and the dark,
Through league on league of the uncharted sky,
Lonelier than dove of fable from its ark, The fieldfares fly.

Mate with his tiny mate, and younglings frail,
That only knew the crevice of their tree
Until, in faith stupendous, they set sail Across the sea.

The black North Sea, that takes such savage toll
Of ships and men and yet could not appal
These little mariners, who seek their goal Beyond it all.

Turning those soft, indomitable breasts
To meet the unchained Titans of the deep
Calm, as if cradled in Norwegian nests, Their course they keep.

No more than thistle-down or flake of snow
To those great gods at play, they win the game;
Never sped archer's arrow from his bow With surer aim.

Still tossed and scattered, their unwinking eyes
Point to that pole unseen where wanderings cease;
Still on they press, and warble to the skies With hearts at peace.

Scenting the English morning in the air,
Through the salt night, ere any morning wakes
The perfumed fields, the dun woods, sere and bare, The brambly brakes

The well-loved orchard, with its hawthorn hedge,
Where luscious berries, red and brown, are found
The misty miles of water-mead and sedge Where gnats abound.

* * * * *

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

But what is this, 'twixt sea and surf-bound shore?
What form stands there, amid the shadows gray,
With flaming blade that smites them as they soar, And bars their way?

Hushed are the twittering throats; each silken head
Turns to the voiceless siren turns and stares
By some strange lure of mystery and dread Caught unawares.

It draws them on, as the magnetic sun
Draws vagrant meteors to its burning breast.
The day is near, the harbour all but won That English nest.

But here they meet inexorable Fate;
Here lies a dreadful reef of fire and glass;
Here stands a glittering sentry at the gate They cannot pass.

Confused, dismayed, they flutter in the gale,
Those little pinions that have lost their track;
The gallant hearts that sped them reel and fail Like ships aback.

Sucked in a magic current, like a leaf
Torn from autumnal tree, they drift abroad,
But ever nearer to the siren reef, The ruthless sword.

On, on, transfixed and swooning, without check,
To the lee shore of that bedazzling wall,
Until they strike, and break in utter wreck, And founder all.

Brave little wings, that sailed the storm so well,
Trimmed to the set of every wayward blast!
Brave little hearts, that never storm could quell, Beaten at last!

That great sea swallows them, and they are gone,
For ever gone, like bubbles of the foam;
And the bright star that lured them, shining on, Still points to Home.

To-morrow.

The lighthouse shines across the sea;
The homing fieldfares sing for glee:

To-morrow.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

"Behold the shore!"
Alas for shattered wing and breast!
The lighthouse breakers make their nest,
And hedges bloom for them no more No more.

In their old church the lovers stand.
His wedding ring is on her hand,
All partings o'er.
Alas for mother still and cold,
The babe her dead young arms enfold!
Her lover will know love no more No more.

What fate is this for birds and men?
The blue empyrean theirs and then
This fast-closed door.
One answers from his bended knee:
"Another morrow comes," saith he,
"A day that brings the night no more No more."

Ah, happy one! Yet happier he
Who knows he knows not what will be;
Who has no lore
To read the runes of life and death,
But lives his best while he has breath,
And leaves with God the evermore The evermore.

MIRAGE.

Mirage.

Is it a will-o'-the-wisp, or is dawn breaking,
That our horizon wears so strange a hue?
Is it but one more dream, or are we waking
To find that dreams, at last, are coming true?

Aye, surely, in that golden glimmer streaking
The cloudy sky-line of the life of man
We see the blessed day he has been seeking
In all directions since the world began.

Sign to each struggling and exhausted nation
Of hope fulfilled, redemption and release;
Sign of the end of needless tribulation,

MIRAGE.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

And the beginning of the reign of Peace.

Country with country, brother with his brother,
Content to share, and not to grab and steal;
Ceasing the wild-beast battle, each with other,
To work in concert for the common weal.

No class-strife more, neighbour with differing neighbour;
No waste or want, to breed the plague or crime;
No soul-debasing pomp and sordid labour,
No wars, no famines, in the coming time!

But swords of slaughter valour and brains and money
Turned into ploughshares for the lands redeemed,
To fill men's homes, as full as hives of honey,
With wealth unknown and happiness undreamed.

