

Classic Poetry Series

Thomas Bailey Aldrich
- poems -

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Thomas Bailey Aldrich(November 11, 1836 – March 19, 1907)

an American poet, novelist, travel writer and editor.

Early life and education

Thomas Bailey Aldrich was born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire on November 11, 1836. When Aldrich was a child, his father moved to New Orleans. After 10 years, Aldrich was sent back to Portsmouth to prepare for college. This period of his life is partly described in his semi-autobiographical novel *The Story of a Bad Boy* (1870), in which "Tom Bailey" is the juvenile hero. Critics have said that this novel contains the first realistic depiction of childhood in American fiction and prepared the ground for *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Career

His father's death in 1849 compelled Aldrich to abandon the idea of college. At age 16, he entered his uncle's business office in New York in 1852. Here he soon became a constant contributor to the newspapers and magazines. Aldrich quickly befriended other young poets, artists and wits of the metropolitan bohemia of the early 1860s. Among them were Edmund Clarence Stedman, Richard Henry Stoddard, Fitz Hugh Ludlow, Bayard Taylor and Walt Whitman. From 1856 to 1859, Aldrich was on the staff of the *Home Journal*, then edited by Nathaniel Parker Willis. During the Civil War, he was the editor of the *New York Illustrated News*.

In 1865 Aldrich returned to New England, where he was editor in Boston for ten years for Ticknor and Fields—then at the height of their prestige—of the eclectic weekly *Every Saturday*. It was discontinued in 1875. From 1881 to 1890, Aldrich was editor of the important *Atlantic Monthly*.

Meanwhile Aldrich continued his private writing, both in prose and verse. His talent was many-sided. He was well-known for his form in poetry. His successive volumes of verse, chiefly *The Ballad of Babie Bell* (1856), *Pampinea, and Other Poems* (1861), *Cloth of Gold* (1874), *Flower and Thorn* (1876), *Friar Jerome's Beautiful Book* (1881), *Mercedes and Later Lyrics* (1883), *Wyndham Towers* (1889), and the collected editions of 1865, 1882, 1897 and 1900, showed him to be a poet of lyrical skill and light touch. Critics believed him to show the influence of Robert Herrick.

Aldrich's longer narrative or dramatic poems were not as successful. No American poet of the time showed more skill in describing some single picture, mood, conceit or episode. His best work was such lyrics as "Hesperides," "When the Sultan goes to Ispahan," "Before the Rain," "Nameless Pain," "The Tragedy," "Seadrift," "Tiger Lilies," "The One White Rose," "Palabras Cariñosas," "Destiny," or the eight-line poem "Identity". This added more to Aldrich's reputation than any of his writing after Babie Bell.

Beginning with the collection of stories entitled *Marjorie Daw and Other People* (1873), Aldrich wrote works of realism and quiet humor. His novels *Prudence Palfrey* (1874), *The Queen of Sheba* (1877), and *The Stillwater Tragedy* (1880) had more dramatic action. The first portrayed Portsmouth with the affectionate touch shown in the shorter humorous tale, *A Rivermouth Romance* (1877). In *An Old Town by the Sea* (1893), Aldrich commemorated his birthplace again. Travel and description are the theme of *From Ponkapog to Pesth* (1883).

Marriage and family

Aldrich married and had two sons.

In 1901, Aldrich's son Charles, married the year before, was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Aldrich built two houses, one for his son and one for him and his family, in Saranac Lake, New York, then the leading treatment center for the disease. On March 6, 1904, Charles Aldrich died of tuberculosis, age thirty-four. The family left Saranac Lake and never returned.

Aldrich died at Boston on March 19, 1907. His last words were recorded as, "In spite of it all, I am going to sleep; put out the lights." His *Life* was written by Ferris Greenslet (1908).

A Dedication

Take these rhymes into thy grace,
Since they are of thy begetting,
Lady, that dost make each place
Where thou art a jewel's setting.

Some such glamour lend this Book;
Let it be thy poet's wages
That henceforth thy gracious look
Lies reflected on its pages.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

A Mood

A blight, a gloom, I know not what, has crept upon my gladness--
Some vague, remote ancestral touch of sorrow, or of madness;
A fear that is not fear, a pain that has not pain's insistence;
A sense of longing, or of loss, in some foregone existence;
A subtle hurt that never pen has writ nor tongue has spoken--
Such hurt perchance as Nature feels when a blossomed bough is broken.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

A Petition

To spring belongs the violet, and the blown
Spice of the roses let the summer own.
Grant me this favor, Muse--all else withhold--
That I may not write verse when I am old.

And yet I pray you, Muse, delay the time!
Be not too ready to deny me rhyme;
And when the hour strikes, as it must, dear Muse,
I beg you very gently break the news.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

A Shadow Of The Night

Close on the edge of a midsummer dawn
In troubled dreams I went from land to land,
Each seven-colored like the rainbow's arc,
Regions where never fancy's foot had trod
Till then; yet all the strangeness seemed not strange,
At which I wondered, reasoning in my dream
With twofold sense, well knowing that I slept.
At last I came to this our cloud-hung earth,
And somewhere by the seashore was a grave,
A woman's grave, new-made, and heaped with flowers;
And near it stood an ancient holy man
That fain would comfort me, who sorrowed not
For this unknown dead woman at my feet.
But I, because his sacred office held
My reverence, listened; and 'twas thus he spake:--
'When next thou comest thou shalt find her still
In all the rare perfection that she was.
Thou shalt have gentle greeting of thy love!
Her eyelids will have turned to violets,
Her bosom to white lilies, and her breath
To roses. What is lovely never dies,
But passes into other loveliness,
Star-dust, or sea-foam, flower, or winged air.
If this befalls our poor unworthy flesh,
Think thee what destiny awaits the soul!
What glorious vesture it shall wear at last!
While yet he spoke, seashore and grave and priest
Vanished, and faintly from a neighboring spire
Fell five slow solemn strokes upon my ear.
Then I awoke with a keen pain at heart,
A sense of swift unutterable loss,
And through the darkness reached my hand to touch
Her cheek, soft-pillowed on one restful palm--
To be quite sure!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

A Touch Of Nature

When first the crocus thrusts its point of gold
Up through the still snow-drifted garden mould,
And folded green things in dim woods unclose
Their crinkled spears, a sudden tremor goes
Into my veins and makes me kith and kin
To every wild-born thing that thrills and blows.
Sitting beside this crumbling sea-coal fire,
Here in the city's ceaseless roar and din,
Far from the brambly paths I used to know,
Far from the rustling brooks that slip and shine
Where the Neponset alders take their glow,
I share the tremulous sense of bud and briar
And inarticulate ardors of the vine.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Act V

[MIDNIGHT.]

First, two white arms that held him very close,
And ever closer as he drew him back
Reluctantly, the loose gold-colored hair
A thousand delicate fibers reaching out
Still to detain him; then some twenty steps
Of iron staircse winding round and down,
And ending in a narrow gallery hung
With Gobelin tapestries--Andromeda
Rescued by Perseus, and the sleek Diana
With her nymphs bathing; at the farther end
A door that gave upon a starlit grove
Of citron and clipt palm-trees; then a path
As bleached as moonlight, with the shadow of leaves
Stamped black upon it; next a vine-clad length
Of solid masonry; and last of all
A Gothic archway packed with night, and then--
A sudden gleaming dagger through his heart.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

After The Rain

THE rain has ceased, and in my room
The sunshine pours an airy flood;
And on the church's dizzy vane
The ancient cross is bathed in blood.
From out the dripping ivy leaves,
Antiquely carven, gray and high,
A dormer, facing westward, looks
Upon the village like an eye.
And now it glimmers in the sun,
A globe of gold, a disk, a speck;
And in the belfry sits a dove
With purple ripples on her neck.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Alec Yeaton's Son

GLOUCESTER, AUGUST, 1720

The wind it wailed, the wind it moaned,
And the white caps flecked the sea;
"An' I would to God," the skipper groaned,
"I had not my boy with me!

Snug in the stern-sheets, little John
Laughed as the scud swept by;
But the skipper's sunburnt cheeks grew wan
As he watched the wicked sky.

"Would he were at his mother's side!"
And the skipper's eyes were dim.
"Good Lord in heaven, if ill betide,
What would become of him!

"For me--my muscles are as steel,
For me let hap what may;
I might make shift upon the keel
Until the break o' day.

"But he, he is so weak and small,
So young, scarce learned to stand--
O pitying Father of us all,
I trust him in Thy hand!

"For Thou, who makest from on high
A sparrow's fall--each one!--
Surely, O Lord, thou'lt have an eye
On Alec Yeaton's son!"

Then, helm hard-port; right straight he sailed
Towards the headland light:
The wind it moaned, the wind it wailed,
And black, black fell the night.

Then burst a storm to make one quail
Though housed from winds and waves--

They who could tell about that gale
Must rise from watery graves!

Sudden it came, as sudden went;
Ere half the night was sped,
The winds were hushed, the waves were spent,
And the stars shone overhead.

Now, as the morning mist grew thin,
The folk on Gloucester shore
Saw a little figure floating in
Secure, on a broken oar!

Up rose the cry, "A wreck! a wreck!
Pull, mates, and waste no breath!"--
They knew it, though 't was but a speck
Upon the edge of death!

Long did they marvel in the town
At God his strange decree,
That let the stalwart skipper drown
And the little child go free!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

An Alpine Picture

Stand here and look, and softly draw your breath
Lest the dread avalanche come crashing down!
How many leagues away is yonder town
Set flower-wise in the valley? Far beneath
Out feet lies summer; here a realm of death,
Where never flower has blossomed nor bird flown.
The ancient water-courses are all strown
With drifts of snow, fantastic wreath on wreath;
And peak on peak against the stainless blue
The Alps like towering campanili stand,
Wondrous, with pinnacles of frozen rain,
Silvery, crystal, like the prism in hue.
O tell me, love, if this be Switzerland --
Or is it but the frost-work on the pane?

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

An Elective Course

LINES FOUND AMONG THE PAPERS OF A HARVARD UNDERGRADUATE

The bloom that lies on Fanny's cheek
Is all my Latin, all my Greek;
The only sciences I know
Are frowns that gloom and smiles that glow;
Siberia and Italy
Lie in her sweet geography;
No scholarship have I but such
As teaches me to love her much.

Why should I strive to read the skies,
Who know the midnight of her eyes?
Why should I go so very far
To learn what heavenly bodies are!
Not Berenice's starry hair
With Fanny's tresses can compare;
Not Venus on a cloudless night,
Enslaving Science with her light,
Ever reveals so much as when
She stares and droops her lids again.

If Nature's secrets are forbidden
To mortals, she may keep them hidden.
Æons and æons we progressed
And did not let that break our rest;
Little we cared if Mars o'erhead
Were or were not inhabited;
Without the aid of Saturn's rings
Fair girls were wived in those fair springs;
Warm lips met ours, and conquered us
Or ere thou wert, Copernicus!

Graybeards, who wish to bridge the chasm
'Twixt man to-day and protoplasm,
Who theorize and probe and gape,
And finally evolve an ape--
Yours is a harmless sort of cult,
If you are pleased with the result.

Some folks admit, with cynic grace,
That you have rather proved your case.
Those dogmatists are so severe!
Enough for me that Fanny's here,
Enough that, having survived
Pre-Eveic forms, she has arrived--
An illustration the completest
Of the survival of the sweetest.

Linnæus aveunt! I only care
To know what flower she wants to wear.
I leave it to the addle-pated
To guess how pinks originated,
As if it mattered! The chief thing
Is that we have them in the Spring,
And Fanny likes them. When they come,
I straightaway send and purchase some.
The Origin of Plants--go to!
Their proper end I have in view.

O loveliest book that ever man
Looked into since the world began
Is Woman! As I turn those pages,
As fresh as in the primal ages,
As day by day I scan, perplexed,
The ever subtly changing text,
I feel that I am slowly growing
To think no other work worth knowing.
And in my copy--there is none
So perfect as the one I own--
I find no thing set down as such
As teaches me to love it much.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

An Ode

I

NOT with slow, funereal sound
Come we to this sacred ground;
Not with wailing fife and solemn muffled drum,
Bringing a cypress wreath
To lay, with bended knee,
On the cold brows of Death—
Not so, dear God, we come,
But with the trumpets' blare
And shot-torn battle-banners flung to air,
As for a victory!