Great Art no more the plaything of the idle,
But nurse and minister to every need;
Nature no longer cowed with bit and bridle;
Conscience enfranchised and Religion freed.

All round our darksome isle the tide encroaches,
Distant and dim as yet, but spreading fast.
The reign of Love and Liberty approaches!
The heirs are coming to their own at last!
* * * * *

Hark! What was that? The vanquished devil howling,
With guns and bombs, for brother devil's blood?
The primal savage out again befouling
All this fair promise with his primal mud?

Alas! So soon to see our lovely morning
Back in the hopeless night whence it arose,
And have no time to wait another dawning!
O Lord, how long how long

A PRAYER.

A Prayer.

Spirit and Breath of Life, whate'er Thy name!
Bear with Thy creature, Man,
That makes his dwelling—place a blot of shame
Upon the Ordered Plan.

Not Thy hand, O Divine Designer, hurled
Athwart the starlit skies
One blood—stained, greed—diseased, hate—eaten world,
To shock celestial eyes.

Not Thy default, O Beautiful, this crust
Of fratricidal crime,
These maggot—breeds of hunger and of lust
That Thy fair work begrime.

But ours, who mock Thee from the highest place,
And in the light of day;
Who claim to lead an upward—struggling race,
And will not seek the way.

Guards of the human birthright, at Thy call
A city sacked and burned;
Guards of the house that is the home of all,
But whence the weak are spurned.

Brothers, to whom the outcast brothers cry
As with a voice unknown;
Stewards of Nature's bounty, that deny
The lawful heirs their own.

Thou that hast made us men, and earth so fair,
To be so vilely used,
Give space for late repentance and repair
Of sacred trust abused.

Give time, Eternal, that we stanch these tears,
Give time to heal this sore,
That our brief speck amid the shining spheres

A PRAYER.

Disgrace its birth no more.

But sail ethereal seas, an orb of light,
To bear Thy purpose on
Until it fades into the cosmic night
Where the dead worlds have gone.

SIC VOS NON VOBIS.

Sic Vos Non Vobis.

Ye, that the untrod paths have braved,
With heart and brain unbound;
Who ask not that your souls be saved,
But that the Truth be found;
Whose fiery cross is borne unseen,
Whose meek brows, bleeding but serene
With only thorns are crowned;
Who, still and steadfast, stand for Right,
Though none acclaim and none requite:

Who learn how little is the sum
Of all that Truth can teach,
And where the serried boundaries come
That bar your utmost reach;
For whom no sage, no saint, can find
A clue to aught that lies behind;
For whom the preachers preach
Only to leave ye at the door
That opens to their knock no more:

Who, listening in the trackless night,
Hearing no bugle-call,
Still fight, undaunted, the good fight,
And never fail or fall;
Who, standing on an inch of ground,
Feel the Infinities around,
Yet dare to face it all,
And keep the life ye hold in trust
Safe from besetting moth and rust.

Life tragic mystery of Man
Strange tale of joy and grief!
Chaff for the errant winds to fan,

SIC VOS NON VOBIS.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

A bubble bright and brief,
That floats and shines and bursts unseen,
And leaves no trace where it has been;
Like thistle-down and leaf,
That in soft airs of autumn dance,
The helpless sport of Fate and Chance.

Ye, who can see the case so clear,
And scorn to cringe and moan,
Who follow humbly, without fear,
The soul's behest alone;
Content to suffer for the sake
Of faithful manhood, and to make
A loftier stepping-stone,
A straighter way, a smoother street,
For tread of unborn children's feet.

Ye, whom the children's sorrows rend,
And who despise the smart,
Who walk uprightly to the end
With an undoubting heart,
To take the guerdon of your pain
Death, with no hope to live again
Ye have the better part,
Salt of the world, that keeps it sound!
Kings that shall yet be throned and crowned.

MOTHERHOOD.

An Old Doll.

Low on her little stool she sits
To make a nursing lap,
And cares for nothing but the form
Her little arms enwrap.

With hairless skull that gapes apart,
A broken plaster ball,
One chipped glass eye that squints askew,
And ne'er a nose at all

No raddle left on grimy cheek,
No mouth that one can see
It scarce discloses, at a glance,

MOTHERHOOD.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

What it was meant to be.

But something in the simple scheme
As it extends below
(It is the "tidy" from my chair
That she is rumpling so)

A certain folding of the stuff
That winds the thing about
(But still permits the sawdust gore
To trickle down and out)

The way it curves around her waist,
On little knees outspread
Implies a body frail and dear,
Whence one infers a head.

She rocks the scarecrow to and fro,
With croonings soft and deep,
A lullaby designed to hush
The bunch of rags to sleep.

I ask what rubbish has she there.
"My dolly," she replies,
But tone and smile and gesture say,
"My angel from the skies."

Ineffable the look of love
Cast on the hideous blur
That somehow means a precious face,
Most beautiful, to her.

The deftness and the tenderness
Of her caressing hands
How can she possibly divine
For what the creature stands?

Herself a nurseling, that has seen
The summers and the snows
Of scarce five years of baby life.
And yet she knows she knows.

MOTHERHOOD.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Just as a puppy of the pack
Knows unheard huntsman's call,
And knows it is a running hound
Before it learns to crawl.

Just as she knew, when hardly born,
The breast unseen before,
And knew how well! before they touched,
What milk and mouth were for.

So, by some mystic extra-sense
Denied to eyes and ears,
Her spirit communes with its own
Beyond the veil of years.

She hears unechoing footsteps run
On floors she never trod,
Sees lineaments invisible
As is the face of God

Forms she can recognise and greet,
Though wholly hid from me.
Alas! a treasure that is not,
And that may never be.

The majesty of motherhood
Sits on her baby brow;
Before her little three-legged throne
My grizzled head must bow.

That dingy bundle in her arms
Symbols immortal things
A heritage, by right divine,
Beyond the claims of kings.

Granny.

Here, in her elbow chair, she sits
A soul alert, alive,
A poor old body shrunk and bent
The queen-bee of the hive.

Granny.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

But hives of bees and hives of men
Obey their several laws;
No fiercely-loving filial throng
This mother-head adores.

This bringer of world-wealth, whereof
None may compute the worth,
Is possibly of no account
To anyone on earth.

Her cap and spectacles, that mean
Dim eyes and scanty hairs,
The humble symbols of her state
The only crown she wears.

Lacking a kingdom and a court,
A relic of the past,
Almost a cumberer of the ground
That is our queen at last.

But still not wholly without place,
Nor quite bereft of power;
A useful stopgap a resource
In many a troubled hour.

She darns the stockings, keeps the house,
The nurseless infant tends,
While the young matrons and the men
Pursue their various ends

Too keen-set on their great affairs,
Or little plays and pranks,
The things and people of their world,
To give her thought or thanks

The children on whom all her thought
And time and love were spent
Through half a century of years!
Yet is she well content.

The schooling of those fiery years,
It has not been for nought;

Granny.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

A large philosophy of life
Has self-less service taught.

The outlook from the heights attained
By climbings sore and slow
Discovers worlds of wisdom, hid
From clearest eyes below.

So calmly, in her elbow chair,
Forgotten and alone,
She knits and dreams, and sometimes sighs
But never makes a moan.

Still dwelling with her brood unseen
Ghosts of a bygone day
The precious daughter in her grave,
The dear son gone astray

And others, to whom once she stood
As only light and law,
The near and living, and yet lost,
That need her love no more.

Watching their joyous setting forth
To mingle with their kind,
With scarce a pang, with ne'er a grudge,
At being left behind.

"Let them be young, as I was young,
And happy while they may"
A dog that waits the night in peace
Since it has had its day.

The Virgin Martyr.

Every wild she-bird has nest and mate in the warm April weather,
But a captive woman, made for love, no mate, no nest, has she.
In the spring of young desire, young men and maids are wed together,
And the happy mothers flaunt their bliss for all the world to see.
Nature's sacramental feast for them an empty board for me.

I, a young maid once, an old maid now, deposed, despised, forgotten

The Virgin Martyr.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

I, like them, have thrilled with passion and have dreamed of nuptial rest,
Of the trembling life within me of my children unbegotten,
Of a breathing new-born body to my yearning bosom prest,
Of the rapture of a little soft mouth drinking at my breast.