Hark to the measured tread of martial feet,
The music and the murmurs of the street!
No bugle breathes this day
Disaster and retreat!—
Hark, how the iron lips
Of the great battle-ships
Salute the City from her azure Bay!

II

Time was—time was, ah, unforgotten years!—
We paid our hero tribute of our tears.
But now let go
All sounds and signs and formulas of woe:
'T is Life, not Death, we celebrate;
To Life, not Death, we dedicate
This storied bronze, whereon is wrought
The lithe immortal figure of our thought,
To show forever to men's eyes,
Our children's children's children's eyes,
How once he stood
In that heroic mood,
He and his dusky braves
So fain of glorious graves!—
One instant stood, and then
Drave through that cloud of purple steel and flame,
Which wrapt him, held him, gave him not again,

But in its trampled ashes left to Fame
An everlasting name!

III

That was indeed to live—
At one bold swoop to wrest
From darkling death the best
That death to life can give.
He fell as Roland fell
That day at Roncevaux,
With foot upon the ramparts of the foe!
A pæan, not a knell,
For heroes dying so!
No need for sorrow here,
No room for sigh or tear,
Save such rich tears as happy eyelids know.
See where he rides, our Knight!
Within his eyes the light
Of battle, and youth's gold about his brow;
Our Paladin, our Soldier of the Cross,
Not weighing gain with loss—
World-loser, that won all
Obeying duty's call!
Not his, at peril's frown,
A pulse of quicker beat;
Not his to hesitate
And parley hold with Fate,
But proudly to fling down
His gauntlet at her feet.
O soul of loyal valor and white truth,
Here, by this iron gate,
Thy serried ranks about thee as of yore,
Stand thou for evermore
In thy undying youth!

The tender heart, the eagle eye!
Oh, unto him belong
The homages of Song;
Our praises and the praise
Of coming days
To him belong—

To him, to him, the dead that shall not die!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Andromeda

The smooth-worn coin and threadbare classic phrase
Of Grecian myths that did beguile my youth,
Beguile me not as in the olden days:
I think more grief and beauty dwell with truth.
Andromeda, in fetters by the sea,
Star-pale with anguish till young Perseus came,
Less moves me with her suffering than she,
The slim girl figure fettered to dark shame,
That nightly haunts the park, there, like a shade,
Trailing her wretchedness from street to street.
See where she passes -- neither wife nor maid;
How all mere fiction crumbles at her feet!
Here is woe's self, and not the mask of woe:
A legend's shadow shall not move you so!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Appreciation

TO the sea-shell's spiral round
'T is your heart that brings the sound:
The soft sea-murmurs that you hear
Within, are captured from your ear.

You do poets and their song
A grievous wrong,
If your own soul does not bring
To their high imagining
As much beauty as they sing.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

At A Reading

The spare professor, grave and bald,
Began his paper. It was called,
I think, "A Brief Historic Glance
At Russia, Germany, and France."
A glance, but to my best belief
'T was almost anything but brief--
A wide survey, in which the earth
Was seen before mankind had birth;
Strange monsters basked them in the sun,
Behemoth, armored glyptodon,
And in the dawn's unpractised ray
The transient dodo winged its way;
Then, by degrees, through slit and slough,
We reached Berlin--I don't know how.
The good Professor's monotone
Had turned me into senseless stone
Instantly, but that near me sat
Hypatia in her new spring hat,
Blue-eyed, intent, with lips whose bloom
Lighted the heavy-curtained room.
Hypatia--ah, what lovely things
Are fashioned out of eighteen springs!
At first, in sums of this amount,
The eighteen winters do not count.
Just as my eyes were growing dim
With heaviness, I saw that slim,
Erect, elastic figure there,
Like a pond-lily taking air.
She looked so fresh, so wise, so neat,
So altogether crisp and sweet,
I quite forgot what Bismarck said,
And why the Emperor shook his head,
And how it was Von Moltke's frown
Cost France another frontier town.
The only facts I took away
From the Professor's theme that day
Were these: a forehead broad and low,
Such as antique sculptures show;
A chin to Greek perfection true;

Eyes of Astarte's tender blue;
A high complexion without fleck
Or flaw, and curls about her neck.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

At Bay Ridge, Long Island

Pleasant it is to lie amid the grass
Under these shady locusts, half the day,
Watching the ships reflected on the Bay,
Topmast and shroud, as in a wizard's glass;
To note the swift and meagre swallow pass,
Brushing the dewdrops from the lilac spray;
Or else to sit and while the noon away
With some old love-tale; or to muse, alas!
On Dante in his exile, sorrow-worn;
On Milton, blind, with inward-seeing eyes
That made their own deep midnight and rich morn;
To think that now, beneath Italian skies,
In such clear air as this, by Tiber's wave,
Daisies are trembling over Keats's grave.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

At Stratford-Upon-Avon

Thus spake his dust (so seemed it as I read
The words): Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
(Poor ghost!) To digg the dust enclosed here --
Then came the malediction on the head
Of whoso dare disturb the sacred dead.
Outside the mavis whistled strong and clear,
The winding Avon murmured in its bed,
But in the solemn Stratford church the air
Was chill and dank, and on the foot-worn tomb
The evening shadows deepened momentarily.
Then a great awe fell on me, standing there,
As if some speechless presence in the gloom
Was hovering, and fain would speak with me.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

At The Funeral Of A Minor Poet

[One of the Bearers Soliloquizes:]

. . . Room in your heart for him, O Mother Earth,
Who loved each flower and leaf that made you fair,
And sang your praises in verses manifold
And delicate, with here and there a line
From end to end in blossom like a bough
The May breathes on, so rich it was. Some thought
The workmanship more costly than the thing
Moulded or carved, as in those ornaments
Found at Mycæne. And yet Nature's self
Works in this wise; upon a blade of grass,
Or what small note she lends the woodland thrush,
Lavishing endless patience. He was born
Artist, not artisan, which some few saw
And many dreamed not. As he wrote no odes
When Croesus wedded or Mæcenæ died,
And gave no breath to civic feasts and shows,
He missed the glare that gilds more facile men--
A twilight poet, groping quite alone,
Belated, in a sphere where every nest
Is emptied of its music and its wings.
Not great his gift; yet we can poorly spare
Even his slight perfection in an age
Of limping triolets and tame rondeaux.
He had at least ideals, though unreached,
And heard, far off, immortal harmonies,
Such as fall coldly on our ear to-day.
The mighty Zolastic Movement now
Engrosses us--a miasmatic breath
Blown from the slums. We paint life as it is,
The hideous side of it, with careful pains,
Making a god of the dull Commonplace.
For have we not the old gods overthrown
And set up strangest idols? We would clip
Imagination's wing and kill delight,
Our sole art being to leave nothing out
That renders art offensive. Not for us
Madonnas leaning from their starry thrones

Ineffable, nor any heaven-wrought dream
Of sculptor or of poet; we prefer
Such nightmare visions as in morbid brains
Take shape and substance, thoughts that taint the air
And make all life unlovely. Will it last?
Beauty alone endures from age to age,
From age to age endures, handmaid of God.
Poets who walk with her on earth go hence
Bearing a talisman. You bury one,
With his hushed music, in some Potter's Field;
The snows and rains blot out his very name,
As he from life seems blotted; through Time's glass
Slip the invisible and magic sands
That mark the century, then falls a day
The world is suddenly conscious of a flower,
Imperishable, ever to be prized,
Sprung from the mould of a forgotten grave.
'T is said the seeds wrapt up among the balms
And hieroglyphics of Egyptian kings
old strange vitality, and, planted, grow
After the lapse of thrice a thousand years.
Some day, perchance, some unregarded note
Of our poor friend here--some sweet minor chord
That failed to lure our more accustomed ear--
Way with the fancy of an unborn age.
Who knows, since seeds have such tenacity?
Meanwhile he's dead, with scantiest laurel won
And little of our Nineteenth Century gold.
So, take him, Earth, and this his mortal part,
With that shrewd alchemy thou hast, transmute
To flower and leaf in thine unending springs!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Baby Bell

I

Have you not heard the poets tell
How came the dainty Baby Bell
Into this world of ours?
The gates of heaven were left ajar:
With folded hands and dreamy eyes,
Wandering out of Paradise,
She saw this planet, like a star,
Hung in the glistening depths of even -
Its bridges, running to and fro,
O'er which the white-winged Angels go,
Bearing the holy Dead to heaven.
She touched a bridge of flowers - those feet,
So light they did not bend the bells
Of the celestial asphodels,
They fell like dew upon the flowers:
Then all the air grew strangely sweet.
And thus came dainty Baby Bell
Into this world of ours.

II

She came and brought delicious May;
The swallows built beneath the eaves;
Like sunlight, in and out the leaves
The robins went, the livelong day;
The lily swung its noiseless bell;
And on the porch the slender vine
Held out its cups of fairy wine.
How tenderly the twilights fell!
Oh, earth was full of singing-birds
And opening springtide flowers,
When the dainty Baby Bell
Came to this world of ours.

III

O Baby, dainty Baby Bell,

How fair she grew from day to day!
What woman-nature filled her eyes,
What poetry within them lay -
Those deep and tender twilight eyes,
So full of meaning, pure and bright
As if she yet stood in the light
Of those oped gates of Paradise.
And so we loved her more and more:
Ah, never in our hearts before
Was love so lovely born:
We felt we had a link between
This real world and that unseen -
The land beyond the morn;
And for the love of those dear eyes,
For love of her whom God led forth,
(The mother's being ceased on earth
When Baby came from Paradise,) -
For love of Him who smote our lives,
And woke the chords of joy and pain,
We said, Dear Christ! - our hearts bowed down
Like violets after rain.

IV

And now the orchards, which were white
And pink with blossoms when she came,
Were rich in autumn's mellow prime;
The clustered apples burnt like flame,
The folded chestnut burst its shell,
The grapes hung purpling, range on range;
And time wrought just as rich a change
In little Baby Bell.
Her lissome form more perfect grew,
And in her features we could trace,
In softened curves, her mother's face.
Her angel-nature ripened too:
We thought her lovely when she came,
But she was holy, saintly now...
Around her pale angelic brow
We saw a slender ring of flame.

V

God's hand had taken away the seal
That held the portals of her speech;
And oft she said a few strange words
Whose meaning lay beyond our reach.
She never was a child to us,
We never held her being's key;
We could not teach her holy things
Who was Christ's self in purity.

VI

It came upon us by degrees,
We saw its shadow ere it fell -
The knowledge that our God had sent
His messenger for Baby Bell.
We shuddered with unlanguage'd pain,
And all our hopes were changed to fears,
And all our thoughts ran into tears
Like sunshine into rain.
We cried aloud in our belief,
'Oh, smite us gently, gently, God!
Teach us to bend and kiss the rod,
And perfect grow through grief.'
Ah! how we loved her, God can tell;
Her heart was folded deep in ours.
Our hearts are broken, Baby Bell!

VII

At last he came, the messenger,
The messenger from unseen lands:
And what did dainty Baby Bell?
She only crossed her little hands,
She only looked more meek and fair!
We parted back her silken hair,
We wove the roses round her brow -
White buds, the summer's drifted snow -
Wrapped her from head to foot in flowers...
And thus went dainty Baby Bell
Out of this world of ours.

Batuschka

[Author's Note: The title means "little father" or "dear little father", a term of endearment applied to the Tsar in Russian folk-song. --T.B.A.]

From yonder gilded minaret
Beside the steel-blue Neva set,
I faintly catch, from time to time,
The sweet, aerial midnight chime--
"God save the Tsar!"

Above the ravelins and the moats
Of the white citadel it floats;
And men in dungeons far beneath
Listen, and pray, and gnash their teeth--
"God save the Tsar!"