Time, that heals so many sorrows, keeps mine ever-freshly aching,
Though my face is growing furrowed and my brown hair turning white.
Still I mourn my irremediable loss, asleep or waking;
Still I hear my son's voice calling "Mother" in the dead of night,
And am haunted by my girl's eyes that will never see the light.

O my children that I might have had! My children lost for ever!
O the goodly years that might have been, now desolate and bare!
O God, what have I lacked, what have I done, that I should never
Take my birthright like the others, take the crown that women wear,
And possess the common heritage to which all flesh is heir.

MATES.

Mates.

It boots not to retrace the path
 To ages dim and hoar,
When Man, at the domestic hearth,
 First learned the art of war,
And since in battle one must fall
Held his defeated spouse in thrall,
 That she should fight no more;
And thereby doomed to sleep and sloth
Strength that in action strengthened both.

It boots not when the better day
 First showed a glint of morn,
Nor whose the eye that, in its ray,
 Saw Woman's chains outworn;
Nor which was first and which was last
When savage rivalry was past
 And chivalry was born;
Enough for us that, free or pent,
Her primal treasure was misspent.

The waxing noontide sees them now
 Joint sovereigns of the land,
No trace upon the gentler brow

MATES.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Of the old helot brand.
Consenting that the right is right,
They walk as comrades or they might
 For ever hand in hand.
Yet still a stronger leads and drags,
And still a weaker leans and lags.

Because we reap what we have sown,
 And are as we were bred;
Because one passion, overgrown,
 Since so long overfed,
Still works confusion to the scheme
Whereof both man and woman dream.
 'Tis the unnumbered dead
That laid it on him for a curse,
And her, its immemorial nurse.

But, with these tyrants in the dust,
 Why should their ghosts hold sway?
Cut the long entail of their lust,
 Heirs of a cleaner day!
Lift the dead hand from living mind,
Break the old spells that bind and blind,
 O Woman, far astray!
And march with Man the open road
Without a fetter or a load.

Our pioneer brothers can discern
 The sunlit heights around;
We, that should likewise look and learn,
 Keep eyes upon the ground
And drug our feebleness with sweets
When needing tonic of strong meats;
 And all our ways surround
With tangling trifles, gaud and toy,
That mock us with the name of joy.

What brains these fragile webs enmesh!
 What soaring thought they tie!
What energies of soul and flesh
 They still or stultify!
What wasted riches of the mind,
What wealth of genius, dumb and blind,
 In shop and workroom lie,
While the great realms of life are stored
With such vast mystery unexplored!

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Where were the sciences and arts
 When men went plumed and curled?
Where were the brains, the hands, the hearts,
 That now subdue the world
The March of Progress, straight and true
When men wore coats of every hue?
 In childish swaddlings furled,
Their strength lay latent and unknown,
As ineffectual as our own.

Freed from this complicated coil
 By mere vainglory spun,
Uprooted from this fruitless soil,
 Unfed by rain or sun,
Where sleep the germs of noble deeds
In still unfructifying seeds,
 Or leafage scarce begun
This ash-heap or the poor and small
That chokes the greatness in us all

Uplifted to the light the place
 Where Man his manhood found
When tyranny of silk and lace
 No longer held him bound;
With eyes, from Fashion's witchcraft clear,
For Beauty, simple and sincere,
 And, unbeguiled by sound
Of siren wooings, quiet ears
For the high message that he hears:

The swelling call to loftier life
 That, like a distant bell,
Chimes through the traffic and the strife
 Of those who buy and sell;
Through camp and temple, field and street,
The market where we game and cheat,
 The home wherein we dwell:
Here should we stand, as strong, as free,
For splendid enterprise as he.

To him no flowering parasite
 That only sucks and clings
To drain and enervate and blight,
 But impulse to his wings;
His mate in passion, mate in power,
His soul's wife, that for marriage dower

MATES.

Exhaustless treasure brings
The daily bread, the daily spur,
The day's reward for him and her.

Like woodland creatures, that have willed
To pair by Nature's plan,
A woman finished and fulfilled
And a completed man;
To run together and abreast,
And side by side to fight or rest,
As when the world began;
Each bound to other, yet both free
It is not, but it ought to be.

THE VAIN QUESTION.

The Vain Question.