The soft reiterations sweep
Across the horror of their sleep,
As if some dæmon in his glee
Were mocking at their misery--
"God save the Tsar!"

In his Red Palace over there,
Wakeful, he needs must hear the prayer.
How can it drown the broken cries
Wrung from his children's agonies?--
"God save the Tsar!"

Father they called him from of old--
Batuschka! . . . How his heart is cold!
Wait till a million scourgèd men
Rise in their awful might, and then
God save the Tsar!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Before The Rain

E knew it would rain, for all the morn
A spirit on slender ropes of mist
Was lowering its golden buckets down
Into the vapory amethyst.
Of marshes and swamps and dismal fens--
Scooping the dew that lay in the flowers,
Dipping the jewels out of the sea,
To sprinkle them over the land in showers.
We knew it would rain, for the poplars showed
The white of their leaves, the amber grain
Shrunk in the wind--and the lightning now
Is tangled in tremulous skeins of rain!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Books And Seasons

Because the sky is blue; because blithe May
Masks in the wren's note and the lilac's hue;
Because -- in fine, because the sky is blue
I will read none but piteous tales to-day.
Keep happy laughter till the skies be gray,
And the sad season cypress wears, and rue;
Then, when the wind is moaning in the flue,
And ways are dark, bid Chaucer make us gay.
But now a little sadness! All too sweet
This springtide riot, this most poignant air,
This sensuous world of color and perfume.
So listen, love, while I the woes repeat
Of Hamlet and Ophelia, and that pair
Whose bridal bed was builded in a tomb.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Broken Music

I know not in what fashion she was made,
Nor what her voice was, when she used to speak,
Nor if the silken lashes threw a shade
On wan or rosy cheek.

I picture her with sorrowful vague eyes,
Illumed with such strange gleams of inner light
As linger in the drift of London skies
Ere twilight turns to night.

I know not; I conjecture. 'Twas a girl
That with her own most gentle desperate hand
From out God's mystic setting plucked life's pearl--
'Tis hard to understand.

So precious life is! Even to the old
The hours are as a miser's coins, and she--
Within her hands lay youth's unminted gold
And all felicity.

The winged impetuous spirit, the white flame
That was her soul once, whither has it flown?
Above her brow gray lichens blot her name
Upon the carven stone.

This is her Book of Verses--wren-like notes,
Shy franknesses, blind gropings, haunting fears;
At times across the chords abruptly floats
A mist of passionate tears.

A fragile lyre too tensely keyed and strung,
A broken music, weirdly incomplete:
Here a proud mind, self-baffled and self-stung,
Lies coiled in dark defeat.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

By The Potomac

The soft new grass is creeping o'er the graves
By the Potomac; and the crisp ground-flower
Tilts its blue cup to catch the passing shower;
The pine-cone ripens, and the long moss waves
Its tangled gonfalons above our braves.
Hark, what a burst of music from yon bower! --
The Southern nightingale that hour by hour
In its melodious summer madness raves.
Ah, with what delicate touches of her hand,
With what sweet voice of bird and rivulet
And drowsy murmur of the rustling leaf
Would Nature soothe us, bidding us forget
The awful crime of this distracted land
And all our heavy heritage of grief.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Corydon

A PASTORAL

SCENE: A roadside in Arcady

SHEPHERD.

Good sir, have you seen pass this way
A mischief straight from market-day?
You'd know her at a glance, I think;
Her eyes are blue, her lips are pink;
She has a way of looking back
Over her shoulder, and, alack!
Who gets that look one time, good sir,
Has naught to do but follow her.

PILGRIM.

I have not seen this maid, methinks,
Though she that passed had lips like pinks.

SHEPHERD.

Or like two strawberries made one
By some sly trick of dew and sun.

PILGRIM.

A poet!

SHEPHERD.

Nay, a simple swain
That tends his flock on yonder plain,
Naught else, I swear by book and bell.
But she that passed, you marked her well.
Was she not smooth as any be
That dwell herein in Arcady?

PILGRIM.

Her skin was as the satin bark
Of birches

SHEPHERD.

Light or dark?

PILGRIM.

Quite dark.

SHEPHERD.

Then 'twas not she.

PILGRIM.

The peach's side
That's next the sun is not so dyed
As was her cheek. Her hair hung down
Like summer twilight falling brown;
And when the breeze swept by, I wist
Her face was in a sombre mist.

SHEPHERD.

No, that is not the maid I seek.
Her hair lies gold against the cheek;
Her yellow tresses take the morn
Like silken tassles of the corn.
And yet--brown locks are far from bad.

PILGRIM.

Now I bethinks me, this one had
A figure like the willow-tree
Which, slight and supple, wondrously
Inclines to droop with pensive grace,
And still retains its proper place;
A foot so arched and very small
The marvel was she walked at all;

Her hand--in sooth I lack for words--
her hand, five slender snow-white birds.
Her voice--though she but said "God-speed"--
Was melody blown through a reed;
The girl Pan changed into a pipe
Had not a note so full and ripe.
And then her eye--my lad her eye!
Discreet, inviting, candid, shy,
An outward ice, an inward fire,
And lashes to the heart's desire--
Soft fringes blacker than the sloe.

SHEPHERD.

Good sir, which way did this one go?

PILGRIM, solus.

So, he is off! The silly youth
Knoweth not love in sober sooth.
He loves, thus lads at first are blind--
No woman, only Womankind.
I needs must laugh, for, by the Mass,
No maid at all did this way pass!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Destiny

Three roses, wan as moonlight, and weighed down
Each with its loveliness as with a crown,
Drooped in a florist's window in a town.

The first a lover bought. It lay at rest,
Like flower on flower, that night, on Beauty's breast.

The second rose, as virginal and fair,
Shrunk in the tangles of a harlot's hair.

The third, a widow, with new grief made wild,
Shut in the icy palm of her dead child.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Echo Song

I

Who can say where Echo dwells?
In some mountain-cave, methinks,
Where the white owl sits and blinks;
Or in deep sequestered dells,
Where foxglove hangs its bells,
Echo dwells.

Echo!

Echo!

II

Phantom of the crystal Air,
Daughter of sweet Mystery!
Here is one has need of thee;
Lead him to thy secret lair,
Myrtle brings he for thy hair--
Hear his prayer,

Echo!

Echo!

III

Echo lift thy drowsy head,
And repeat each charm'd word
Thou must needs have overheard
Yestere'en ere, rosy-red,
Daphne down the valley fled--
Words unsaid,

Echo!

Echo!

IV

Breathe the vows she since denies!
She hath broken every vow;
What she would she would not now--
Thou didst hear her perjuries.

Whisper, whilst I shut my eyes,
Those sweet lies,
Echo!
Echo!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Egypt

Fantastic sleep is busy with my eyes;
I seem in some waste solitude to stand
Once ruled of Cheops; upon either hand
A dark illimitable desert lies,
Sultry and still -- a zone of mysteries.
A wide-browed Sphinx, half buried in the sand,
With orbless sockets stares across the land,
The wofulest thing beneath these brooding skies
Save that loose heap of bleached bones, that lie
Where haply some poor Bedouin crawled to die.
Lo! while I gaze, beyond the vast sand-sea
The nebulous clouds are downward slowly drawn,
And one bleared star, faint glimmering like a bee,
Is shut in the rosy outstretched hand of Dawn.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Eidolons

Those forms we fancy shadows, those strange lights
That flash on lone morasses, the quick wind
That smites us by the roadside are the Night's
Innumerable children. Unconfined
By shroud or coffin, disembodied souls,
Still on probation, steal into the air
From ancient battlefields and churchyard knolls
At the day's ending. Pestilence and despair
Fly with the startled bats at set of sun;
And wheresoever murders have been done,
In crowded palaces or lonely woods,
Where'er a soul has sold itself and lost
Its high inheritance, there, hovering, broods
Some mute, invisible, accursèd ghost.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Ellen Terry In The Merchant Of Venice

As there she lives and moves upon the scene,
So lived and moved this radiant womanhood
In Shakespeare's vision; in such wise she stood
Smiling upon Bassanio; such her mien
When pity dimmed her eyelids' golden sheen,
Hearing Antonio's story, and the blood
Paled on her cheek, and all her lightsome mood
Was gone. This shape in Shakespeare's thought has been!
Thus dreamt he of her in gray London town;
Such were her eyes; on such gold-colored hair
The grave young judge's velvet cap was set;
So stood she lovely in her crimson gown.
Mine were a happy cast, could I but snare
Her beauty in a sonnet's fragile net.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Elmwood

Here, in the twilight, at the well-known gate
I linger, with no heart to enter more.
Among the elm-tops the autumnal air
Murmurs, and spectral in the fading light
A solitary heron wings its way
Southward--save this no sound or touch of life.
Dark is the window where the scholar's lamp
Was used to catch a pallor from the dawn.

Yet I must needs a little linger here.
Each shrub and tree is eloquent of him,
For tongueless things and silence have their speech.
This is the path familiar to his foot
From infancy to manhood and old age;
For in a chamber of that ancient house
His eyes first opened on the mystery
Of life, and all the splendor of the world.
Here, as a child, in loving, curious way,
He watched the bluebird's coming; learned the date
Of hyacinth and goldenrod, and made
Friends of those little redmen of the elms,
And slyly added to their winter store
Of hazel-nuts: no harmless thing that breathed,
Footed or winged, but knew him for a friend.
The gilded butterfly was not afraid
To trust its gold to that so gentle hand,
The bluebird fled not from the pendent spray.
Ah, happy childhood, ringed with fortunate stars!
What dreams were his in this enchanted sphere,
What intuitions of high destiny!
The honey-bees of Hybla touched his lips
In that old New-World garden, unawares.

So in her arms did Mother Nature fold
Her poet, whispering what of wild and sweet
Into his ear--the state-affairs of birds,
The lore of dawn and sunset, what the wind
Said in the tree-tops--fine, unfathomed things
Henceforth to turn to music in his brain:

A various music, now like notes of flutes,
And now like blasts of trumpets blown in wars.
Later he paced this leafy academe
A student, drinking from Greek chalices
The ripened vintage of the antique world.
And here to him came love, and love's dear loss;
Here honors came, the deep applause of men
Touched to the heart by some swift-winged word
That from his own full heart took eager flight--
Some strain of piercing sweetness or rebuke,
For underneath his gentle nature flamed
A noble scorn for all ignoble deed,
Himself a bondman till all men were free.

Thus passed his manhood; then to other lands
He strayed, a stainless figure among courts
Beside the Manzanares and the Thames.
Whence, after too long exile, he returned
With fresher laurel, but sedater step
And eye more serious, fain to breathe the air
Where through the Cambridge marshes the blue Charles
Uncoils its length and stretches to the sea:
Stream dear to him, at every curve a shrine
For pilgrim Memory. Again he watched
His loved syringa whitening by the door,
And knew the catbird's welcome; in his walks
Smiled on his tawny kinsmen of the elms
Stealing his nuts; and in the ruined year
Sat at his widowed hearthside with bent brows
Leonine, frosty with the breath of time,
And listened to the crooning of the wind
In the wide Elmwood chimneys, as of old.
And then--and then....

The after-glow has faded from the elms,
And in the denser darkness of the boughs
From time to time the firefly's tiny lamp
Sparkles. How often in still summer dusks
He paused to note that transient phantom spark
Flash on the air--a light that outlasts him!

The night grows chill, as if it felt a breath

Blown from that frozen city where he lies.
All things turn strange. The leaf that rustles here
Has more than autumn's mournfulness. The place
Is heavy with his absence. Like fixed eyes
Whence the dear light of sense and thought has fled,
The vacant windows stare across the lawn.
The wise sweet spirit that informed it all
Is elsewhere. The house itself is dead.

O autumn wind among the sombre pines,
Breathe you his dirge, but be it sweet and low.
With deep refrains and murmurs of the sea,
Like to his verse--the art is yours alone.
His once--you taught him. Now no voice but yours!
Tender and low, O wind among the pines.
I would, were mine a lyre of richer strings,
In soft Sicilian accents wrap his name.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Enamored Architect Of Airy Rhyme

Enamored architect of airy rhyme,
Build as thou wilt, heed not what each man says:
Good souls, but innocent of dreamers' ways,
Will come, and marvel why thou wastest time;
Others, beholding how thy turrets climb
'Twixt theirs and heaven, will hate thee all thy days;
But most beware of those who come to praise.
O Wondersmith, O worker in sublime
And heaven-sent dreams, let art be all in all;
Build as thou wilt, unspoiled by praise or blame,
Build as thou wilt, and as thy light is given;
Then, if at last the airy structure fall,
Dissolve, and vanish -- take thyself no shame.
They fail, and they alone, who have not striven.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

England

While men pay reverence to mighty things,
They must revere thee, thou blue-cinctured isle
Of England-not to-day, but this long while
In front of nations, Mother of great kings,
Soldiers, and poets. Round thee the sea flings
His steel-bright arm, and shields thee from the guile
And hurt of France. Secure, with august smile,
Thou sittest, and the East its tribute brings.
Some say thy old-time power is on the wane,
Thy moon of grandeur, filled, contracts at length-
They see it darkening down from less to less.
Let but a hostile hand make threat again,
And they shall see thee in thy ancient strength,
Each iron sinew quivering, lioness!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Even This Will Pass Away

Touched with the delicate green of early May,
Or later, when the rose uplifts her face,
The world hangs glittering in starry space,
Fresh as a jewel found but yesterday.
And yet 'tis very old; what tongue may say
How old it is? Race follows upon race,
Forgetting and forgotten; in their place
Sink tower and temple; nothing long may stay.
We build on tombs, and live our day, and die;
From out our dust new towers and temples start;
Our very name becomes a mystery.
What cities no man ever heard of lie
Under the glacier, in the mountain's heart,
In violet glooms beneath the moaning sea!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Fannie

Fannie has the sweetest foot
Ever in a gaiter boot!
And the hoyden knows it,
And, of course, she shows it-
Not the knowledge, but the foot-
Yet with such a modest grace,
Never seems it out of place,
Ah, there are not many
Half so sly, or sad, or mad,
Or wickeder than Fannie.

Fannie has the blackest hair
Of any of the village girls;
It does not shower on her neck
In silken or coquettish curls.
It droops in folds around her brow,
As clouds, at night, around the moon,
Looped with lilies here and there,
In many a dangerous festoon.
And Fannie wears a gipsy hat,
Saucily-yes, all of that!
Ah, there are not many
Half so sly, or sad, or mad,
Or wickeder than Fannie.

Fannie wears an open dress-
Ah! the charming chemisette!
Half concealing, half revealing
Something far more charming yet.
Fannie draper her breast with lace,
As one would drape a costly vase
To keep away mischevius flies;
But lace can't keep away one's eyes,
For every time her bosom heaves,
Ah, it peepeth through it;
Yet Fannie looks the while as if
Never once she knew it.
Ah, there are not many
Half so sly, or sad, or mad,

Or innocent than Fannie.

Fannie lays her hand in mine;
Fannie speaks with naivete,
Fannie kisses me, she does!
In her own coquettish way.
Then softly speaks and deeply sighs,
With angels nestled in her eyes.
In the merrie month of May,
Fannie swears sincerely
She will be my own wife,
And love me dearly, dearly
Ever after all her life.
Ah, there are not many
Half so sly, or sad, or mad,
As my true-hearted Fannie.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Fredericksburg

The increasing moonlight drifts across my bed,
And on the churchyard by the road, I know
It falls as white and noiselessly as snow
'Twas such a night two weary summers fled;
The stars, as now, were waning overhead.
Listen! Again the shrill-lipped bugles blow
Where the swift currents of the river flow
Past Fredericksburg; far off the heavens are red
With sudden conflagration; on yon height,
Linstock in hand, the gunners hold their breath;
A signal rocket pierces the dense night,
Flings its spent stars upon the town beneath;
Hark! -- the artillery massing on the right,
Hark! -- the black squadrons wheeling down to Death!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Guilielmus Rex

The folk who lived in Shakespeare's day
And saw that gentle figure pass
By London Bridge, his frequent way--
They little knew what man he was.

The pointed beard, the courteous mien,
The equal port to high and low,
All this they saw or might have seen--
But not the light behind the brow!

The doublet's modest gray or brown,
The slender sword-hilt's plain device,
What sign had these for prince or clown?
Few turned, or none, to scan him twice.

Yet 't was the King of England's kings!
The rest with all their pomps and trains
Are mouldered, half-remembered things--
'T is he alone that lives and reigns!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Henry Howard Brownell

They never crowned him, never dreamed his worth,
And let him go unlaurelled to the grave:
Hereafter there are guerdons for the brave,
Roses for martyrs who wear thorns on earth,
Balms for bruised hearts that languish in the dearth
Of human love. So let the grasses wave
Above him nameless. Little did he crave
Men's praises: modestly, with kindly mirth,
Not sad nor bitter, he accepted fate --
Drank deep of life, knew books, and hearts of men,
Cities and camps, and war's immortal woe,
Yet bore through all (such virtue in him sate
His spirit is not whiter now than then)
A simple, loyal nature, pure as snow.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Heredity

A soldier of the Cromwell stamp,
With sword and psalm-book by his side,
At home alike in church and camp:
Austere he lived, and smileless died.

But she, a creature soft and fine-
From Spain, some say, some say from France;
Within her veins leapt blood like wine-
She led her Roundhead lord a dance!

In Grantham church they lie asleep;
Just where, the verger may not know.
Strange that two hundred years should keep
The old ancestral fires aglow!

In me these two have met again;
To each my nature owes a part:
To one, the cool and reasoning brain;
To one, the quick, unreasoning heart.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Hesperides

If thy soul, Herrick, dwelt with me,
This is what my songs would be:
Hints of our sea-breezes, blent
With odors from the Orient;
Indian vessels deep with spice;
Star-showers from the Norland ice;
Wine-red jewels that seem to hold
Fire, but only burn with cold;
Antique goblets, strangely wrought,
Filled with the wine of happy thought,
Bridal measure, vain regrets,
Laburnum buds and violets;
Hopeful as the break of day;
Clear as crystal; new as May;
Musical as brooks that run
O'er yellow shallows in the sun;
Soft as the satin fringe that shades
The eyelids of thy Devon maids;
Brief as thy lyrics, Herrick, are,
And polished as the bosom of a star.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

I Vex Me Not With Brooding On The Years

I vex me not with brooding on the years
That were ere I drew breath; why should I then
Distrust the darkness that may fall again
When life is done? Perchance in other spheres--
Dead planets--I once tasted mortal tears,
And walked as now among a throng of men,
Pondering things that lay beyond my ken,
Questioning death, and solacing my fears.
Ofttimes indeed strange sense I have of this,
Vague memories that hold me with a spell,
Touches of unseen lips upon my brow,
Breathing some incommunicable bliss!
In years foregone, O soul, was all not well?
Still lovelier life awaits thee. Fear not thou!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Identity

SOMEWHERE--in desolate wind-swept space--
In Twilight-land--in No-man's land--
Two hurrying Shapes met face to face,
And bade each other stand.

"And who are you?" cried one a-gape,
Shuddering in the gloaming light.
"I know not," said the second Shape,
"I only died last night!"

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

I'LI Not Confer With Sorrow

I'll not confer with Sorrow
Till to-morrow;
But Joy shall have her way
This very day.

Ho, eglantine and cresses
For her tresses!--
Let Care, the beggar, wait
Outside the gate.

Tears if you will--but after
Mirth and laughter;
Then, folded hands on breast
And endless rest.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

In Westminster Abbey

"The Southern Transept, hardly known by any other name but Poets' Corner"
DEAN STANLEY

Tread softly here; the sacreddest of tombs
Are those that hold your poets. Kings and queens
Are facile accidents of Time and Chance.
Chance sets them on the heights, they climb not there!
But he who from the darkling mass of men
Is on the wing of heavenly thought upborne
To finer ether, and becomes a voice
For all the voiceless, God annointed him:
His name shall be a star, his grave a shrine.

Tread softly here, in silent reverence tread.
Beneath those marble cenotaphs and urns
Lies richer dust than ever nature hid
Packed in the mountain's adamant heart,
Or slyly wrapt in unsuspected sand--
The dross men toil for, and oft stain the soul.
How vain and all ignoble seems that greed
To him who stands in this dim claustral air
With these most sacred ashes at his feet!
This dust was Chaucer, Spenser, Dryden this--
The spark that once illumed it lingers still.
O ever-hallowed spot of English earth!
If the unleashed and unhappy spirit of man
Have option to visit our dull globe,
What august Shades at midnight here convene
In the miraculous sessions of the moon,
When the great pulse of London faintly throbs,
And one by one the stars in heaven pale!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Invita Minerva

Not of desire alone is music born,
Not till the Muse wills is our passion crowned;
Unsought she comes; if sought, but seldom found,
Repaying thus our longing with her scorn.
Hence is it poets often are forlorn,
In super-subtle chains of silence bound,
And mid the crowds that compass them around
Still dwell in isolation night and morn,
With knitted brow and cheek all passion-pale
Showing the baffled purpose of the mind.
Hence is it I, that find no prayers avail
To move my Lyric mistress to be kind,
Have stolen away into this leafy dale
Drawn by the flutings of the silvery wind.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Kriss Kringle

Just as the moon was fading
Amid her misty rings,
And every stocking was stuffed
With childhood's precious things,

Old Kriss Kringle looked around,
And saw on the elm-tree bough,
High hung, an oriole's nest,
Lonely and empty now.

"Quite a stocking," he laughed,
"Hung up there on a tree!
I didn't suppose the birds
Expected a present from me!"

Then old Kriss Kringle, who loves
A joke as well as the best,
Dropped a handful of snowflakes
Into the oriole's empty nest.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Latakia

I.

When all the panes are hung with frost,
Wild wizard-work of silver lace,
I draw my sofa on the rug,
Before the ancient chimney-place.
Upon the painted tiles are mosques
And minarets, and here and there
A blind muezzin lifts his hands,
And calls the faithful unto prayer.
Folded in idle, twilight dreams,
I hear the hemlock chirp and sing,
As if within its ruddy core
It held the happy heart of Spring.
Ferdousi never sang like that,
Nor Saadi grave, nor Hafiz gay;
I lounge, and blow white rings of smoke,
And watch them rise and float away.

II.

The curling wreaths like turbans seem
Of silent slaves that come and go,—
Or Viziers, packed with craft and crime,
Whom I behead from time to time,
With pipe-stem, at a single blow.
And now and then a lingering cloud
Takes gracious form at my desire,
And at my side my lady stands,
Unwinds her veil with snowy hands,—
A shadowy shape, a breath of fire!

O Love, if you were only here
Beside me in this mellow light,
Though all the bitter winds should blow,
And all the ways be choked with snow,
'Twould be a true Arabian night!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

L'Eau Dormante

Curled up and sitting on her feet.
Within the window's deep embrasure,
Is Lydia; and across the street,
A lad, with eyes of roguish azure,
Watches her buried in her book.
In vain he tries to win a look,
And from the trellis over there
Blows sundry kisses through the air,
Which miss the mark, and fall unseen,
Uncared for. Lydia is thirteen.