Why should we court the storms that rave and rend,
Safe at our household hearth?
Why, starved and naked, without home or friend,
Unknowing whence we came or where we wend,
Follow from no beginning to no end
An uncrowned martyr's path?

Is it worth while to waste our all in vain?
To seek, and not to know?
To strive for something we can never gain,
To labour blindly for a wage of pain,
And crack our heartstrings with the stress and strain,
And reap no field we sow?

What does it matter whether love or hate,
Or praise or blame, be theirs
Who pass like shadows, with no time to wait
For understanding of the ways of fate,
Which makes the hopeless desert blossom late,
And kills good wheat with tares?

Why do we choose to suffer, when we might
Lie down to sleep and dream?
Is praise for men who try to do the right?
Is blame for him who shirks the deadly fight?
And whose the friendship that is heart's delight?

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

And whose the love supreme?

Wide do we set our sanctuary door
That fairest guest to greet,
And find too late, when we have shown our store,
The sacred places rudely trampled o'er,
Bereaved, profaned, and soiled for evermore
With tread of vulgar feet.

And nothing left to solace us but this,
At such a frightful cost
A taste, a glimpse, the memory of a kiss;
Only a sense of what diviner bliss,
That might have been, we have contrived to miss;
Only what love has lost.

And brother-bond the loyal comradeship
That comes to every call
What worth the smiling eye, the warm hand-grip,
The benediction of the kindly lip?
Sickness, old age or poverty can strip
The value from them all.

And faith, embalmed in immemorial creed
Once our supreme support,
Our staff and beacon to uphold and lead
A light extinguished and a broken reed!
And where, O where, in bitter time of need,
Shall substitute be sought?

Wherefore this anguish of desire to see
That which concerns us not
The evolution of the life to be,
The distant course, the final destiny
Of worlds and men the ages wherein we
Shall have no part or lot?

Why not shut eyes of spirit and of brain
That can torment us thus?
Why not take something to assuage the pain,
And shut the doors and go to sleep again?
The Search may be successful or in vain,
What matters it to us?

Is it worth while, when house and home are here,
And we can dwell at ease,
To go forth, lonely, and in mortal fear,
To travel roads that lead not anywhere,
As bare of lamp or signpost, far or near,
And full of thorns, as these?

To leave the Good whereof we are possest,
To seek, in senseless grief,
For some divine but ever unknown Best,
And see no goal and find no place of rest
Is it worth while, on such a fruitless quest
To waste a life so brief?

We must not ask we must not ask again.
We have to wait and see.
Press on, poor soul, along the path of pain
That is the one thing absolutely plain.
The last assessment of the loss and gain
Is not a task for thee.

AT LONG LAST.

At Long Last.

Late, late, the prize is drawn, the goal attained,
The Heart's Desire fulfilled, Love's guerdon gained.
Wealth's use is past, Fame's crown of laurel mocks
The downward-drooping head and grizzled locks.
The end is reached the end of toil and strife The end of life.

Love flowers and fades like grass, and flowers again;
The spendthrift lovers waste themselves in vain;
Their fiery passions burn out one by one,
And then, alas! when their best days are done,
Spirit and body find their perfect mate So late! So late!

Long-sought, long seeking, through the lonely years,
The wanderers meet to weep their useless tears
For time and chance irrevocably flown,
Dear hopes outlived and happy faiths outgrown,
Children unborn, the myriad joys unseen That might have been.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Not for the spring and morning—time of youth
The perfect flower of slow—unfolding truth,
The perfect love, that dreams of youth foretell,
But youth knows not and youth could never tell;
That light celestial, as of sunset fires
When day expires.

Late comes the gift that crowns the hungry quest,
Like ripe wheat—harvest in a land at rest,
And comes alone, a consecrated cup,
To those proved worthy to sit down and sup.
To them aye, aye, despite their treasure lost, 'Tis worth the cost.

'Tis worth the cost to reach the heights at last,
Ere eyes are dim and daylight overpast.
To see one aim achieved, one dream fulfilled,
Ere striving brain and trusting heart are stilled.
To live one glorious hour its price of pain
Is never paid in vain.

THE MAGIC WAND.

The Magic Wand.

As an April garden Breathes the scent of rain
Rain that calls her treasures Back to life again
So my spirit quickens to the opening strain.

In its sheath of darkness Fancy's folded wing
Thrills and stirs and quivers To another spring,
When the bow is drawn across the trembling string.

In their grave of silence, In their husk and core,
Dreams that winter buried Feel the sap once more
Running warm and vital, as it ran before.

Into secret chambers Where old passions sleep,
Through the long—closed shutters, Lights of morning creep:
Through the opening doorway
Airs of morning sweep.

Hope resurgent, and Youth, With their dancing train,
Mingled grief and glory, Blended bliss and pain,
Ecstasies and agonies, come forth and live again.

Wizard hand that summoned Each forgotten ghost,
Plays like wind or water With the spell—bound host,
Sailing seas supernal, for no earthly coast.

Yet no magic music That an ear can mark
Draws them winging upward Through the mist and dark,
As the sky at sunrise draws the mounting lark.

Through the poet—spirit, Touched with heavenly fire,
Heavenly voices whisper In the wood and wire.
God is the musician, and my soul the lyre.

CRAVEN-HEART.

Craven-Heart.

Those anguished voices in the air!
Oh, I could shriek and tear my hair
In rage, rebellion and despair.

But what is one, amid a throng
So vast and merciless and strong,
To make attempt to right the wrong?

What ear would hear me if I cried?
And who would rally to my side?
What could I do to stem the tide?

Though I should plunge in flood and flame,
And suffer every shame and blame,
The world would triumph all the same.

I am not called upon to pay.
So why join in the hopeless fray,
And waste my brief and precious day?

THE FUTURE VERDICT.

The Future Verdict.

How will our unborn children scoff at us
In the good years to come, The happier years to come,
Because, like driven sheep, we yielded thus,
Before the shearers dumb.

What are the words their wiser lips will say?
"These men had gained the light;" "These women knew the right;
"They had their chance, and let it slip away."
"They did not, when they might.

"They were the first to hear the gospel preached,
"And to believe therein;" "Yet they remained in sin.
"They saw the promised land they might have reached,"
"And dared not enter in.

"They might have won their freedom, had they tried;"
"No savage laws forbade;" "For them the way was made.

CRAVEN-HEART.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

"They might have had the joys for which they cried" And yet they shrank, afraid.

"Afraid to face the martyr's rack and flame?" "The traitor's dungeon? Nay "Of what their world would say
"The smile, the joke, the thinnest ghost of blame!" Lord! Lord! What fools were they!"

And we no longer actors of the stage
We cumber now maybe
With other eyes shall see
This wasted chance, and with celestial rage
Cry "O what fools were we!"

GOOD-BYE.

Good-Bye.

Good-bye! 't is like a churchyard bell Good-bye!
Poor weeping eyes! Poor head, bowed down with woe!
Kiss me again, dear love, before you go.
Ah me, how fast the precious moments fly! Good-bye! Good-bye!

We are like mourners when they stand and cry
At open grave in wintry wind and rain.
Yes, it is death. But you shall rise again,
Your sun return to this benighted sky. Good-bye! Good-bye!

The great physician, Time, shall pacify
This parting anguish with another friend,
Your heart is broken now, but it will mend.
Though it is death, yet still you will not die. Good-bye! Good-bye!

Dear heart! Dear eyes! Dear tongue, that cannot lie!
Your love is true, your grief is deep and sore.
But love with pass then you will grieve no more.
New love will come. Your tears will soon be dry. Good-bye! Good-bye!

SONNETS.

Influence.

As in the deeps of embryonic night,
Out of unfathomable obscurities
Of Nature's womb, the little life-germs rise,
Pushing and pulsing upward to the light;

GOOD-BYE.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

As, when the first day dawns on waking sight,
They leap to liberty and recognize
The golden sunshine and the morning skies
Their home and goal and heritage and right

So do our brooding thoughts and deep desires
Grow in our souls, we know not how or why;Grove for we know not what, all blind and dumb.
So, when the time is ripe, and one aspires
To free his thought in speech, ours hear the cry,And to full birth and instant knowledge come.

Individuality.

Phew! 'Tis a stuffy and stupid place,
This social edifice by Custom wrought
This fenced enclosure wherein all are caught,
The great and small, the noble and the base,
And squeezed and flattened to one common face.
Air, air for springing fancy, errant thought!
Scope to make something of the seeming nought!
Room for the fleet foot and the open race!

Break out, O brother, braver than the rest,
Lover of Liberty, whose arm is strong!
Buttress our independence with thy breast,
And fight a passage through the stagnant throng.
Many will press behind thee, but they need
The stalwart captain, not afraid to lead.

Contentment.

Is it a virtue, as the sages say,
The "trivial round and common task" to ply,
And for no wider walk of life to sigh
Than we were born to; sweetly, day by day,
Our meed of lowly reverence to pay
Our high-placed "betters"; never to defy
The powers that be; never to kick or cry,
Or think, or question simply to obey?

Then vice be with us, although blood be shed.
No pact with powers partizan and blind;No peace with Custom that makes right of wrong.
We shall content us when the starved are fed
When men and brothers are agreed and kind,And there is fair play between weak and strong.

Vows.

Nay, ask me not. I would not dare pretend
To constant passion and a life-long trust.
They will desert thee, if indeed they must.
How can we guess what Destiny will send
Smiles of fair fortune, or black storms to rend
What even now is shaken by a gust?
The fire will burn, or it will die in dust.
We cannot tell until the final end.

And never vow was forged that could confine
Aught but the body of the thing whereon
Its pledge was stamped. The inner soul divine,
That thinks of going, is already gone.
When faith and love need bolts upon the door,
Faith is not faith, and love abides no more.

Desire.

Bright eyes, sweet lips, with many fevers fill
The young blood, running wildly, as it must;
But lips and eyes beget a strange distrust.
Electric fingers send the sudden thrill
Through senses unsubserving to the will;
The flames die down, and leave a dim disgust;
Unfragrant kisses turn to drouth and dust;
I kiss; I feast; but I am hungry still.

O woman, woman, passionate but strong!
True to thy love as needle to the pole True to the truth, and not alone to me
O mate and friend, elusive in the throng,
With thy clear brows, thy straight and upright soul, Nameless unknown my hunger is for thee!

Outcast.

Perchance for dear Life's sake and life is sweet
When work had failed and roads were deep in snow,
And this meant food and fire, she fell so low
That painted creature of the midnight street.
Perchance that other, with the shoeless feet,
Was Nature's victim, too untaught to know
That all live buds are not allowed to blow
Too starved and passion-blind to be discreet.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

And their accuser? She within the fold
That walks in light, bejewelled and belaced, Who in cold blood, and not for love or need,
Sold the white flower of womanhood for gold;
The wedded harlot, rich and undisgraced, The viler prostitute in mind and deed.

Drunk.

The filthy beast! And is he here again,
With his foul slobbering mouth and shuffling feet,
To taint the atmosphere and shame the street,
And shock the pure and holy that abstain?
Disgusting brute! Disgraceful blot and stain
On social order, civilized and sweet!
Deal with him, Constable, as right and meet
When laws are flouted that we must maintain.

Put him in prison! Confiscate his bowl!
Away with him and the accursed drink
That wrecks his body and degrades his soul,
And makes him loathsome to clean men! But think
He had no choice. It was his only share
Of all its pleasures that the world could spare.

Fashion.

See those resplendent creatures, as they glide
O'er scarlet carpet, between footmen tall,
From sumptuous carriage to effulgent hall
A dazzling vision in their pomp and pride!
See that choice supper needless cast aside
Though worth a thousand fortunes, counting all,
To them for whom no crumb of it will fall
The starved and homeless in the street outside.

Some day the little great god will decree
That overmuch connotes the underbred,
That pampered body means an empty head,
And wealth displayed the last vulgarity.
When selfish greed becomes a social sin
The world's regeneration may begin.

The Mob.

Why stand dumbfounded and aghast,

Drunk.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

As at invading armies sweeping by,
Surprised by haggard face and threatening cry,
The storm unheralded, that rose so fast?
Men, with gaunt wives and hungry children, cast
Upon the wintry streets to thief or die,
They cannot always suffer silently;
Patience gives out. The poor worm turns at last.

And not ear listens to the warning call.
No eye awakes to see the portent dread.
Must brute force reign and social order fall
Ere these starved millions can be clothed and fed?
A strange phenomenon, this unconcern
To live so fast and be so slow to learn!

Wasted.

Each day another soldier in the van,
Each day a new young worker in the fields,
And every day more plenteous harvest—yields
From human toil, to bless and not to ban
A better world, upon a better plan.
And, daily strengthening the arms he wields,
And more disdainful of old shifts and shields,
An ever nobler and diviner Man.

But, oh, how few the saved, how small the gain,
How poor the profit as against the cost, The waste of life potential, vast and fair,
In soul unfructified and starveling brain,
Of Power that might have been, and might be lost For want of common food and common air!

Honour.

Me let the world disparage and despise
The world, that hugs its soul—corroding chains,
The world, that spends for such ignoble gains.
Let foe or bigot wrap my name in lies;
Let Justice, blind and maimed and halt, chastise
The rebel—spirit surging in my veins;
Let the Law deal me penalties and pains;
Let me be outcast in my neighbours' eyes.

But let me fall not in my own esteem,
By poor deceit or petty greed debased; Let me be clean from undetected shame;
Know myself true, though heretic I seem;

Wasted.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Know myself faithful, howsoe'er disgraced; Upright and strong, for all the load of blame.

Despair.

Alone! Alone! No beacon, far or near!
No chart, no compass, and no anchor stay!
Like melting fog, the mirage melts away
In all-surrounding darkness, void and clear,
Drifting, I spread vain hands, and vainly peer,
And vainly call for pilot weep and pray;
Beyond these limits not the faintest ray
Shows the distant coast whereto the lost may steer.

O what is Life, if we must hold it thus,
As wind-blown sparks hold momentary fire? What are these gifts without the larger boon?
O what is Art, or Wealth, or Fame to us
Who scarce have time to know what we desire? O what is Love, if we must part so soon?

Faith.

And is the Great Cause lost beyond recall?
Have all the hopes of ages come to nought?
Is Life no more with noble meaning fraught?
Is Life but Death, and Love its funeral pall?
Maybe. But still on bended knees I fall,
Filled with a faith no preacher ever taught.
Oh God **my** God, by no false prophet wrought,
I believe still, in despite of it all!

Let go the myths and creeds of groping men.
This clay knows nought the Potter understands.
I own that Power divine beyond my ken,
And still can leave me in His shaping hands.
But, O my God, that madest me to feel!
Forgive the anguish of the turning wheel.

Peace.

(July 28, 1887).

The red-rose flush fades slowly in the west.
The golden water, basking in the light,
Pales to clear amber and to silver white.
The velvet shadow of a flame-crowned crest
Lies dark and darker on its shining breast,

Despair.

The Hand in the Dark and Other Poems

Till lonely mere and isle and mountain–height
Grow dim as dreams in tender mist of night,
And all is tranquil as a babe at rest.

So still! So calm! Will our life's eve come thus?

No sound of strife, of labour or of pain, No ring of woodman's axe, no dip of oar.
Will work be done, and night's rest earned, for us?

And shall we wake to see sunrise again? Or shall we sleep, to see and know no more?

About This Poem. "The left hand in other languages can be gauche or sinister. In English it might seem left out or left behind" and poetically it certainly is, though linguistically the hand's left comes not from the past tense of leave but from an Old English word meaning weak. The right hand is...well, right. One hand is dominant. And they both, like the moon, have darker and lighter sides. Surely our wordless hands have a lot on their minds." James Richardson. These thoughts, and others like them, passed and repassed through Miss Heredith's mind as she sat, day after day, in her nephew's sick room. It was her custom to take her needlework there of an afternoon, and relieve the nurse for two or three hours. He held out his hand to Musard, who was surprised by the strength of his grip. He eyed the young man critically, and thought he looked fairly well considering the ordeal he had passed through. "I am glad to see you better, Phil," he said. "I am completely in the dark. Has anybody been arrested for the murder of my wife?" He spoke in a dry impersonal tone as though of some occurrence in which he had but a remote interest, but Musard was too keen a judge of men to be deceived by his apparent calmness. Around the clustered chimneys clung the ivy's wreathed and braided threads, And dappled lights and shadows flung across the sombre browns and reds; Where the graver's hand had been, it spread its tendrils bright and green. Far-stretching branches shadowed deep the blazoned windows and broad eaves, And rocked the faithful rooks asleep, and strewed the terraces with leaves.