My lad, if you, without abuse,
Will take advise from one who's wiser,
And put his wisdom to more use
Than ever yet did your adviser;
If you will let, as none will do,
Another's heartbreak serve for two,
You'll have a care, some four years hence,
How you lounge there by yonder fence
And blow those kisses through that screen--
For Lydia will be seventeen.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Like Crusoe, Walking By The Lonely Strand

Like Crusoe, walking by the lonely strand
And seeing a human footprint on the sand,
Have I this day been startled, finding here,
Set in brown mould, and delicately clear,
Spring's footprint--the first crocus of the year!
O sweet invasion! Farewell solitude!
Soon shall wild creatures of the field and wood
Flock from all sides with much ado and stir,
And make of me most willing prisoner!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Memory

My mind lets go a thousand things
Like dates of wars and deaths of kings,
And yet recalls the very hour--
'T was noon by yonder village tower,
And on the last blue noon in May--
The wind came briskly up this way,
Crisping the brook beside the road;
Then, pausing here, set down its load
Of pine-scents, and shook listlessly
Two petals from that wild-rose tree.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Miracles

Sick of myself and all that keeps the light
Of the wide heavens away from me and mine,
I climb this ledge, and by this wind-swept pine
Lingering, watch the coming of the night:
'Tis ever a new wonder to my sight.
Men look to God for some mysterious sign,
For other stars than such as nightly shine,
For some unwonted symbol of His might.
Wouldst see a miracle not less than those
The Master wrought of old in Galilee?
Come watch with me the azure turn to rose
In yonder West, the changing pageantry,
The fading alps and archipelagoes,
And spectral cities of the sunset-sea.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Monody On The Death Of Wendell Phillips

I

One by one they go
Into the unknown dark--
Star-lit brows of the brave,
Voices that drew men's souls.
Rich is the land, O Death!
Can give you dead like our dead!--
Such as he from whose hand
The magic web of romance
Slipt, and the art was lost!
Such as he who erewhile--
The last of the Titan brood--
With his thunder the Senate shook;
Or he who, beside the Charles,
Untoucht of envy or hate,
Tranced the world with his song;
Or that other, that grey-eyed seer
Who in pastoral Concord ways
With Plato and Hâfiz walked.

II

Not of these was the man
Whose wraith, through the mists of night,
Through the shuddering wintry stars,
Has passed to eternal morn.
Fit were the moan of the sea
And the clashing of cloud on cloud
For the passing of that soul!

Ever he faced the storm!
No weaver of rare romance,
No patient framer of laws,
No maker of wondrous rhyme,
No bookman wrapt in his dream.

His was the voice that rang
In the fight like a bugle-call,

And yet could be tender and low
As when, on a night in June,
The hushed wind sobs in the pines.
His was the eye that flashed
With a sabre's azure gleam,
Pointing to heights unwon!

III

Not for him were these days
Of clerky and sluggish calm--
To the petrel the swooping gale!
Austere he seemed, but the hearts
Of all men beat in his breast;
No fetter but galled his wrist,
No wrong that was not his own.
What if those eloquent lips
Curled with the old-time scorn?
What if in needless hours
His quick hand closed on the hilt?
'T was the smoke from the well-won fields
That clouded the veteran's eyes.
A fighter this to the end.

Ah, if in coming times
Some giant evil arise,
And Honor falter and pale,
His were a name to conjure with!
God send his like again!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

No Songs In Winter

The sky is gray as gray may be,
There is no bird upon the bough,
There is no leaf on vine or tree.

In the Neponset marshes now
Willow-stems, rosy in the wind,
Shiver with hidden sense of snow.

So too 't is winter in my mind,
No light-winged fancy comes and stays:
A season churlish and unkind.

Slow creep the hours, slow creep the days,
The black ink crusts upon the pen--
Just wait till bluebirds, wrens, and jays
And golden orioles come again!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

On Reading William Watson's Sonnet Entitled The Purple East

Restless the Northern Bear amid his snows
Crouched by the Neva; menacing is France,
That sees the shadow of the Uhlan's lance
On her clipped borders; struggling in the throes
Of wanton war lies Spain, and deathward goes.
And thou, O England, how the time's mischance
Hath fettered thee, that with averted glance
Thou standest, marble to Armenia's woes!
If 'twas thy haughty Dauther of the West
That stayed thy hand,, a word had driven away
Her sudden ire, and brought her to thy breast!
Thy blood makes quick her pulses, and some day,
Not now, yet some day, at thy soft behest
She by thy side shall hold the world at bay.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Outward Bound

I leave behind me the elm-shadowed square
And carven portals of the silent street,
And wander on with listless, vagrant feet
Through seaward-leading alleys, till the air
Smells of the sea, and straightway then the care
Slips from my heart, and life once more is sweet.
At the lane's ending lie the white-winged fleet.
O restless Fancy, whither wouldst thou fare?
Here are brave pinions that shall take thee far --
Gaunt hulks of Norway; ships of red Ceylon;
Slim-masted lovers of the blue Azores!
'Tis but an instant hence to Zanzibar,
Or to the regions of the Midnight Sun;
Ionian isles are thine, and all the fairy shores!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Palabras Cariñosas

GOOD-NIGHT! I have to say good-night
To such a host of peerless things!
Good-night unto the slender hand
All queenly with its weight of rings;
Good-night to fond, uplifted eyes,
Good-night to chestnut braids of hair,
Good-night unto the perfect mouth,
And all the sweetness nestled there—
The snowy hand detains me, then
I'll have to say Good-night again!

But there will come a time, my love,
When, if I read our stars aright,
I shall not linger by this porch
With my farewells. Till then, good-night!
You wish the time were now? And I.
You do not blush to wish it so?
You would have blushed yourself to death
To own so much a year ago—
What, both these snowy hands! ah, then
I 'll have to say Good-night again!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Palinode

Who is Lydia, pray, and who
Is Hypatia? Softly, dear,
Let me breathe it in your ear--
They are you, and only you.
And those other nameless two
Walking in Arcadian air--
She that was so very fair?
She that had the twilight hair?--
They were you, dear, only you.
If I speak of night or day,
Grace of fern or bloom of grape,
Hanging cloud or fountain spray,
Gem or star or glistening dew,
Or of mythologic shape,
Psyche, Pyrrha, Daphne, say--
I mean you, dear, you, just you.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Pauline Pavlovna

SCENE: St. Petersburg. Period: the present time. A ballroom in the winter palace of the prince---. The ladies in character costumes and masks. The gentlemen in official dress and unmasked, with the exception of six tall figures in scarlet kaftans, who are treated with marked distinction as they move here and there among the promenaders. Quadrille music throughout the dialogue.

Count SERGIUS PAVLOVICH PANSHINE, who has just arrived, is standing anxiously in the doorway of an antechamber with his eyes fixed upon the lady in the costume of a maid of honor in the time of Catharine II. The lady presently disengages herself from the crowd, and passes near count PANSHINE, who impulsively takes her by the hand and leads her across the threshold of the inner apartment, which is unoccupied.

HE.

Pauline!

SHE.

You knew me?

HE.

How could I have failed?
A mask may hide your features, not your soul.
There is an air about you like the air
That folds a star. A blind man knows the night,
And feels the constellations. No coarse sense
Of eye or ear had made you plain to me.
Through these I had not found you; for your eyes,
As blue as the violets of our Novgorod,
Look black behind your mask there, and your voice--
I had not known that either. My heart said,
"Pauline Pavlovna."

SHE.

Ah! your heart said that?
You trust your heart, then! 'T is a serious risk!--
How is it you and others wear no mask?

HE.

The Emperor's orders.

SHE.

Is the Emperor here?
I have not seen him.

HE.

He is one of the six
In scarlet kaftans and all masked alike.
Watch--you will note how every one bows down
Before these figures, thinking each by chance
May be the Tsar; yet none knows which he is.
Even his counterparts are left in doubt.
Unhappy Russia! No serf ever wore
Such chains as gall our emperor these sad days.
He dare trust no man.

SHE.

All men are so false.

HE.

Spare one, Pauline Pavlovna.

SHE.

No; all, all!
I think there is no truth left in the world,
In man or woman. Once were noble souls.--
Count Sergius, is Nastasia here to-night?

HE.

Ah! then you know! I thought to tell you first.
Not here, beneath these hundred curious eyes,
In all this glare of light; but in some place
Where I could throw me at your feet and weep.
In what shape came the story to your ear?

Decked in the teller's colors, I'll be sworn;
The truth, but in the livery of a lie,
And so must wrong me. Only this is true:
The Tsar, because I risked my wretched life
To shield a life as wretched as my own,
Bestows upon me, as supreme reward--
O irony--the hand of this poor girl.
Says, "Here, I have the pearl of pearls for you,
Such as was never plucked from out of the deep
By Indian diver, for a Sultan's crown.
Your joy's decreed, and stabs me with a smile.

SHE.

And she--she loves you?

HE.

I know not, indeed.
Likes me, Perhaps. What matters it?--her love!
The guardian, Sidor Yurievich consents,
And she consents. No love in it at all,
A mere caprice, a young girl's spring-tide dream.
Sick of ear-rings, weary of her mare,
She'll have a lover--something ready-made,
Or improvised between two cups of tea--
A lover by imperial ukase!
Fate said her word--I chanced to be the man!
If that grenade the crazy student threw
Had not spared me, as well as spared the Tsar,
All this would not have happened. I'd have been
A hero, but quite safe from her romance.
She takes me for a hero--think of that!
Now, by our holy Lady of Kazan,
When I have finished pitying myself,
I'll pity her.

SHE.

Oh no; begin with her;
She needs it most.

HE.

At her door lies the blame.
Whatever falls. She, with a single word
With half a tear, had stopt it at the first,
This cruel juggling with poor human hearts.

SHE.

The Tsar commanded it--you said the Tsar

HE.

The Tsar does what she wills--God fathoms why.
Were she his mistress, now! but there's no snow
Whiter within the bosom of a cloud,
Nor colder wither. She is very haughty,
For all her fragile air of gentleness;
With something vital in her, like those flowers
That on our desolate steppes outlast the year.
Resembles you in some things. It was that
First made us friends. I do her justice, see!
For we were friends in that smooth surface way
We Russians have imported out of France.
Alas! from what a blue and tranquil heaven
This bolt fell on me! After these two years,
My suit with Ossip Leminoff at an end,
The old wrong righted, the estates restored,
And my promotion, with the ink not dry!
Those fairies which neglected me at birth
Seemed now to lavish all good gifts on me--
Gold roubles, office, sudden dearest friends.
The whole world smiled. Then, as I stooped to taste
The sweetest cup, freak dashed it from my lip.
This very night--just think, this very night--
I planned to come and beg of you the alms
I dared not ask for in my poverty.
I thought me poor then. How stript am I now!
There's not a ragged medicant one meets
Along the Nevski Prospeky but has leave
To tell his love, and I have not that right!
Pauline Pavlovna, why do you stand there

Stark as a statue, with no word to say?

SHE.

Because this thing has frozen up my heart.
I think that there is something killed in me,
A dream that would have mocked all other bliss.
What shall I say? What would you have me say?

HE.

If it be possible, the word of words!

SHE, very slowly.

Well, then--I love you. I may tell you so
This once, and then forever hold my peace.
We cannot stay here longer unobserved.
No--do not touch me! but stand further off,
And seem to laugh, as if we jested--eyes,
Eyes everywhere! Now turn your face away
I love you.

HE.

With such music in my ears
I would death find me. It were sweet to die
Listening! You love me--prove it.

SHE.

Prove it--how?
I prove saying it. How else?

HE.

Pauline,
I have three things to choose from; you shall choose:
This marriage, or Siberia, or France.
The first means hell; the second purgatory;
The third--with you--were nothing less than heaven!

SHE, starting.

How dared you even dream it!

HE.

I was mad.

This business has touched me in the brain.

Have parience! the calamity's so new.

[Pause.]

There is a fourth way; but that gate is shut

To brave men who hold life a thing of God.

SHE.

Yourself spoke there; the rest was not of you.

HE.

Oh, lift me to your level! So I'm safe.

What's to be done?

SHE.

There must be some path out.

Perhaps the Emperor--

HE.

Not a ray of hope!

His mind is set on this with that insistence

Which seems to seize on all match-making folk.

The fancy bites them, and they straight go mad.

SHE.

Your father's friend, the Metropolitan--

A word from him

HE.

Alas, he too is bitten!
Gray-haired, gray-hearted, worldly wise, he sees
This marriage makes me the Tsar's protégé,
And opens every door to preference.

SHE.

Think while I think. There surely is some key
Unlocks the labyrinth, could we but find it.
Nastasia!

HE.

What! beg life of her? not I.

SHE.

Beg love. She is a woman, young, perhaps
Untouched as yet of this too poisonous air.
Were she told all, would she not pity us?
For if she love you, as I think she must,
Would not some generous impulse stir in her,
Some latent, unsuspected spark illumine?
How love thrills even commonest girl-clay,
Ennobling it an instant, if no more!
You said that she is proud; then touch her pride,
And turn her into marble at the touch.
But yet the gentler passion is the stronger.
Go to her, tell her, in some tenderest phrase
That will not hurt too much--ah, but 't will hurt!--
Just how your happiness lies in her hand
To make or mar for all time; hint, not say,
Your heart is gone from you, and you may find--

HE.

A casemate in St. Peter and St. Paul
For, say, a month; then some Siberian town.
Not this way lies escape. At my first word
That sluggish Tartar blood would turn to fire
In every vein.

SHE.

How blindly you read her,
Or any woman! Yes, I know, I grant
How small we often seem in our small world
Of trivial cares and narrow precedents--
Lacking that wide horizon stretched for men--
Capricious, spiteful, frightened at a mouse;
But when it comes to suffering mortal pangs,
The weakest of us measures pulse with you.

HE.

Yes, you, not she. If she were at your height!
But there's no martyr wrapt in her rose flesh.
There should have been; for Nature gave you both
The self-same purple for your eyes and hair,
The self-same music to your southern lips,
Fashioned you both, as 't were, in the same mould,
Yet failed to put the soul in one of you!
I know her wilful--her light head quite turned
In this court atmosphere of flatteries;
A Moscow beauty, petted and soiled there,
And since spoiled here; as soft as swan's down now,
With words like honey melting from the comb,
But being crossed, vindictive, cruel, cold.
I fancy her, between two rosy smiles,
Saying, "Poor fellow, in the Nertchinsk mines!"
That is the sum of her.

SHE.

You know her not.
Count Sergius Pavlovich, you said no mask
Could hide the soul, yet how you have mistaken
The soul these two months--and the face to-night!

[Removes her mask.]

You!--It was you!

SHE.

Count Sergius Pavlovich,
Go find Pauline Pavlovna--she is here--
And tell her the Tsar has set you free.

[She goes out hurriedly, replacing her mask.]

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Pillared Arch And Sculptured Tower

Pillared arch and sculptured tower
Of Ilium have had their hour;
The dust of many a king is blown
On the winds from zone to zone;
Many a warrior sleeps unknown.
Time and Death each hold in thrall,
Yet is Love the lord of all;
Still does Helen's beauty stir
Because a poet sang of her!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Piscataqua River

Thou singest by the gleaming isles,
By woods, and fields of corn,
Thou singest, and the sunlight smiles
Upon my birthday morn.

But I within a city, I,
So full of vague unrest,
Would almost give my life to lie
An hour upon upon thy breast.

To let the wherry listless go,
And, wrapt in dreamy joy,
Dip, and surge idly to and fro,
Like the red harbor-buoy;

To sit in happy indolence,
To rest upon the oars,
And catch the heavy earthy scents
That blow from summer shores;

To see the rounded sun go down,
And with its parting fires
Light up the windows of the town
And burn the tapering spires;

And then to hear the muffled tolls
From steeples slim and white,
And watch, among the Isles of Shoals,
The Beacon's orange light.

O River! flowing to the main
Through woods, and fields of corn,
Hear thou my longing and my pain
This sunny birthday morn;

And take this song which fancy shapes
To music like thine own,
And sing it to the cliffs and capes
And crags where I am known!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Prescience

The new moon hung in the sky, the sun was low in the west,
And my betrothed and I in the churchyard paused to rest--
Happy maiden and lover, dreaming the old dream over:
The light winds wandered by, and robins chirped from the nest.

And lo! in the meadow sweet was the grave of a little child,
With a crumbling stone at the feet and the ivy running wild--
Tangled ivy and clover folding it over and over:
Close to my sweetheart's feet was the little mound up-piled.

Stricken with nameless fears, she shrank and clung to me,
And her eyes were filled with tears for a sorrow I did not see:
Lightly the winds were blowing, softly her tears were flowing--
Tears for the unknown years and a sorrow that was to be!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Pursuit And Possession

When I behold what pleasure is pursuit,
What life, what glorious eagerness it is;
Then mark how full possession falls from this,
How fairer seems the blossom than the fruit --
I am perplexed, and often stricken mute
Wondering which attained the higher bliss,
The wingèd insect, or the chrysalis
It thrust aside with unreluctant foot.
Spirit of verse, that still elud'st my art,
Thou uncaught rapture, thou swift-fleeting fire,
O let me follow thee with hungry heart
If beauty's full possession kill desire!
Still flit away in moonlight, rain, and dew,
Will-of-the-wisp, that I may still pursue!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Quatrains

MASKS

BLACK Tragedy lets slip her grim disguise
And shows you laughing lips and roguish eyes;
But when, unmasked, gay Comedy appears,
How wan her cheeks are, and what heavy tears!

MEMORIES

TWO things there are with Memory will abide,
Whatever else befall, while life flows by:
That soft cold hand-touch at the altar side;
The thrill that shook you at your child's first cry.

CIRCUMSTANCE

LINKED to a clod, harassed, and sad
With sordid cares, she knew not life was sweet
Who should have moved in marble halls, and had
Kings and crown-princes at her feet.

ON READING —

GREAT thoughts in crude, unshapely verse set forth
Lose half their preciousness, and ever must.
Unless the diamond with its own rich dust
Be cut and polished, it seems little worth.

QUITS

IF my best wines mislike thy taste,
And my best service win thy frown,
Then tarry not, I bid thee haste;
There 's many another Inn in town.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Reminiscence

Though I am native to this frozen zone
That half the twelvemonth torpid lies, or dead;
Though the cold azure arching overhead
And the Atlantic's never-ending moan
Are mine by heritage, I must have known
Life elsewhere in epochs long since fled;
For in my veins some Orient blood is red,
And through my thought are lotus blossoms blown.
I do remember . . . it was just at dusk,
Near a walled garden at the river's turn
(A thousand summers seem but yesterday!),
A Nubian girl, more sweet than Koorja musk,
Came to the water-tank to fill her urn,
And, with the urn, she bore my heart away!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Sargent's Portrait Of Edwin Booth

That face which no man ever saw
And from his memory banished quite,
With eyes in which are Hamlet's awe
And Cardinal Richelieu's subtle light,
Looks from this frame. A master's hand
Has set the master player here,
In the fair temple that he planned
Not for himself. To us most dear
This image of him! "It was thus
He looked; such pallor touched his cheek;
With that same grace he greeted us--
Nay, 't is the man, could it but speak!"
Sad words that shall be said some day--
Far fall the day! O cruel Time,
Whose breath sweeps mortal things away,
Spare long this image of his prime,
That others standing in the place
Where, save as ghosts, we come no more,
May know what sweet majestic face
The gentle Prince of Players wore!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Sea Longings

The first world-sound that fell upon my ear
Was that of the great winds along the coast
Crushing the deep-sea beryl on the rocks--
The distant breakers' sullen cannonade.
Against the spires and gables of the town
The white fog drifted, catching here and there
At overleaning cornice or peaked roof,
And hung--weird gonfalons. The garden walks
Were choked with leaves, and on their ragged biers
Lay dead the sweets of summer--damask rose,
Clove-pink, old-fashioned, loved New England flowers
Only keen salt-sea odors filled the air.
Sea-sounds, sea-odors--these were all my world.
Hence is it that life languishes with me
Inland; the valleys stifle me with gloom
And pent-up prospect; in their narrow bound
Imagination flutters futile wings.
Vainly I seek the sloping pearl-white sand
And the mirage's phantom citadels
Miraculous, a moment seen, then gone.
Among the mountains I am ill at ease,
Missing the stretched horizon's level line
And the illimitable restless blue.
The crag-torn sky is not the sky I love,
But one unbroken sapphire spanning all;
And nobler than the branches of a pine
Aslant upon a precipice's edge
Are the strained spars of some great battle-ship
Plowing across the sunset. No bird's lilt
So takes me as the whistling of the gale
Among the shrouds. My cradle-song was this,
Strange inarticulate sorrows of the sea,
Blithe rhythms upgathered from the Sirens' caves.
Perchance of earthly voices the last voice
That shall an instant my freed spirit stay
On this world's verge, will be some message blown
Over the dim salt lands that fringe the coast
At dusk, or when the tranced midnight droops
With weight of stars, or haply just as dawn,

Illumining the sullen purple wave,
Turns the gray pools and willow-stems to gold.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Sestet

SENT TO A FRIEND WITH A VOLUME OF TENNYSON

Wouldst thou know the knightly clash of steel on steel?
Or list the throstle singing loud and clear?
Or walk at twilight by some haunted mere
In Surrey; or in throbbing London feel
Life's pulse at highest--hark, the minster's peal! . . .
Turn but the page, that various world is here!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Sleep

When to oft sleep we give ourselves away,
And in a dream as in a fairy bark
Drift on and on through the enchanted dark
To purple daybreak -- little thought we pay
To that sweet bitter world we know by day.
We are clean quit of it, as is a lark
So high in heaven no human eye can mark
The thin swift pinion cleaving through the gray.
Till we awake ill fate can do no ill,
The resting heart shall not take up again
The heavy load that yet must make it bleed;
For this brief space the loud world's voice is still,
No faintest echo of it brings us pain.
How will it be when we shall sleep indeed?

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Song From The Persian

AH, sad are they who know not love,
But, far from passion's tears and smiles,
Drift down a moonless sea, beyond
The silvery coasts of fairy isles.

And sadder they whose longing lips
Kiss empty air, and never touch
The dear warm mouth of those they love --
Waiting, wasting, suffering much.

But clear as amber, fine as musk,
Is life to those who, pilgrim-wise,
Move hand in hand from dawn to dusk,
Each morning nearer Paradise.

Ah, not for them shall angels pray!
They stand in everlasting light,
They walk in Allah's smile by day,
And slumber in his heart by night.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Sonnets

ENAMOURED ARCHITECT OF AIRY RHYME

ENAMOURED architect of airy rhyme,
Build as thou wilt; heed not what each man says:
Good souls, but innocent of dreamers' ways,
Will come, and marvel why thou wastest time;
Others, beholding how thy turrets climb
'Twixt theirs and heaven, will hate thee all thy days;
But most beware of those who come to praise.
O Wondersmith, O worker in sublime
And heaven-sent dreams, let art be all in all;
Build as thou wilt, unspoiled by praise or blame,
Build as thou wilt, and as thy light is given:
Then, if at last the airy structure fall,
Dissolve, and vanish—take thyself no shame.
They fail, and they alone, who have not striven.

REMINISCENCE

THOUGH I am native to this frozen zone
That half the twelvemonth torpid lies, or dead;
Though the cold azure arching overhead
And the Atlantic's never-ending moan
Are mine by heritage, I must have known
Life elsewhere in epochs long since fled;
For in my veins some Orient blood is red,
And through my thought are lotus blossoms blown.
I do remember ... it was just at dusk,
Near a walled garden at the river's turn
(A thousand summers seem but yesterday!),
A Nubian girl, more sweet than Koorja musk,
Came to the water-tank to fill her urn,
And, with the urn, she bore my heart away!

OUTWARD BOUND

I LEAVE behind me the elm-shadowed square
And carven portals of the silent street,
And wander on with listless, vagrant feet

Through seaward-leading alleys, till the air
Smells of the sea, and straightway then the care
Slips from my heart, and life once more is sweet.
At the lane's ending lie the white-winged fleet.
O restless Fancy, whither wouldst thou fare?
Here are brave pinions that shall take thee far—
Gaunt hulks of Norway; ships of red Ceylon;
Slim-masted lovers of the blue Azores!
'T is but an instant hence to Zanzibar,
Or to the regions of the Midnight Sun;
Ionian isles are thine, and all the fairy shores!

ANDROMEDA

THE SMOOTH-WORN coin and threadbare classic phrase
Of Grecian myths that did beguile my youth,
Beguile me not as in the olden days:
I think more grief and beauty dwell with truth.
Andromeda, in fetters by the sea,
Star-pale with anguish till young Perseus came,
Less moves me with her suffering than she,
The slim girl figure fettered to dark shame,
That nightly haunts the park, there, like a shade,
Trailing her wretchedness from street to street.
See where she passes—neither wife nor maid;
How all mere fiction crumbles at her feet!
Here is woe's self, and not the mask of woe:
A legend's shadow shall not move you so!

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

FOREVER am I conscious, moving here,
That should I step a little space aside
I pass the boundary of some glorified
Invisible domain—it lies so near!
Yet nothing know we of that dim frontier
Which each must cross, whatever fate betide,
To reach the heavenly cities where abide
(Thus Sorrow whispers) those that were most dear,
Now all transfigured in celestial light!
Shall we indeed behold them, thine and mine,
Whose going hence made black the noonday sun?—

Strange is it that across the narrow night
They fling us not some token, or make sign
That all beyond is not Oblivion.

SLEEP

WHEN to soft sleep we give ourselves away,
And in a dream as in a fairy bark
Drift on and on through the enchanted dark
To purple daybreak—little thought we pay
To that sweet bitter world we know by day.
We are clean quit of it, as is a lark
So high in heaven no human eye can mark
The thin swift pinion cleaving through the gray.
Till we awake ill fate can do no ill,
The resting heart shall not take up again
The heavy load that yet must make it bleed;
For this brief space the loud world's voice is still,
No faintest echo of it brings us pain.
How will it be when we shall sleep indeed?

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Sweetheart, Sigh No More

It was with doubt and trembling
I whispered in her ear.
Go, take her answer, bird-on-bough,
That all the world may hear--
Sweetheart, sigh no more!

Sing it, sing it, tawny throat,
Upon the wayside tree,
How fair she is, how true she is,
How dear she is to me--
Sweetheart, sigh no more!

Sing it, sing it, and through the summer long
The winds among the clover-tops,
And brooks, for all their silvery stops,
Shall envy you the song--
Sweetheart, sigh no more!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Tennyson

I

Shakespeare and Milton--what third blazoned name
Shall lips of after-ages link to these?
His who, beside the wide encircling seas,
Was England's voice, her voice with one acclaim,
For threescore years; whose word of praise was fame,
Whose scorn gave pause to man's iniquities.

II

What strain was his in that Crimean war?
A bugle call in battle; a low breath,
Plaintive and sweet, above the fields of death!
So year by year the music rolled afar,
From Euxine wastes to flowery Kandahar,
Bearing the laurel or the cypress wreath.

III

Others shall have their little space of time,
Their proper niche and bust, then fade away
Into the darkness, poets of a day;
But thou, O builder of enduring rhyme,
Thou shalt not pass! Thy fame in every clime
On earth shall live where saxon speech has sway.

IV

Waft me this verse across the winter sea,
Through light and dark, through mist and blinding sleet,
O winter winds, and lay it at his feet;
Though the poor gift betray my poverty,
At his feet lay it: it may chance that he
Will find no gift, where reverence is, unmeet.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Thalia

"A MIDDLE-AGED LYRICAL POET IS SUPPOSED TO BE TAKING FINAL LEAVE OF THE MUSE OF COMEDY. SHE HAS BROUGHT HIM HIS HAT AND GLOVES, AND IS ABSTRACTEDLY PICKING A THREAD OF GOLD HAIR FROM HIS COAT SLEEVE AS HE BEGINS TO SPEAK:

I say it under the rose--
oh, thanks! --yes, under the laurel,
We part lovers, not foes;
we are not going to quarrel.

We have too long been friends
on foot and in gilded coaches,
Now that the whole thing ends,
to spoil our kiss with reproaches.

I leave you; my soul is wrung;
I pause, look back from the portal--
Ah, I no more am young,
and you, child, are immortal!

Mine is the glacier's way,
yours is the blossom's weather--
When were December and May
known to be happy together?

Before my kisses grow tame,
before my moodiness grieve you,
While yet my heart is flame,
and I all lover, I leave you.

So, in the coming time,
when you count the rich years over,
Think of me in my prime,
and not as a white-haired lover.

Fretful, pierced with regret,
the wraith of dead Desire
Thrumming a cracked spinnet
by a slowly dying fire.

When, at last, I am cold--
years hence, if the gods so will it--
Say, "He was true as gold,"
and wear a rose in your fillet!

Others, tender as I,
will come and sue for carresses,
Woo you, win you, and die--
mind you, a rose in your tresses!

Some Melpomene woo,
some hold Clio nearest;
You, sweet Comedy--you
were ever sweetest and dearest!

Nay, it is time to go--
when writing your tragic sister
Say to that child of woe
how sorry I was I missed her.

Really, I cannot stay,
though "parting is such sweet sorrow" . . .
Perhaps I will, on my way
down-town, look in to-morrow!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The Flight Of The Goddess

A man should live in a garret aloof,
And have few friends, and go poorly clad,
With an old hat stopping the chink in the roof,
To keep the Goddess constant and glad.

Of old, when I walked on a rugged way,
And gave much work but for little bread,
The Goddess dwelt with me night and day,
Sat at my table, haunted my bed.

The narrow, mean attic, I see it now!--
Its window overlooking the city's tiles,
The sunset's fires, and the clouds of snow,
And the river wandering miles and miles.

Just one picture hung in the room,
The saddest story that art can tell--
Dante and Virgil in lurid gloom
Watching the lovers flow through Hell.

Wretched enough was I sometimes,
Pinched, and harassed with vain desires;
But thicker than clover sprung the rhymes
As I dwelt as a sparrow among the spires.

Midnight filled my slumbers with song;
Music haunted my dreams by day.
Now I listen and wait and long,
But the Delphian airs have died away.

I wonder and wonder how it befell:
Suddenly I had friends in crowds;
I bade the house-tops a long farewell;
'Good-by,' I cried, 'to the stars and the clouds!

'But thou, rare soul, thou hast dwelt with me,
Spirit of Poesy! thou divine
Breath of the morning, thou shalt be,
Goddess! for ever and ever mine.'

And the woman I loved was now my bride,
And the house I wanted was my own;
I turned to the Goddess satisfied--
But the Goddess had somehow flown.

Flown, and I fear she will never return;
I am much too sleek and happy for her,
Whose lovers must hunger and waste and burn
Ere the beautiful heathen heart will stir.

I call--but she does not stoop to my cry;
I wait--but she lingers, and ah! so long!
It was not so in the years gone by,
When she touched my lips with chism of song.

I swear I will get me a garret again,
And adore, like a Parsee, the sunset's fires,
And lure the Goddess, by vigil and pain,
Up with the sparrows among the spires.

For a man should live in a garret aloof,
And have few friends, and go poorly clad,
With an old hat stopping the chink in the roof,
To keep the Goddess constant and glad.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The Last Caesar

I

Now there was one who came in later days
To play at Emperor: in the dead of night
Stole crown and sceptre, and stood forth to light
In sudden purple. The dawn's straggling rays
Showed Paris fettered, murmuring in amaze,
With red hands at her throat--a piteous sight.
Then the new Cæsar, stricken with affright
At his own daring, shrunk from public gaze

In the Elysée, and had lost the day
But that around him flocked his birds of prey,
Sharp-beaked, voracious, hungry for the deed.
'Twixt hope and fear beheld great Cæsar hang!
Meanwhile, methinks, a ghostly laughter rang
Through the rotunda of the Invalides.

II

What if the boulevards, at set of sun,
Reddened, but not with the sunset's kindly glow?
What if from quai and square the murmured woe
Swept heavenward, pleadingly? The prize was won,
A kingling made and Liberty undone.
No Emperor, this, like him awhile ago,
But his Name's shadow; that one struck the blow
Himself, the street-sweeping gun!

This was a man of tortuous heart and brain,
So warped he knew not his own point of view--
The master of a dark, mysterious smile.

And there he plotted, by the storied Seine
And in the fairy gardens of St. Cloud,
The Sphinx that puzzled Europe, for awhile.

III

I see him as men saw him once--a face
Of true Napoleon pallor; round the eyes
The wrinkled care; mustache spread pinion-wise,
Pointing his smile with odd sardonic grace
As wearily he turns him in his place,
And bends before the hoarse Parisian cries--
Then vanishes, with glitter of gold-lace
And trumpets blaring to the patient skies.

Not thus he vanished later! On his path
The Furies waited for the hour and man,
Foreknowing that they waited not in vain.

Then fell the day, o day of dreadful wrath!
Bow-down in shame, O crimson-girt Sedan!
Weep fair Alsace! weep, loveliest Lorraine!

So mused I, sitting underneath the trees
In that old garden of the Tuileries,
Watching the dust of twilight sifting down
Through chestnut boughs just touched with autumn's brown--

Not twilight yet, but that illusive bloom
Which holds before the deep-edged shadows come;
For still the garden stood in golden mist,
Still, like a river of golden amethyst,
The Seine slipt through its pans of fretted stone,
And, near the grille that once fenced in a throne,
The fountains still unbraided to the day
The unsubstantial silver of their spray.

A spot to dream in, love in, waste one's hours!
Temples and palaces, and gilded towers,
And fairy terraces!--and yet, and yet
Here in her woe came Marie Antoinette,
Came sweet Corday, Du Barry with shrill cry,
Not learning from her betters how to die!
Here, while the nations watched with bated breath,
Was held the saturnalia of Red Death!

For where that slim Egyptian shaft uplifts
Its point to catch the dawn's and sunset's drifts

Of various gold, the busy Headsman stood. . . .
Place de la Concorde--no, the Place of Blood!

And all so peaceful now, one cannot bring
Imagination to accept the thing.
Lies, all of it! some dreamer's wild romance--
High-hearted, witty, laughter-loving France!
In whose brain was it that the legend grew
Of Mænads shrieking in this avenue,
Of watch-fires burning, Famine standing guard,
Of long-speared Uhlans in that palace-yard!
What ruder sound this soft air ever smote
Than a bird's twitter, or a bugle's note?
What darker crimson ever splashed these walks
Than that of rose-leaves dropping from the stalks?
And yet--what means that charred and broken wall,
That sculptured marble, splintered, like to fall,
Looming among the trees there? . . . And you say
This happened, as it were, but yesterday?
And here the commune stretched a barricade,
And there the final desperate stand was made?
Such things have been? How all things change and fade!
How little lasts in this brave world below!
Love dies; hate cools; the Cæsars come and go;
Gaunt Hunger fattens, and the weak grow strong.
Even Republics are not here for long!

Ah, who can tell what hour may bring the doom,
The lighted torch, the tocsin's heavy boom!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The Letter

EDWARD ROWLAND SILL, DIED FEBRUARY 27, 1887

I held his letter in my hand,
And even while I read
The lightning flashed across the land
The word that he was dead.

How strange it seemed! His living voice
Was speaking from the page
Those courteous phrases, tersely choice,
Light-hearted, witty, sage.

I wondered what it was that died!
The man himself was here,
His modesty, his scholar's pride,
His soul serene and clear.

These neither death nor time shall dim,
Still this sad thing must be--
Henceforth I may not speak to him,
Though he can speak to me!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The Lorelei

Yonder we see it from the steamer's deck,
The haunted Mountain of the Lorelei --
The hanging crags sharp-cut against a sky
Clear as a sapphire without flaw or fleck.
'Twas here the Siren lay in wait to wreck
The fisher-lad. At dusk, as he rowed by,
Perchance he heard her tender amorous cry,
And, seeing the wondrous whiteness of her neck,
Perchance would halt, and lean towards the shore;
Then she by that soft magic which she had
Would lure him, and in gossamers of her hair,
Gold upon gold, would wrap him o'er and o'er,
Wrap him, and sing to him, and drive him mad,
Then drag him down to no man knoweth where.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The Menu

I beg you come to-night and dine.
A welcome waits you, and sound wine--
The Roederer chilly to a charm,
As Juno's breath the claret warm,
The sherry of an ancient brand.
No Persian pomp, you understand--
A soup, a fish, two meats, and then
A salad fit for aldermen
(When alderman, alas, the days!
Were really worth their mayonnaise);
A dish of grapes whose clusters won
Their bronze in Carolinian sun;
Next, cheese--for you the Neufchâtel,
A bit of Cheshire likes me well;
Café au lait or coffee black,
With Kirsch or Kümmel or Cognac
(The German band in Irving Place
By this time purple in the face);
Cigars and pipes. These being through,
Friends shall drop in, a very few--
Shakespeare and Milton, and no more.
When these are guests I bolt the door,
With Not at Home to any one
Excepting Alfred Tennyson.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The Poets

When this young Land has reached its wrinkled prime,
And we are gone and all our songs are done,
And naught is left unchanged beneath the sun,
What other singers shall the womb of Time
Bring forth to reap the sunny slopes of rhyme?
For surely till the thread of life be spun
The world shall not lack poets, though but one
Make lonely music like a vesper chime
Above the heedless turmoil of the street.
What new strange voices shall be given to these,
What richer accents of melodious breath?
Yet shall they, baffled, lie at Nature's feet
Searching the volume of her mysteries,
And vainly question the fixed eyes of Death.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The Rarity Of Genius

While yet my lip was breathing youth's first breath,
I all too young to know their deepest spell,
I saw Medea and Phædra in Rachel;
Later I saw the great Elizabeth.
Rachel, Ristori -- we shall speak with death
Ere we meet souls like these. In one age dwell
Not many such: a century shall tell
Its hundred beads before it braid a wreath
For two so queenly foreheads. If it take
Æons to form a diamond, grain on grain,
Æons to crystallize its fire and dew,
By what slow processes must Nature make
Her Shakespeares and her Raffaels? Great the gain
If she spoil millions making one or two.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The Shipman's Tale

Listen my masters! I speak naught but truth.
From dawn to dawn they drifted on and on,
Not knowing wither nor to what dark end.
Now the North froze them, now the hot South scorched.
Some called to God, and found great comfort so;
Some gnashed their teeth with curses, some laughed
An empty laughter, seeing they yet lived,
So sweet was breath between their foolish lips.
Day after day the same relentless sun,
Night after night the same unpitying stars.
At intervals fierce lightning tore the clouds,
Showing vast hollow spaces, and the sleet
Hissed, and the torrents of the sky were loosed.
From time to time a hand relaxed its grip,
And some pale wretch slid down into the dark
With stifled moan, and transient horror seized
The rest who waited, knowing what must be.
At every turn strange shapes reached up and clutched
The whirling wreck, held on awhile, and then
Slipt back into that blackness whence they came.
Ah, hapless folk, to be so tost and torn,
So racked by hunger, fever, fire, and wave,
And swept at last into the nameless void--
Frail girls, strong men, and mothers with their babes!

And was none saved?
My masters, not a soul!

O shipman, woful, woful is thy tale!
Our hearts are heavy and our eyes are dimmed.
What ship is this that suffered such ill fate?

What ship, my masters? Know ye not?--The World!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The Sisters' Tragedy

A.D. 1670

AGLÄE, a widow.

MURIEL, her unmarried sister.

It happened once, in that brave land that lies
For half the twelvemonth wrapt in sombre skies,
Two sisters loved one man. He being dead,
Grief loosed the lips of her he had not wed,
And all the passion that through heavy years
Had masked in smiles unmasked itself in tears.
No purer love may mortals know than this,
The hidden love that guards another's bliss.
High in a turret's westward-facing room,
Whose painted window held the sunset's bloom,
The two together grieving, each to each
Unveiled her soul with sobs and broken speech.

Both were young, in life's rich summer yet;
And one was dark, with tints of violet
In hair and eyes, and one was blond as she
Who rose--a second daybreak--from the sea,
Gold-tressed and azure-eyed. In that lone place,
Like dusk and dawn, they sat there face to face.

She spoke the first whose strangely silvering hair
No wreath had worn, nor widow's weed might wear,
And told her blameless love, and knew no shame--
Her holy love that, like a vestal flame
Beside the body of some queen
Within a guarded crypt, had burned unseen
From weary year to year. And she who heard
Smiled proudly through her tears and said no word,
But, drawing closer, on the troubled brow
Laid one long kiss, and that was words enow!

MURIEL.

Be still, my heart! Grown patient with thine ache,
Thou shouldst be dumb, yet needs must speak, or break.
The world is empty now that he is gone.

AGLÄE.

Ay, sweetheart!

MURIEL.

None was like him, no, not one.
From other men he stood apart, alone
In honor spotless as unfallen snow.
Nothing all evil was it his to know;
His charity still found some germ, some spark
Of light in natures that seemed wholly dark.
He read men's souls; the lowly and the high
Moved on the self-same level in his eye.
Gracious to all, to none subservient,
Without offence he spake the word he meant--
His word no trick of tact or courtly art,
But the white flowering of the noble heart.
Careless he was of much the world counts gain,
Careless of self, too simple to be vain,
Yet strung so finely that for conscience-sake
He would have gone like Cranmer to the stake.
I saw--how could I help but love? And you--

AGLÄE.

At this perfection did I worship too . . .
'T was this that stabbed me. Heed not what I say!
I meant it not, my wits are gone astray,
With all that is and has been. No, I lie--
Had he been less perfection, happier I!

MURIEL.

Strange words and wild! 'T is the distracted mind
Breathes them, not you, and I no meaning find.

AGLÄE.

Yet 't were as plain as writing on a scroll
had you but eyes to read within my soul.--
How a grief hidden feeds on its own mood,
Poison's the healthful currents of the blood
With bitterness, and turns the heart to stone!
I think, in truth, 't were better to make moan,
And so be done with it. This many a year,
Sweetheart, have I laughed lightly and made cheer,
Pierced through with sorrow!

Then the widowed one
With sorrowfullest eyes beneath the sun,
Faltered, irresolute, and bending low
Her head, half whispered,

Dear, how could you know?
What masks are faces!--yours, unread by me
These seven long summers; mine, so placidly
Shielding my woe! No tremble of the lip,
No cheek's quick pallor let our secret slip!
Mere players we, and she that played the queen,
Now in her homespun, looks how poor and mean!
How shall I say it, how find words to tell
What thing it was for me made earth a hell
That else had been my heaven! 'T would blanch your cheek
Were I to speak it. Nay, but I will speak,
Since like two souls at compt we seem to stand,
Where nothing may be hidden. Hold my hand,
But look not at me! Noble 't was, and meet,
To hide your heart, nor fling it at his feet
To lie despised there. Thus saved you our pride
And that white honor for which earls have died.
You were not all unhappy, loving so!
I with a difference wore my weight of woe.
My lord was he. It was my cruel lot,
My hell, to love him--for he loved me not!

Then came a silence. Suddenly like death
The truth flashed on them, and each held her breath--
A flash of light whereby they both were slain,
She that was loved and she that loved in vain!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

The Undiscovered Country

Forever am I conscious, moving here,
That should I step a little space aside
I pass the boundary of some glorified
Invisible domain -- it lies so near!
Yet nothing know we of that dim frontier
Which each must cross, whatever fate betide,
To reach the heavenly cities where abide
(Thus Sorrow whispers) those that were most dear,
Now all transfigured in celestial light!
Shall we indeed behold them, thine and mine,
Whose going hence made black the noonday sun? --
Strange is it that across the narrow night
They fling us not some token, or make sign
That all beyond is not Oblivion.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Thorwaldsen

Not in the fabled influence of some star,
Benign or evil, do our fortunes lie;
We are the arbiters of destiny,
Lords of the life we either make or mar.
We are our own impediment and bar
To noble endings. With distracted eye
We let the golden moment pass us by,
Time's foolish spendthrifts, searching wide and far
For what lies close at hand. To serve our turn
We ask fair wind and favorable tide.
From the dead Danish sculptor let us learn
To make Occasion, not to be denied:
Against the sheer precipitous mountain-side
Thorwaldsen carved his Lion at Lucerne.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Threnody

I

Upon your hearse this flower I lay
Brief be your sleep! You shall be known
When lesser men have had their day:
Fame blossoms where true seed is sown,
Or soon or late, let Time wound what it may.

II

Unvext by any dream of fame,
You smiled, and bade the world pass by:
But I--I turned, and saw a name
Shaping itself against the sky--
White star that rose amid the battle's flame!

III

Brief be your sleep, for I would see
Your laurels--ah, how trivial now
To him must earthly laurel be
Who wears the amaranth on his brow!
How vain the voices of mortality!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

To Hafiz

THOUGH gifts like thine the fates gave not to me,
One thing, O Hafiz, we both hold in fee—
Nay, it holds us; for when the June wind blows
We both are slaves and lovers to the rose.
In vain the pale Circassian lily shows
Her face at her green lattice, and in vain
The violet beckons, with unveilèd face—
The bosom's white, the lip's light purple stain,
These touch our liking, yet no passion stir.
But when the rose comes, Hafiz—in that place
Where she stands smiling, we kneel down to her!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

To L.T. In Florence

You by the Arno shape your marble dream,
Under the cypress and the olive trees,
While I, this side the wild wind-beaten seas,
Unrestful by the Charles's placid stream,
Long once again to catch the golden gleam
Of Brunelleschi's dome, and lounge at ease
In those pleached gardens and fair galleries.
And yet perchance you envy me, and deem
My star the happier, since it holds me here.
Even so one time, beneath the cypresses,
My heart turned longingly across the sea
To these familiar fields and woodlands dear,
And I had given all Titian's goddesses
For one poor cowslip or anemone.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Unguarded Gates

WIDE open and unguarded stand our gates,
Named of the four winds, North, South, East, and West;
Portals that lead to an enchanted land
Of cities, forests, fields of living gold,
Vast prairies, lordly summits touched with snow,
Majestic rivers sweeping proudly past
The Arab's date-palm and the Norseman's pine—
A realm wherein are fruits of every zone,
Airs of all climes, for, lo! throughout the year
The red rose blossoms somewhere—a rich land,
A later Eden planted in the wilds,
With not an inch of earth within its bound
But if a slave's foot press it sets him free.
Here, it is written, Toil shall have its wage,
And Honor honor, and the humblest man
Stand level with the highest in the law.
Of such a land have men in dungeons dreamed,
And with the vision brightening in their eyes
Gone smiling to the fagot and the sword.

Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
And through them presses a wild motley throng—
Men from the Volga and the Tartar steppes,
Featureless figures of the Hoang-Ho,
Malayan, Scythian, Teuton, Kelt, and Slav,
Flying the Old World's poverty and scorn;
These bringing with them unknown gods and rites,—
Those, tiger passions, here to stretch their claws.
In street and alley what strange tongues are loud,
Accents of menace alien to our air,
Voices that once the Tower of Babel knew!

O Liberty, white Goddess! is it well
To leave the gates unguarded? On thy breast
Fold Sorrow's children, soothe the hurts of fate,
Lift the down-trodden, but with hand of steel
Stay those who to thy sacred portals come
To waste the gifts of freedom. Have a care
Lest from thy brow the clustered stars be torn

And trampled in the dust. For so of old
The thronging Goth and Vandal trampled Rome,
And where the temples of the Cæsars stood
The lean wolf unmolested made her lair.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

When The Sultan Goes To Ispahan

When the Sultan Shah-Zaman
Goes to the city Ispahan,
Even before he gets so far
As the place where the clustered palm-trees are,
At the last of the thirty palace-gates
The pet of the harem, Rose-in-Bloom,
Orders a feast in his favorite room--
Glittering square of colored ice,
Sweetened with syrup, tinctured with spice,
Creams, and cordials, and sugared dates,
Syrian apples, Othmanee quinces,
Limes and citrons and apricots,
And wines that are known to Eastern princes.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

With Three Flowers

Herewith I send you three pressed withered flowers:
This one was white, with golden star; this, blue
As Capri's cave; that, purple and shot through
With sunset-orange. Where the Duomo towers
In diamond air, and under pendent bowers
The Arno glides, this faded violet grew
On Landor's grave; from Landor's heart it drew
Its clouded azure in the long spring hours.
Within the shadow of the Pyramid
Of Cais Cestius was the daisy found,
White as the soul of Keats in Paradise.
The pansy -- there were hundreds of them hid
In the thick grass that folded Shelley's mound,
Guarding his ashes with most lovely eyes.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich