Classic Poetry Series

Augusta Davies Webster

- poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

Augusta Davies Webster (30 January 1837 - 5 September 1894)

Born in 1837, Webster was a prolific writer in every genre, a self-educated classical scholar, a professional poetry reviewer, an activist, and an educator. She began her literary career as a young girl and had published two volumes of poetry, two well-received translations of Aeschylus and Euripides, and a three-volume novel by the time she became a very active member of the London Suffrage Society in the 1860s. During the 1870s Webster continued to support suffrage for women and the women's movement in general, as well as liberalism and individualism, in a series of essays that she wrote for the Examiner and later published as A Housewife's Opinions. Beginning in 1879, she served two terms on the London School Board, with the second term concurrent with her position as one of the main poetry reviewers for the Athenaeum. She consistently published poetry and drama in these years, as well as a children's novella. Webster was married and had one daughter. In the 1880s she hosted literary salons and was one of the most respected literary, political, and social figures in London until she died of cancer in 1894. Webster disappeared from view immediately after her death, and critics are only now beginning the process of exploring the rich diversity of her work. The recent increased interest in Julia Augusta Webster bodes well for a more complete understanding of the significance of Webster's work as a writer and professional critic, as well as her effectiveness as an activist and political figure. However, as this bibliographic project demonstrates, relatively few scholars have focused on the work of this woman of significance in the last half of the 19th century.

Biography

The only biographically focused work to date is Patricia Rigg's book. Rigg 2009 makes use of archived letters and family records in the United Kingdom and the United States to construct as comprehensive an account of Webster's early family connections, marriage, motherhood, activism, and professional reviewing work as archival materials allow.

Eserleri:

Poetry
Blanche Lisle: And Other Poems (1860)
Lilian Gray (1864)
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A Woman Sold and Other Poems (1867)
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A Bird and flower upon the tree

A bird and flower upon the tree,
Sweet peony and oriole,
Each of them a perfect soul,
Song and sweetness manifest
The bird and flower we love the best
Side by side on the tall tree.

'Flower who art sunlight and fire, flower who art perfume and joy,
Sweetest of sweet,
Ah for the gift withheld!
Ah for the given gift's alloy!
Why must thy spirit exhale only in beauty and breath?
Ah for the voice thou hast not! I by thy side on the tree,
Telling the world of love, pain, and all raptures that be,
Raptures of laughter and life, raptures of tears and death,
Singing my heart to heaven, singing to earth at my feet;
Silence in thee.'

'Bird who art dew-drops and flame, bird who art rapture and song,
Sweetest of sweet,
Lo there's a voice part mine, songs that to me too belong,
Songs that grew of my growth, voice that has breathed my breath.
Bird that while I sit mute singest beside on the tree,
Hast thou ever a song taking no perfume of me?
Give forth my sweetness in song; bird, thou art singing for both,
Singing our hearts to heaven, singing to earth at our feet;
My voice in thee.'

On the tree-top side by side,
Sweet oriole and peony;
Music rings through earth and sky,
Sweet and sweet in sweetness lost
The flower and bird we love the most,
On the tree-top side by side.

Augusta Davies Webster

A Castaway

Poor little diary, with its simple thoughts,
its good resolves, its "Studied French an hour,"
"Read Modern History," "Trimmed up my grey hat,"
"Darned stockings," "Tatted," "Practised my new song,"
"Went to the daily service," "Took Bess soup,"
"Went out to tea." Poor simple diary!
and did I write it? Was I this good girl,
this budding colourless young rose of home?
did I so live content in such a life,
seeing no larger scope, nor asking it,
than this small constant round -- old clothes to mend,
new clothes to make, then go and say my prayers,
or carry soup, or take a little walk
and pick the ragged-robins in the hedge?
Then for ambition, (was there ever life
that could forego that?) to improve my mind
and know French better and sing harder songs;
for gaiety, to go, in my best white
well washed and starched and freshened with new bows,
and take tea out to meet the clergyman.
No wishes and no cares, almost no hopes,
only the young girl's hazed and golden dreams
that veil the Future from her.

So long since:
and now it seems a jest to talk of me
as if I could be one with her, of me
who am ..... me.

And what is that? My looking-glass
answers it passably; a woman sure,
no fiend, no slimy thing out of the pools,
a woman with a ripe and smiling lip
that has no venom in its touch I think,
with a white brow on which there is no brand;
a woman none dare call not beautiful,
not womanly in every woman's grace.

Aye let me feed upon my beauty thus,
be glad in it like painters when they see
at last the face they dreamed but could not find
look from their canvass on them, triumph in it,
the dearest thing I have. Why, 'tis my all,
let me make much of it: is it not this,
this beauty, my own curse at once and tool
to snare men's souls -- (I know what the good say
of beauty in such creatures) -- is it not this
that makes me feel myself a woman still,
some little pride, some little --

Here's a jest!
what word will fit the sense but modesty?

A wanton I but modest!

Modest, true;
I'm not drunk in the streets, ply not for hire
at infamous corners with my likenesses
of the humbler kind; yes, modesty's my word --
'twould shape my mouth well too, I think I'll try:
"Sir, Mr What-you-will, Lord Who-knows-what,
my present lover or my next to come,
value me at my worth, fill your purse full,
for I am modest; yes, and honour me
as though your schoolgirl sister or your wife
could let her skirts brush mine or talk of me;
for I am modest."

Well, I flout myself:
but yet, but yet --

Fie, poor fantastic fool,
why do I play the hypocrite alone,
who am no hypocrite with others by?
where should be my "But yet"? I am that thing
called half a dozen dainty names, and none
dainty enough to serve the turn and hide
the one coarse English worst that lurks beneath:
just that, no worse, no better.

And, for me,
I say let no one be above her trade;
I own my kindredship with any drab
who sells herself as I, although she crouch
in fetid garrets and I have a home
all velvet and marqueterie and pastilles,
although she hide her skeleton in rags
and I set fashions and wear cobweb lace:
the difference lies but in my choicer ware,
that I sell beauty and she ugliness;
our traffic's one -- I'm no sweet slaver-tongue
to gloze upon it and explain myself
a sort of fractious angel misconceived --
our traffic's one: I own it. And what then?
I know of worse that are called honourable.
Our lawyers, who, with noble eloquence
and virtuous outbursts, lie to hang a man,
or lie to save him, which way goes the fee:
our preachers, gloating on your future hell
for not believing what they doubt themselves:
our doctors, who sort poisons out by chance,
and wonder how they'll answer, and grow rich:
our journalists, whose business is to fib
and juggle truths and falsehoods to and fro:
our tradesmen, who must keep unspotted names

and cheat the least like stealing that they can:
our -- all of them, the virtuous worthy men
who feed on the world's follies, vices, wants,
and do their businesses of lies and shams
honestly, reputably, while the world
claps hands and cries "good luck," which of their trades,
their honourable trades, barefaced like mine,
all secrets brazened out, would shew more white?

And whom do I hurt more than they? as much?
The wives? Poor fools, what do I take from them
worth crying for or keeping? If they knew
what their fine husbands look like seen by eyes
that may perceive there are more men than one!
But, if they can, let them just take the pains
to keep them: 'tis not such a mighty task
to pin an idiot to your apron-string;
and wives have an advantage over us,
(the good and blind ones have), the smile or pout
leaves them no secret nausea at odd times.
Oh they could keep their husbands if they cared,
but 'tis an easier life to let them go,
and whimper at it for morality.

Oh! those shrill carping virtues, safely housed
from reach of even a smile that should put red
on a decorous cheek, who rail at us
with such a spiteful scorn and rancourousness,
(which maybe is half envy at the heart),
and boast themselves so measurelessly good
and us so measurelessly unlike them,
what is their wondrous merit that they stay
in comfortable homes whence not a soul
has ever thought of tempting them, and wear
no kisses but a husband's upon lips
there is no other man desires to kiss --
refrain in fact from sin impossible?
How dare they hate us so? what have they done,
what borne, to prove them other than we are?
What right have they to scorn us -- glass-case saints,
Dianas under lock and key -- what right
more than the well-fed helpless barn-door fowl
to scorn the larcenous wild-birds?

Pshaw, let be!
Scorn or no scorn, what matter for their scorn?
I have outfaced my own -- that's harder work.
Aye let their virtuous malice dribble on --
mock snowstorms on the stage -- I'm proof long since:
I have looked coolly on my what and why,
and I accept myself.

Oh I'll endorse
the shamefullest revilings mouthed at me,
cry "True! Oh perfect picture! Yes, that's I!"
and add a telling blackness here and there,
and then dare swear you, every nine of ten,
my judges and accusers, I'd not change
my conscience against yours, you who tread out
your devil's pilgrimage along the roads
that take in church and chapel, and arrange
a roundabout and decent way to hell.

Well, mine's a short way and a merry one:
so says my pious hash of ohs and ahs,
choice texts and choicer threats, appropriate names,
(Rahabs and Jezebels), some fierce Tartuffe
hurled at me through the post. We had rare fun
over that tract digested with champagne.
Where is it? where's my rich repertory
of insults biblical? 'I prey on souls' --
only my men have oftenest none I think:
'I snare the simple ones' -- but in these days
there seem to be none simple and none snared,
and most men have their favourite sinnings planned
to do them civilly and sensibly:
'I braid my hair' -- but braids are out of date:
'I paint my cheeks' -- I always wear them pale:
'I -- '

Pshaw! the trash is savourless to-day:
one cannot laugh alone. There, let it burn.
What, does the windy dullard think one needs
his wisdom dove-tailed on to Solomon's,
his threats out-threatening God's, to teach the news
that those who need not sin have safer souls?
We know it, but we've bodies to save too;
and so we earn our living.

Well lit, tract!
at least you've made me a good leaping blaze.
Up, up, how the flame shoots! and now 'tis dead.
Oh proper finish, preaching to the last --
no such bad omen either; sudden end,
and no sad withering horrible old age.
How one would clutch at youth to hold it tight!
and then to know it gone, to see it gone,
be taught its absence by harsh, careless looks,
to live forgotten, solitary, old --
the cruellest word that ever woman learns.
Old -- that's to be nothing, or to be at best
a blurred memorial that in better days
there was a woman once with such a name.
No, no, I could not bear it: death itself

shews kinder promise ..... even death itself,
since it must come one day --

Oh this grey gloom!
This rain, rain, rain, what wretched thoughts it brings!
Death: I'll not think of it.

Will no one come?
'Tis dreary work alone.

Why did I read
that silly diary? Now, sing song, ding dong,
come the old vexing echoes back again,
church bells and nursery good-books, back again
upon my shrinking ears that had forgotten --
I hate the useless memories: 'tis fools' work
singing the hacknied dirge of 'better days:'
best take Now kindly, give the past good-bye,
whether it were a better or a worse.

Yes, yes, I listened to the echoes once,
the echoes and the thoughts from the old days.
The worse for me: I lost my richest friend,
and that was all the difference. For the world
would not have that flight known. How they'd roar:
"What! Eulalie, when she refused us all,
'ill' and 'away,' was doing Magdalene,
tears, ashes, and her Bible, and then off
hide her in a Refuge ... for a week!"

A wild whim that, to fancy I could change
my new self for my old, because I wished!
since then, when in my languid days there comes
that craving, like homesickness, to go back
to the good days, the dear old stupid days,
to the quiet and the innocence, I know
'tis a sick fancy and try palliatives.

What is it? You go back to the old home,
and 'tis not your home, has no place for you,
and, if it had, you could not fit you in it.
And could I fit me to my former self?
If I had had the wit, like some of us,
to sow my wild-oats into three per cents,
could I not find me shelter in the peace
of some far nook where none of them would come,
nor whisper travel from this scurrilous world,
that gloats and moralizes through its leers,
to blast me with my fashionable shame?
There I might -- oh my castle in the clouds!
and where's its rent? -- but there, were there a there,
I might again live the grave blameless life

among such simple pleasures, simple cares:
but could they be my pleasures, be my cares?
The blameless life, but never the content --
never. How could I henceforth be content
in any life but one that sets the brain
in a hot merry fever with its stir?
what would there be in quiet rustic days,
each like the other, full of time to think,
to keep one bold enough to live at all?
Quiet is hell, I say -- as if a woman
could bear to sit alone, quiet all day,
and loathe herself, and sicken on her thoughts.

They tried it at the Refuge, and I failed:
I could not bear it. Dreary hideous room,
coarse pittance, prison rules, one might bear these
and keep one's purpose; but so much alone,
and then made faint and weak and fanciful
by change from pampering to half-famishing --
good God, what thoughts come! Only one week more
and 'twould have ended: but in one day more
I must have killed myself. And I loathe death,
the dreadful foul corruption, with who knows
what future after it.

Well, I came back,
Back to my slough. Who says I had my choice?
Could I stay there to die of some mad death?
and if I rambled out into the world,
sinless but penniless, what else were that
but slower death, slow pining shivering death
by misery and hunger? Choice! what choice
of living well or ill? could I have that?
and who would give it me? I think indeed
some kind hand, a woman's -- I hate men --
had stretched itself to help me to firm ground,
taken a chance and risked my falling back,
could have gone my way not falling back:
but, let her be all brave, all charitable,
how could she do it? Such a trifling boon,
little work to live by, 'tis not much,
and I might have found will enough to last:
but where's the work? More sempstresses than shirts;
and defter hands at white work than are mine
drop starved at last: dressmakers, milliners,
too many too they say; and then their trades
need skill, apprenticeship. And who so bold
as hire me for their humblest drudgery?
not even for scullery slut; not even, I think,
for governess, although they'd get me cheap.
And after all it would be something hard,
with the marts for decent women overfull,

if I could elbow in and snatch a chance
and oust some good girl so, who then perforce
must come and snatch her chance among our crowd.

Why, if the worthy men who think all's done
if we'll but come where we can hear them preach,
could bring us all, or any half of us,
into their fold, teach all us wandering sheep,
or only half of us, to stand in rows
and baa them hymns and moral songs, good lack,
what would they do with us? what could they do?
Just think! with were't but half of us on hand
to find work for ... or husbands. Would they try
to ship us to the colonies for wives?

Well, well; I know the wise ones talk and talk:
"Here's cause, here's cure:" "No, here it is and here:"
and find society to blame, or law,
the Church, the men, the women, too few schools,
too many schools, too much, too little taught:
somewhere or somehow someone is to blame:
but I say all the fault's with God himself
who puts too many women in the world.
We ought to die off reasonably and leave
as many as the men want, none to waste.
Here's cause; the woman's superfluity:
and for the cure, why, if it were the law,
say, every year, in due percentages,
balancing them with men as the times need,
to kill off female infants, 'twould make room;
and some of us would not have lost too much,
losing life ere we know what it can mean.

The other day I saw a woman weep
beside her dead child's bed: the little thing
lay smiling, and the mother wailed half mad,
shrieking to God to give it back again.
I could have laughed aloud: the little girl
living had but her mother's life to live;
there she lay smiling, and her mother wept
to know her gone!

My mother would have wept.

Oh mother, mother, did you ever dream,
you good grave simple mother, you pure soul
no evil could come nigh, did you once dream
in all your dying cares for your lone girl
left to fight out her fortune all alone
that there would be this danger? -- for your girl,
taught by you, lapped in a sweet ignorance,
scarcely more wise of what things sin could be

than some young child a summer six months old
where in the north the summer makes a day,
of what is darkness ... darkness that will come
to-morrow suddenly. Thank God at least
for this much of my life, that when you died,
that when you kissed me dying, not a thought
of this made sorrow for you, that I too
was pure of even fear.

Oh yes, I thought,
still new in my insipid treadmill life,
(my father so late dead), and hopeful still
here might be something pleasant somewhere in it,
some sudden fairy come, no doubt, to turn
any pumpkin to a chariot, I thought then
that I might plod, and plod, and drum the sounds
of useless facts into unwilling ears,
tease children with dull questions half the day,
then con dull answers in my room at night
ready for next day's questions, mend quill pens
and cut my fingers, add up sums done wrong
and never get them right; teach, teach, and teach --
what I half knew, or not at all -- teach, teach
for years, a lifetime -- I!

And yet, who knows?
it might have been, for I was patient once,
and willing, and meant well; it might have been
had I but still clung on in my first place --
a safe dull place, where mostly there were smiles
but never merry-makings; where all days
jogged on sedately busy, with no haste;
where all seemed measured out, but margins broad:
a dull home but a peaceful, where I felt
my pupils would be dear young sisters soon,
and felt their mother take me to her heart,
motherly to all lonely harmless things.
But I must have a conscience, must blurt out
my great discovery of my ignorance!
And who required it of me? And who gained?
What did it matter for a more or less
the girls learnt in their schoolbooks, to forget
in their first season? We did well together:
they loved me and I them: but I went off
to housemaid's pay, six crossgrained brats to teach,
wrangles and jangles, doubts, disgrace ... then this;
and they had a perfection found for them,
who has all ladies' learning in her head
abridged and scheduled, speaks five languages,
knows botany and conchology and globes,
draws, paints, plays, sings, embroiders, teaches all
on a patent method never known to fail:

and now they're finished and, I hear, poor things,
are the worst dancers and worst dressers out.
And where's their profit of those prison years
all gone to make them wise in lesson books?
who wants his wife to know weeds' Latin names?
who ever chose a girl for saying dates?
or asked if she had learned to trace a map?

Well, well, the silly rules this silly world
makes about women! This is one of them.
Why must there be pretence of teaching them
what no one ever cares that they should know,
what, grown out of the schoolroom, they cast off
like the schoolroom pinafore, no better fit
for any use of real grown-up life,
for any use to her who seeks or waits
the husband and the home, for any use,
for any shallowest pretence of use,
to her who has them? Do I not know this,
I like my betters, that a woman's life,
her natural life, her good life, her one life,
is in her husband, God on earth to her,
and what she knows and what she can and is
is only good as it brings good to him?

Oh God, do I not know it? I the thing
of shame and rottenness, the animal
that feed men's lusts and prey on them, I, I,
who should not dare to take the name of wife
on my polluted lips, who in the word
hear but my own reviling, I know that.
I could have lived by that rule, how content:
my pleasure to make him some pleasure, pride
to be as he would have me, duty, care,
to fit all to his taste, rule my small sphere
to his intention; then to lean on him,
be guided, tutored, loved -- no not that word,
that loved which between men and women means
all selfishness, all putrid talk, all lust,
all vanity, all idiocy -- not loved
but cared for. I've been loved myself, I think,
some once or twice since my poor mother died,
but cared for, never: -- that a word for homes,
kind homes, good homes, where simple children come
and ask their mother is this right or wrong,
because they know she's perfect, cannot err;
their father told them so, and he knows all,
being so wise and good and wonderful,
even enough to scold even her at times
and tell her everything she does not know.
Ah the sweet nursery logic!

Fool! thrice fool!
do I hanker after that too? Fancy me
infallible nursery saint, live code of law!
me preaching! teaching innocence to be good!
a mother!

Yet the baby thing that woke
and wailed an hour or two, and then was dead,
was mine, and had he lived ..... why then my name
would have been mother. But 'twas well he died:
I could have been no mother, I, lost then
beyond his saving. Had he come before
and lived, come to me in the doubtful days
when shame and boldness had not grown one sense,
for his sake, with the courage come of him,
I might have struggled back.

But how? But how?
His father would not then have let me go:
his time had not yet come to make an end
of my 'for ever' with a hireling's fee
and civil light dismissal. None but him
to claim a bit of bread of if I went,
child or no child: would he have given it me?
He! no; he had not done with me. No help,
no help, no help. Some ways can be trodden back,
but never our way, we who one wild day
have given goodbye to what in our deep hearts
the lowest woman still holds best in life,
good name -- good name though given by the world
that mouths and garbles with its decent prate,
and wraps it in respectable grave shams,
and patches conscience partly by the rule
of what one's neighbour thinks but something more
by what his eyes are sharp enough to see.
How I could scorn it with its Pharisees,
if it could not scorn me: but yet, but yet --
oh God, if I could look it in the face!

Oh I am wild, am ill, I think, to night:
will no one come and laugh with me? No feast,
no merriment to-night. So long alone!
Will no one come?

At least there's a new dress
to try, and grumble at -- they never fit
to one's ideal. Yes, a new rich dress,
with lace like this too, that's a soothing balm
for any fretting woman, cannot fail,
I've heard men say it ... and they know so well
what's in all women's hearts, especially
women like me.

No help! no help! no help!
How could it be? It was too late long since --
even at the first too late. Whose blame is that?
there are some kindly people in the world,
but what can they do? If one hurls oneself
into a quicksand, what can be the end,
but that one sinks and sinks? Cry out for help?
Ah yes, and, if it came, who is so strong
to strain from the firm ground and lift one out?
And how, so firmly clutching the stretched hand,
as death's pursuing terror bids, even so,
how can one reach firm land, having to foot
the treacherous crumbling soil that slides and gives
and sucks one in again? Impossible path!
No, why waste struggles, I or any one?
what is must be. What then? I, where I am,
sinking and sinking; let the wise pass by
and keep their wisdom for an apter use,
let me sink merrily as I best may.

Only, I think, my brother -- I forgot
he stopped his brotherhood some years ago --
but if he had been just so much less good
as to remember mercy. Did he think
how once I was his sister, prizing him
as sisters do, content to learn for him
the lesson girls with brothers all must learn,
to do without?

I have heard girls lament
that doing so without all things one would,
but I saw never aught to murmur at,
for men must be made ready for their work,
and women all have more or less their chance
of husbands to work for them, keep them safe
like summer roses in soft greenhouse air
that never guess 'tis winter out of doors:
no, I saw never aught to murmur at,
content with stinted fare and shabby clothes
and cloistered silent life to save expense,
teaching myself out of my borrowed books,
while he for some one pastime, (needful true
to keep him of his rank, 'twas not his fault),
spent in a month what could have given me
my teachers for a year.

'Twas no one's fault:
for could he be launched forth on the rude sea
of this contentious world and left to find
oars and the boatman's skill by some good chance?
'Twas no one's fault: yet still he might have thought

of our so different youths, and owned at least
'tis pitiful when a mere nerveless girl,
untutored, must put forth upon that sea,
not in the woman's true place, the wife's place,
to trust a husband and be borne along,
but impotent blind pilot to herself.

Merciless, merciless -- like the prudent world
that will not have the flawed soul prank itself
with a hoped second virtue, will not have
the woman fallen once lift up herself .....
lest she should fall again. Oh how his taunts,
his loathing fierce reproaches, scarred and seared,
like branding iron hissing in a wound!
And it was true -- that killed me: and I felt
a hideous hopeless shame kill out my heart,
and knew myself for ever that he said,
that which I was -- Oh it was true, true, true.

No, not true then. I was not all that then.
Oh, I have drifted on before mad winds
6 and made ignoble shipwreck, not to-day
could any breeze of heaven prosper me
into the track again, nor any hand
snatch me out of the whirlpool I have reached;
but then?

Nay he judged very well: he knew
repentance was too dear a luxury
for a beggar's buying, knew it earns no bread --
and knew me a too base and nerveless thing
to bear my first fault's sequel and just die.
And how could he have helped me? Held my hand,
owned me for his, fronted the angry world
clothed with my ignominy? Or maybe
taken me to his home to damn him worse?
What did I look for? for what less would serve
that he could do, a man without a purse?
He meant me well, he sent me that five pounds,
much to him then; and, if he bade me work
and never vex him more with news of me,
we both knew him too poor for pensioners.
I see he did his best; I could wish now
sending it back I had professed some thanks.

But there! I was too wretched to be meek:
it seemed to me as if he, every one,
the whole great world, were guilty of my guilt,
abettors and avengers: in my heart
I gibed them back their gibings; I was wild.

I see clear now and know one has one's life

in hand at first to spend or spare or give
like any other coin; spend it or give
or drop it in the mire, can the world see
you get your value for it, or bar back
the hurrying of its marts to grope it up
and give it back to you for better use?
And if you spend or give that is your choice;
and if you let it slip that's your choice too,
you should have held it firmer. Yours the blame,
and not another's, not the indifferent world's
which goes on steadily, statistically,
and count by censuses not separate souls --
and if it somehow needs to its worst use
so many lives of women, useless else,
it buys us of ourselves, we could hold back,
free all of us to starve, and some of us,
(those who have done no ill and are in luck),
to slave their lives out and have food and clothes
until they grow unserviceably old.

Oh I blame no one -- scarcely even myself.
It was to be: the very good in me
has always turned to hurt; all I thought right
at the hot moment, judged of afterwards,
shows reckless.

Why, look at it, had I taken
the pay my dead child's father offered me
for having been its mother, I could then
have kept life in me, (many have to do it,
that swarm in the back alleys, on no more,
cold sometimes, mostly hungry, but they live);
I could have gained a respite trying it,
and maybe found at last some humble work
to eke the pittance out. Not I, forsooth,
I must have spirit, must have womanly pride,
must dash back his contemptuous wages, I,
who had not scorned to earn them, dash them back
the fiercer that he dared to count our boy
in my appraising: and yet now I think
I might have taken it for my dead boy's sake;
it would have been his gift.

But I went forth
with my fine scorn, and whither did it lead?
Money's the root of evil do they say?
money is virtue, strength: money to me
would then have been repentance: could I live
upon my idiot's pride?

Well, it fell soon.
I had prayed Edward might believe me dead,

and yet I begged of him -- That's like me too,
beg of him and then send him back his alms!
What if he gave as to a whining wretch
that holds her hand and lies? I am less to him
than such a one; her rags do him no wrong,
but I, I, wrong him merely that I live,
being his sister. Could I not at least
have still let him forget me? But 'tis past:
and naturally he may hope I am long dead.

Good God! to think that we were what we were
one to the other ... and now!

He has done well;
married a sort of heiress, I have heard,
a dapper little madam, dimple cheeked
and dimple brained, who makes him a good wife --
No doubt she'd never own but just to him,
and in a whisper, she can even suspect
that we exist, we other women things:
what would she say if she could learn one day
she has a sister-in-law! So he and I
must stand apart till doomsday.

But the jest,
to think how she would look! -- Her fright, poor thing!
The notion! -- I could laugh outright ..... or else,
for I feel near it, roll on the ground and sob.

Well, after all, there's not much difference
between the two sometimes.

Was that the bell?
Some one at last, thank goodness. There's a voice,
and that's a pleasure. Whose though? Ah I know.
Why did she come alone, the cackling goose?
why not have brought her sister? -- she tells more
and titters less. No matter; half a loaf
is better than no bread.

Oh, is it you?
Most welcome, dear: one gets so moped alone.

Augusta Davies Webster

A Coarse Morning

OH the yellow boisterous sea,
The surging, chafing, murderous sea!
And the wind-gusts hurtle the torn clouds by,
On to the south through a shuddering sky,
And the bare black ships scud aloof from the land.
'Tis as like the day as can be,
When the ship came in sight that came never to strand,
The ship that was blown on the sunken sand—
And he coming back to me!

Oh the great white snake of foam,
The coiling, writhing, snake of white foam,
Hissing and huddering out in the bay,
Over the banks where the wrecked ship lay,
Over the sands where the dead may lie deep!
There are some in the churchyard loam,
Some two or three the sea flung to our keep:
Their mothers can sit by a grave to weep,
But my son never came home.

Never, never, living or dead—
Oh, never, Willie, living or dead,
Could you keep your word and come back to me!
Oh, my darling! As like this day as can be,
When the ship came in sight that came never to strand,
When the ship came rounding the head,
Close to the haven and close to the sand.—
And their graves are long green that were tossed to land.
Ah, 'Sure to come back,' he said!

Augusta Davies Webster

A Comrade

'I AM Joy,' she said; but her voice was low,
Too low for laughter;
'I am Love '; but her eyes lacked Love's quick glow,
And the tear that springs after;
'I am Life'; but she seemed too calm, too still,
Like one who waits, but forgets to-morrow;
Then she took my hand, and I did her will,
And knew she was Sorrow.

And she led me on through the world we see,
Where smiles are many;
Through the fever and stir of life's hot glee
That waits never for any;
Through the silence of rest when dreams are o'er
And stillness is sweeter than hope's best pleasure;
Through the peace when nought is to garner more
Of Love's plenished treasure.

So at length we twain were the truest pair,
More kind than lovers.
Then she said 'After blight the boughs are bare,
Yet the strong tree recovers;
And anew hast thou Life, Love, Joy, at call:
Unclasp my hand.' And I clasped, denying;
'Thou art best, more strong, more true than all;
And after thee dying.'

Augusta Davies Webster

A Dilettante

Good friend, be patient: goes the world awry?
well, can you groove it straight with all your pains?
and, sigh or scold, and, argue or intreat,
what have you done but waste your part of life
on impotent fool's battles with the winds,
that will blow as they list in spite of you?

Fie, I am weary of your pettish griefs
against the world that's given, like a child
who whines and pules because his bread's not cake,
because the roses have those ugly thorns
that prick if he's not careful of his hands.
Oh foolish spite: what talk you of the world,
and mean the men and women and the sin?
Oh friend, these all pass by, and God remains:
and God has made a world that pleases Him,
and when He wills then He will better it;
let it suffice us as he wills it now.

Nay, hush and look and listen. For this noon,
this summer noon, replies "but be content,"
speaking in voices of a hundred joys.

For lo, we, lying on this mossy knoll,
tasting the vivid musk of sheltering pines,
and balm of odorous flowers and sweet warm air;
feeling the uncadenced music of slow leaves,
and ripples in the brook athwart its stones,
and birds that call each other in the brakes
with sudden questions and smooth long replies,
the gossip of the incessant grasshoppers,
and the contented hum of laden bees;
we, knowing (with the easy restful eye
that, whichsoever way it turns, is filled
with unexacting beauty) this smooth sky,
blue with our English placid silvery blue,
mottled with little lazy clouds, this stretch
of dappled wealds and green and saffron slopes,
and near us these gnarled elm-trunks barred with gold,
and ruddy pine-boles, where the slumbrous beams
have slipped through the translucent leafy net
to break the shimmering dimness of the wood;
we, who, like licensed truants from light tasks
which lightly can be banished out of mind,
have all ourselves to give to idleness,
were more unreasoning, if we make moan
of miseries and toils and barrenness,
than if we sitting at a feast told tales
of famines and for the pity of them starved.

Oh, life is good when, on such summer days,
we linger in the dreamful paradise

that lies at every door where so much space
is left to garner in the languid air
as grass may grow in and some verdurous tree,
and some few yards of blueness and of clouds
may stretch above, making immensity;
when, lost out of our petty unit selves,
the heart grows large in the grave trance of peace,
and all things breathing, growing, are its kin,
and all the fair and blossoming earth is home.

And beauty is our lesson: for, look there,
that exquisite curve and cluster of rich leaves,
emerald and shadow, in that patch of sun,
what is it but a nettle? And that knoll
of woven green, where all fantastic grace
of shaggy stems and lush and trailing shoots
and all a thousand delicate varied tints,
are mingled in a wanton symmetry,
what is it but a thorn and bramble copse?
And that far plain, on which, through all the day,
change still grows lovelier and every cloud
makes different softer dimness, every light
an other-coloured glory, what is it?
a desolate barren waste, marshland and moor.
And in some other moment, when the rain
spurts greyly downwards on the soddening fields,
or the dank, autumn fog veils leaden skies,
or the keen baleful east winds nip the bloom
of frightened spring with bleak and parching chills,
the waste, the thorns, the nettle, each would seem
cursed with the unloveliness of evil things.

So beauty comes and goes: yet beauty is
a message out of Heaven; can it speak
from evil things? I know not; but I know
that waste and thorns and nettle are to-day
teachers of Love, a prospect not to change,
for use, against a fifty miles of corn.
Can we tell good from evil you and I?

Oh, if the men and women of to-day
seem ill or good to us, why, what know we?
to-morrow they, or those who follow them,
will seem another way; and are they changed,
or are the eyes that see them? Let them be;
are we divine that we should judge and rule?
And they are not the world by several selves
but in a gathered whole, and if that whole
drift heavenward or hellward God can see,
not we, who, ants hived in our colonies,
count the world loam or gravel, stocked with flowers
or weeds or cabbages, as we shall find

within our own small ranges, and (being wise
and full of care for all the universe),
wonder, and blame, and theorize, and plan,
by the broad guide of our experiences!

'Twere a neat world if levelled by the ants;
no ridges, no rough gaps, all fined and soft.
But I will rather use my antish wits
in smoothing just my cell and at my doors
than join in such heroic enterprise.

Selfish, you call me? callous? Hear a tale.
There was a little shallow brook that ran
between low banks, scarcely a child's leap wide,
feeding a foot or two of bordering grass
and, here and there, some tufts of waterflowers
and cresses, and tall sedge, rushes and reeds;
and, where it bubbled past a poor man's cot,
he and his household came and drank of it,
and all the children loved it for its flowers
and counted it a playmate made for them:
but, not far off, a sandy arid waste
where, when a winged seed rested, or a bird
would drop a grain in passing, and it grew,
it presently must droop and die athirst,
spread its scorched silent leagues to the fierce sun:
and once a learned man came by and saw,
and "lo," said he, "what space for corn to grow,
could we send vivifying moistures here,
while look, this wanton misdirected brook
watering its useless weeds!" so had it turned,
and made a channel for it through the waste:
but its small waters could not feed that drought,
and, in the wide unshadowed plain, it lagged,
and shrank away, sucked upwards of the sun
and downwards of the sands; so the new bed
lay dry, and dry the old; and the parched reeds
grew brown and dwined, the stunted rushes drooped,
the cresses could not root in that slacked soil,
the blossoms and the sedges died away,
the greenness shrivelled from the dusty banks,
the children missed their playmate and the flowers,
and thirsted in hot noon-tides for the draught
grown over precious now their mother went
a half-mile to the well to fill her pails;
and not two ears of corn the more were green.

Tell me, what should I do? I take my life
as I have found it, and the work it brings;
well, and the life is kind, the work is light,
shall I go fret and scorn myself for that?
and must I sally forth to hack and hew

at giants or at windmills, leave the post
I could have filled, the work I could have wrought,
for some magnificent mad enterprise,
some task to lift a mountain, drain a sea,
tread down a Titan, build a pyramid?
No, let me, like a bird bred in the cage,
that, singing its own self to gladness there,
makes some who hear it gladder, take what part
I have been born to, and make joy of it.

Grumbler, what are you muttering in your beard?
"You've a bird-likeness too, to shew me in;
I take life, as a sea-gull takes the sea,
mere skimmingly." I say no otherwise;
'tis a wise bird the sea-gull, does but taste
the hale and briny freshness of the spray:
what would you have me do? plunge in and drown?

Oh chiding friend, I am not of your kind,
you strenuous souls who cannot think you live
unless you feel your limbs, though 'twere by aches:
great boisterous winds you are, who must rush on
and sweep all on your way or drop and die,
but I am only a small fluttering breeze
to coax the roses open: let me be;
perhaps I have my use no less than you.

Ah well! How strange that you and I, who tread
so same a path, perceive it so unlike.
And which sees justly? Maybe both of us:
or maybe one of us is colour-blind,
and sees the tintings blurred, or sees them false,
or does not see, so misses what they shew.
Or likelier each of us is colour-blind,
and sees the world his own way, fit for him:
doubtless we afterwards shall understand
the beauty and the pain are more alike.

Augusta Davies Webster

A Preacher

"Lest that by any means
When I have preached to others I myself
Should be a castaway." If some one now
Would take that text and preach to us that preach, --
Some one who could forget his truths were old
And what were in a thousand bawling mouths
While they filled his -- some one who could so throw
His life into the old dull skeletons
Of points and morals, inferences, proofs,
Hopes, doubts, persuasions, all for time untold
Worn out of the flesh, that one could lose from mind
How well one knew his lesson, how oneself
Could with another, may be choicer, style
Enforce it, treat it from another view
And with another logic -- some one warm
With the rare heart that trusts itself and knows
Because it loves -- yes such a one perchance,
With such a theme, might waken me as I
Have wakened others, I who am no more
Than steward of an eloquence God gives
For others' use not mine. But no one bears
Apostleship for us. We teach and teach
Until, like drumming pedagogues, we lose
The thought that what we teach has higher ends
Than being taught and learned. And if a man
Out of ourselves should cry aloud, "I sin,
And ye are sinning, all of us who talk
Our Sunday half-hour on the love of God,
Trying to move our peoples, then go home
To sleep upon it and, when fresh again,
To plan another sermon, nothing moved,
Serving our God like clock-work sentinels,
We who have souls ourselves," why I like the rest
Should turn in anger: "Hush this charlatan
Who, in his blatant arrogance, assumes
Over us who know our duties."
Yet that text
Which galls me, what a sermon might be made
Upon its theme! How even I myself
Could stir some of our priesthood! Ah! but then
Who would stir me?
I know not how it is;
I take the faith in earnest, I believe,
Even at happy times I think I love,
I try to pattern me upon the type
My Master left us, am no hypocrite
Playing my soul against good men's applause,
Nor monger of the Gospel for a cure,
But serve a Master whom I chose because
It seemed to me I loved him, whom till now
My longing is to love; and yet I feel
A falseness somewhere clogging me. I seem

Divided from myself; I can speak words
Of burning faith and fire myself with them;
I can, while upturned faces gaze on me
As if I were their Gospel manifest,
Break into unplanned turns as natural
As the blind man's cry for healing, pass beyond
My bounded manhood in the earnestness
Of a messenger from God. And then I come
And in my study's quiet find again
The callous actor who, because long since
He had some feelings in him like the talk
The book puts in his mouth, still warms his pit
And even, in his lucky moods, himself
With the passion of his part, but lays aside
His heroism with his satin suit
And thinks "the part is good and well conceived
And very natural -- no flaw to find" --
And then forgets it.
Yes I preach to others
And am -- I know not what -- a castaway?
No, but a man who feels his heart asleep,
As he might feel his hand or foot. The limb
Will not awake without a little shock,
A little pain perhaps, a nip or blow,
And that one gives and feels the waking pricks.
But for one's heart I know not. I can give
No shock to make mine prick. I seem to be
Just such a man as those who claim the power
Or have it, (say, to serve the thought), of willing
That such a one should break an iron bar,
And such a one resist the strength of ten,
And the thing is done, yet cannot will themselves
One least small breath of power beyond the wont.
To-night now I might triumph. Not a breath
But shivered when I pictured the dead soul
Awaking when the body dies to know
Itself has lived too late, and drew in long
With yearning when I shewed how perfect love
Might make Earth's self be but an earlier Heaven.
And I may say and not be over-bold,
Judging from former fruits, "Some one to-night
Has come more near to God, some one has felt
What it may mean to love Him, some one learned
A new great horror against death and sin,
Some one at least -- it may be many." Yet --
And yet -- Why I the preacher look for God,
Saying "I know thee Lord, what I should see
If I could see thee as some can on earth,
But I do not see thee," and "I know thee Lord,
What loving thee is like, as if I loved,
But I cannot love thee." And even with the thought
The answer grows "Thine is the greater sin,"

And I stand self-convicted yet not shamed,
But quiet, reasoning why it should be thus,
And almost wishing I could suddenly
Fall in some awful sin, that so might come
A living sense of God, if but by fear,
And a repentance sharp as is the need.
But now, the sin being indifference,
Repentance too is tepid.
There are some,
Good men and honest though not overwise
Nor studious of the subtler depths of minds
Below the surface strata, who would teach,
In such a case, to scare oneself awake
(As girls do, telling ghost-tales in the dark),
With scriptural terrors, all the judgments spoken
Against the tyrant empires, all the wrath
On them who slew the prophets and forsook
Their God for Baal, and the awful threat
For him whose dark dread sin is pardonless,
So that in terror one might cling to God --
As the poor wretch, who, angry with his life,
Has dashed into a dank and hungry pool,
Learns in the death-gasp to love life again
And clings unreasoning to the saving hand.
Well I know some -- for the most part with thin minds
Of the effervescent kind, easy to froth,
Though easier to let stagnate -- who thus wrought
Convulsive pious moods upon themselves
And, thinking all tears sorrow and all texts
Repentance, are in peace upon the trust
That a grand necessary stage is past,
And do love God as I desire to love.
And now they'll look on their hysteric time
And wonder at it, seeing it not real
And yet not feigned. They'll say "A special time
Of God's direct own working -- you may see
It was not natural."
And there I stand
In face with it, and know it. Not for me;
Because I know it, cannot trust in it;
It is not natural. It does not root
Silently in the dark as God's seeds root,
Then day by day move upward in the light.
It does not wake a tremulous glimmering dawn,
Then swell to perfect day as God's light does.
It does not give to life a lowly child
To grow by days and morrows to man's strength,
As do God's natural birthdays. God who sets
Some little seed of good in everything
May bring his good from this, but not for one
Who calmly says "I know -- this is a dream,
A mere mirage sprung up of heat and mist;

It cannot slake my thirst: but I will try
To fool my fancy to it, and will rush
To cool my burning throat, as if there welled
Clear waters in the visionary lake,
That so perchance Heaven pitying me may send
Its own fresh showers upon me." I perchance
Might, with occasion, spite of steady will
And steady nerve, bring on the ecstasy:
But what avails without the simple faith?
I should not cheat myself, and who cheats God?
And wherefore should I count love more than truth,
And buy the loving him with such a price,
Even if 'twere possible to school myself
To an unbased belief and love him more
Only through a delusion?
Not so, Lord.
Let me not buy my peace, nay not my soul,
At price of one least word of thy strong truth
Which is Thyself. The perfect love must be
When one shall know thee. Better one should lose
The present peace of loving, nay of trusting,
Better to doubt and be perplexed in soul
Because thy truth seems many and not one,
Than cease to seek thee, even through reverence,
In the fulness and minuteness of thy truth.
If it be sin, forgive me: I am bold,
My God, but I would rather touch the ark
To find if thou be there than -- thinking hushed
"'Tis better to believe, I will believe,
Though, were't not for belief, 'Tis far from proved" --
Shout with the people "Lo our God is there,"
And stun my doubts by iterating faith.
And yet, I know not why it is, this knack
Of sermon-making seems to carry me
Athwart the truth at times before I know --
In little things at least; thank God the greater
Have not yet grown by the familiar use
Such puppets of a phrase as to slip by
Without clear recognition. Take to-night --
I preached a careful sermon, gravely planned,
All of it written. Not a line was meant
To fit the mood of any differing
From my own judgment: not the less I find --
(I thought of it coming home while my good Jane
Talked of the Shetland pony I must get
For the boys to learn to ride:) yes here it is,
And here again on this page -- blame by rote,
Where by my private judgment I blame not.
"We think our own thoughts on this day," I said,
"Harmless it may be, kindly even, still
Not Heaven's thoughts -- not Sunday thoughts I'll say."
Well now do I, now that I think of it,

Advise a separation of our thoughts
By Sundays and by week-days, Heaven's and ours?
By no means, for I think the bar is bad.
I'll teach my children "Keep all thinkings pure,
And think them when you like, if but the time
Is free to any thinking. Think of God
So often that in anything you do
It cannot seem you have forgotten Him,
Just as you would not have forgotten us,
Your mother and myself, although your thoughts
Were not distinctly on us, while you played;
And, if you do this, in the Sunday's rest
You will most naturally think of Him;
Just as your thoughts, though in a different way,
(God being the great mystery He is
And so far from us and so strangely near),
Would on your mother's birthday-holiday
Come often back to her." But I'd not urge
A treadmill Sunday labour for their mind,
Constant on one forced round: nor should I blame
Their constant chatter upon daily themes.
I did not blame Jane for her project told,
Though she had heard my sermon, and no doubt
Ought, as I told my flock, to dwell on that.
Then here again "the pleasures of the world
That tempt the younger members of my flock."
Now I think really that they've not enough
Of these same pleasures. Grey and joyless lives
A many of them have, whom I would see
Sharing the natural gaieties of youth.
I wish they'd more temptations of the kind.
Now Donne and Allan preach such things as these
Meaning them and believing. As for me,
What did I mean? Neither to feign nor teach
A Pharisaic service. 'Twas just this,
That there are lessons and rebukes long made
So much a thing of course that, unobserving,
One sets them down as one puts dots to i's,
Crosses to t's.
A simple carelessness;
No more than that. There's the excuse -- and I,
Who know that every carelessness is falsehood
Against my trust, what guide or check have I
Being, what I have called myself, an actor
Able to be awhile the man he plays
But in himself a heartless common hack?
I felt no falseness as I spoke the trash,
I was thrilled to see it moved the listeners,
Grew warmer to my task! 'Twas written well,
Habit had made the thoughts come fluently
As if they had been real --
Yes, Jane, yes,

I hear you -- Prayers and supper waiting me --
I'll come --
Dear Jane, who thinks me half a saint.

Augusta Davies Webster

A Song Of A Spring-Time

TOO rash, sweet birds, spring is not spring;
Sharp winds are fell in east and north;
Late blossoms die for peeping forth; Rains numb, frost blights;
Days are unsunned, storms tear the nights;
The tree-buds wilt before they swell.
Frosts in the buds, and frost-winds fell: And you, you sing.

But let no song be sweet in spring;
Spring is but hope for after-time,
And what is hope but spring-tide rime? But blights, but rain?
Spring wanes unsunned, and sunless wane
The hopes false spring-tide bore to die.
Spring's answer is the March wind's sigh: And you, you sing.

Augusta Davies Webster

A Soul in Prison

(The Doubter lays aside his book.)

"Answered a score of times." Oh, looked for teacher,
is this all you will teach me? I in the dark
reaching my hand for you to help me forth
to the happy sunshine where you stand, "Oh shame,
to be in the dark there, prisoned!" answer you;
"there are ledges somewhere there by which strong feet
might scale to daylight: I would lift you out
with just a touch, but that your need's so slight;
for there are ledges." And I grope and strain,
think I've found footing, and slip baffled back,
slip, maybe, deeper downwards. "Oh, my guide,
I find no ledges: help me: say at least
where they are placed, that I may know to seek."
But you in anger, "Nay, wild wilful soul,
thou will rot in the dark, God's sunshine here
at thy prison's very lip: blame not the guide;
have I not told thee there is footing for thee?"
and so you leave me, and with even tread
guide men along the highway ... where, I think,
they need you less.

Say 'twas my wanton haste,
or my drowsed languor, my too earthward eyes
watching for hedge flowers, or my too rapt gaze
it the mock sunshine of a sky-born cloud,
that led me, blindling, here: say the black walls
grew round me while I slept, or that I built
with ignorant hands a temple for my soul
to pray in to herself, and that, for want
of a window heavenwards, a loathsome night
of mildew and decay festered upon it,
till the rotted pillars fell and tombed me in:
let it so be my fault, whichever way,
must I be left to die? A murderer
is helped by holy hands to the byway road
that comes at God through shame; a thief is helped;
A harlot; a sleek cozener that prays,
swindles his customers, and gives God thanks,
and so to bed with prayers. Let them repent,
lay let them not repent, you'll say "These souls
may yet be saved, and make a joy in heaven:"
you are thankful you have found them, you whose charge
is healing sin. But I, hundreds as I,
whose sorrow 'tis only to long to know,
and know too plainly that we know not yet,
we are beyond your mercies. You pass by
and note the moral of our fate: 'twill point
a Sunday's sermon ... for we have our use,
boggarts to placid Christians in their pews--
"Question not, prove not, lest you grow like these:"

and then you tell them how we daze ourselves
on problems now so many times resolved
that you'll not re-resolve them, how we crave
new proofs, as once an evil race desired
new signs and could not see, for stubbornness,
signs given already.

Proofs enough, you say,
quote precedent, "Hear Moses and the prophets."
I know the answer given across the gulf,
but I know too what Christ did: there were proofs,
enough for John and Peter, yet He taught
new proofs and meanings to those doubting two
who sorrowing walked forth to Emmaus
and came back joyful.

"They," you'd answer me,
if you owned my instance, "sorrowed in their doubt,
and did not wholly doubt, and loved."

Oh, men
who read the age's heart in library books
writ by our fathers, this is how you know it!
Do we say "The old faith is obsolete,
the world wags all the better, let us laugh,"
we of to-day? Why will you not divine
the fathomless sorrow of doubt? why not divine
the yearning to be lost from it in love?
And who doubts wholly? That were not to doubt.
Doubt's to be ignorant, not to deny:
doubt's to be wistful after perfect faith.
You will not think that: you come not to us
to ask of us, who know doubt, what doubt is,
but one by one you pass the echoes on,
each of his own pulpit, each of all the pulpits,
and in the swelling sound can never catch
the tremulous voice of doubt that wails in the cold:
you make sham thunder for it, to outpeal
with your own better thunders.

You wise man
and worthy, utter honest in your will,
I love you and I trust you: so I thought
"Here's one whose love keeps measure to belief
with onward vigorous feet, one quick of sight
to catch the clue in scholars' puzzle-knots,
deft to unweave the coil to one straight thread,
one strong to grapple vague Protean faith
and keep her to his heart in one fixed shape
and living; he comes forward in his strength,
as to a battlefield to answer challenge,
as in a storm to buffet with the waves

for shipwrecked men clutching the frothy crests
and sinking; he is stalwart on my side--
mine, who, untrained and weaponless, have warred
at the powers of unbelief, and am borne down--
mine, who am struggling in the sea for breath."
I looked to you as the sick man in his pain
looks to the doctor whose sharp medicines
have the taste of health behind them, looked to you
for--well, for a boon different from this.
My doctor tells me "Why, quite long ago
they knew your fever (or one very like);
and they knew remedies, you'll find them named
in many ancient writers, let those serve:"
and "Thick on the commons, by the daily roads,
the herbs are growing that give instant strength
to palsied limbs like yours, clear such filmed sight:
you need but eyes to spy them, hands to uproot,
that's all."

All, truly.

Strong accustomed eyes,
strong tutored hands, see for me, reach for me!
But there's a cry like mine rings through the world,
and no help comes. And with slow severing rasp
at our very heart-roots the toothed question grates,
"Do these, who know most, not know anything?"

Oh, teachers, will you teach us? Growing, growing,
like the great river made of little brooks,
our once unrest swells to a smooth despair:
stop us those little brooks; you say you can.
Oh, teachers, teach us, you who have been taught;
learn for us, you who have learned how to learn:
we, jostling, jostled, through the market world
where our work lies, lack breathing space, lack calm,
lack skill, lack tools, lack heart, lack everything,
for your work of the studies. Such roughed minds
we bring to it as when the ploughman tries
his hard unpliant fingers at the pen;
so toil and smudge, then put the blurred scrawl by,
unfinished, till next holiday comes round.
Thus maybe I shall die and the blurred scrawl
be still unfinished, where I try to write
some clear belief, enough to get by heart.

Die still in the dark! Die having lived in the dark!
there's a sort of creeping horror thinking that.
'Tis hard too, for I yearned for light, grew dazed,
not by my sight's unuse and choice of gloom,
but by too bold a gaze at the sun,
thinking to apprehend his perfect light

not darkly through a glass.

Too bold, too bold.
Would I had been appeased with the earth's wont
of helpful daily sunbeams bringing down
only so much heaven's light as may be borne--
heaven's light enough for many a better man
to see his God by. Well, but it is done:
never in any day shall I now be
as if I had not gazed and seen strange lights
swim amid darknesses against the sky.
Never: and, when I dream as if I saw,
'tis dreaming of the sun, and, when I yearn
in agony to see, still do I yearn,
not for the sight I had in happier days,
but for the eagle's strong gaze at the sun.

Ah, well! that's after death, if all be true.
Nay, but for me, never, if all be true:
I love not God, because I know Him not,
I do but long to love Him--long and long
with an ineffable great pain of void;
I cannot say I love Him: that not said,
they of the creeds all tell me I am barred
from the very hope of knowing.

Maybe so;
for daily I know less. 'Tis the old tale
of men lost in the mouldy vaults of mines
or dank crypt cemeteries--lamp puffed out,
guides, comrades, out of hearing, on and on
groping and pushing he makes farther way
from his goal of open daylight. Best to wait
till some one come to seek him. But the strain
of such a patience!--and "If no one comes!"
He cannot wait.

If one could hear a voice,
"Not yet, not yet: myself have still to find
what way to guide you forth, but I seek well,
I have the lamp you lack, I have a chart:
not yet; but hope." So might one strongly bear
through the long night, attend with hearkening breath
for the next word, stir not but as it bade.
Who will so cry to us?

Or is it true
you could come to us, guide us, but you will not?
You say it, and not we, teachers of faith;
must we believe you? Shall we not more think
our doubt is consciousness of ignorance,
your faith unconsciousness of ignorance;

so you know less than we?

My author here,
honest at heart, but has your mind a warp--
the zealot's warp, who takes believed for proved;
the disciple's warp, who takes all heard for proved;
the teacher's warp, who takes all taught for proved,
and cannot think "I know not"? Do you move
one stumbling-block that bars out souls from Heaven?
your back to it, you say, "I see no stone;
'tis a fool's dream, an enemy's false tale
to hinder passengers." And I who lean
broken against the stone?

Well, learned man,
I thank you for your book. 'Tis eloquent,
'tis subtle, resolute; I like the roar
of the big battling phrases, like those frets
of hissing irony--a book to read.
It helps one too--a sort of evidence--
to see so strong a mind so strongly clasped
to creeds whose truth one hopes. What would I more?
'tis a dark world, and no man lights another:
'tis a dark world, and no man sees so plain
as he believes he sees ... excepting those
who are mere blind and know it.

Here's a man
thinks his eyes' stretch can plainly scan out God,
and cannot plainly scan his neighbour's face--
he'll make you a hobgoblin, hoofs and horns,
of a poor cripple shivering at his door
begging a bit of food.

We get no food;
stones, stones: but then he but half sees, he trows
'tis honest bread he gives us.

A blind world.
Light! light! oh God, whose other name is Light,
if--

Ay, ay, always if: thought's cursed with ifs.
Well, where's my book?--No "ifs" in that, I think;
a readable shrewd book; 'twill win the critics.

Augusta Davies Webster

A Summer Mood

BUT wait. Let each by each the days pass by,
One faded and one blown like summer flowers;
What need of hope, with summer in the sky?
What of regret, with all fair morrows ours?
If yesterday be gone,No reck, 'twas not alone,
To-morrow will have just so sweet long hours.
But yet to-day is sweetest till 'tis flown.

But wait. Let summer day be changed from day,
Like following surges of the ebb and flow;
And flow brings breath of saltness and blithe spray,
And ebb long music of seas plashing low.
The waves, stolen out of reach
,Have no farewell for speech;
Next tide will roll as swift, as rippling go.
And yet 'tis now that's best along the beach.

Ah wait. The while we linger our lives live,
Our summer ripens purpose through our dreams;
Flower-petals fallen leave a seed to thrive,
Spent tides heap treasures from the deep sea streams;
Now drifts by unaware,
And Afterwards is heir;
To-morrow wins the wealth of yester gleams.
Yet 'tis to-day that summer makes most fair.

Augusta Davies Webster

An Inventor

Not yet!

I thought this time 'twas done at last,
the workings perfected, the life in it;
and there's the flaw again, the petty flaw,
the fretting small impossibility
that has to be made possible.

To work!
so many more months lost on a wrong tack;
and months and months may so be lost again,
who knows? until they swell a tale of years
counted by failures. No time to sit down
with folded arms to moan for the spent toil,
for on, on, glide the envious treacherous hours
that bring at last the night when none can work;
and I'll not die with my work unfulfilled.

It must perform my thought, it must awake,
this soulless whirring thing of springs and wheels,
and be a power among us. Aye, but how?
There it stands facing me, compact, precise,
the nice presentment of my long design,
and what is it? an accurate mockery,
and not my creature. Where's my secret hid,
the little easy secret which, once found,
will shew so palpable that the pleased world
shall presently believe it always knew?
Where is my secret? Oh, my aching brain!
Good God, have all the anxious ponderings,
all the laborious strain of hand and head,
all the night watches, all the stolen days
from fruitfuller tasks, all I have borne and done,
brought me no nearer solving?

Stolen days;
yes, from the little ones and grave pale wife
who should have every hour of mine made coin
to buy them sunshine. Stolen; and they lack all
save the bare needs which only paupers lack:
stolen; and cheerlessly the mother sits
over her dismal blinding stitchery,
and no quick smile of welcome parts her lips,
seeing me come; and quiet at their play
the children crowd, cooped in the unlovely home,
and envy tattered urchins out of doors
their merry life and playground of the streets.

Oh, if it were but my one self to spend!
but to doom them too with me! Never a thought
dawns first into the world but is a curse
on the rash finder; part of heaven's fire

filched to bestow on men, and for your pay
the vulture at your heart.

What should one choose?
or is there choice? A madness comes on you,
whose name is revelation: who has power
to check the passion of it, who in the world?
A revelation, yes; 'tis but a name
for knowledge ... and there perishes free-will,
for every man is slave of what he knows;
it is the soul of him, could you quench that
you leave the mere mechanic animal--
a sentient creature, true, and reasoning,
(because the clockwork in it's made for that),
but, like my creature there, its purport lacked,
so but its own abortive counterfeit.
We have our several purports; some to pace
the accustomed roads and foot down rampant weeds,
bearing mute custom smoothly on her course;
some difficultly to force readier paths,
or hew out passes through the wilderness;
and some belike to find the snuggest place,
and purr beside the fire. Each of his kind;
but can you change your kind? the lion caged
is still a lion, pipes us no lark's trills;
drive forth the useful brood hen from the yard,
she'll never learn the falcon's soar and swoop.
We must abye our natures; if they fit
too crossly to our hap the worse for us,
but who would pray (say such a prayer could serve)
"Let me become some other, not myself"?

And yet, and yet--Oh, why am I assigned
to this long maiming battle? Why to me
this blasting gift, this lightning of the gods
scorching the hand that wields it? why to me?
A lonely man, or dandled in the lap
of comfortable fortune, might with joy
hug the strange serpent blessing; to the one
it has no tooth, for gilded hands make gold
of all they touch, the other ..... is alone,
and has the right to suffer. Not for them
is doubt or dread; but I--Oh little ones
whose unsuspecting eyes pierce me with smiles!
Oh sad and brooding wife whose silent hopes
are all rebukes to mine!

Come, think it out;
traitor to them or traitor to the world;
is that the choice? Why then, they are my own,
given in my hand, looking to me for all,
and, for my destined present to the world,

being what it is, some one some fortunate day
will find it, or achieve it; if the world wait...
well, it has waited. Yet 'twere pitiful
that still and still, while to a thousand souls
life's irrecoverable swift to-day
becomes the futile yesterday, the world
go beggared of a birthright unaware,
and, (as if one should slake his thirst with blood
pricked from his own red veins, while at his hand
lies the huge hairy nut from whose rough bowl
he might quaff juicy milk and knows it not),
spend out so great a wealth of wasted strength
man upon man given to the imperious
unnecessary labour. How were that,
having made my honest bargain with the world
to serve its easier and accepted needs
for the due praise and pudding, keeping it,
like a wise servant, not to lose my place,
to note the enduring loss, and, adding up
its various mischiefs, score them as the price
of my reposeful fortunes? Why, do this,
and each starved blockhead dribbling out his life
on the continued toil would be my drudge,
and not one farthest comer of our earth
where hurrying traffic plies but would have voice
to reach my ears and twit me guilty to it.
But then, the wife and children: must they pine
in the bleak shade of frosty poverty,
because the man that should have cared for them
discerned a way to double wealth with wealth
and glut the maw of rank prosperity?

Traitor to them or traitor to the world:
a downright question that, and sounds well put,
and one that begs its answer, since we count
the nearer duty first to every man;
but there's another pungent clause to note...
that's traitor to myself. Has any man
the right of that? God puts a gift in you--
to your own hurt, we'll say, but what of that?--
He puts a gift in you, a seed to grow
to His fulfilment, germinant with your life,
and may you crush it out? And, say you do,
what is your remnant life? an empty husk,
or balked and blighted stem past hope of bloom.
Well, make the seed develope otherwise
and grow to your fulfilment wiselier planned:
but will that prosper? may the thistle say
"Let me blow smooth white lilies," or the wheat

"Let me be purple with enticing grapes"?
God says "Be that I bade, or else be nought,"

and what thing were the man to make that choice?
For me I dare not, were it for their sake,
and, for their sake, I dare not; could their good
grow out of my undoing? they with me,
and I with them, we are so interknit
that taint in me must canker into them
and my upholding holds them from the mire:
and so, as there are higher things than ease,
we must bear on together they and I.

And it may be to bear is all our part.
I have outpast the first fantastic hopes
that fluttered round my project at its birth,
outgrown them as the learning child outgrows
the picture A's and B's that lured him on;
I have forgotten honours, wealth, renown,
I see no bribe before me but that one,
my work's fruition. Yes, as we all, who feel
the dawn of a creative thought, discern
in the beginning that perfected end
which haply shall not be, I saw the end;
and my untried presumptuous eyes, befooled,
saw it at hand. How round each forward step
locked the delusive and decoying dreams!
and I seemed, while I sowed, still hurrying on
to touch the sudden fruit, the ripe choice fruit
to be garnered for my dear ones, mine for them:
but long since I have learned, in weariness,
in failures, and in toil, to put by dreams,
to put by hopes, and work, as the bird sings,
because God planned me for it. For I look
undazzled on the future, see the clouds,
and see the sunbeams, several, not one glow:
I know that I shall find my secret yet
and make my creature here another power
to change a world's whole life; but, that achieved,
whom will the world thank for it? Me perhaps;
perhaps some other, who, with after touch,
shall make the springs run easier: I have read
the lives of men like me who have so sought,
so found, then been forgotten, while there came
an apter man, maybe but luckier,
to add or alter, gave another shape,
made or displayed it feasible and sure,
and then the thing was his ... as the rare gem
is not called his who dug it from the mines,
but his who cut and set it in a ring.
It will be as it will be: I dare count
no better fortunes mine than from first days
the finders met with, men who, howsoe'er,
seekers and teachers, bring the world new gifts,
too new for any value. Well, so be it:

and now--No, I am over weary now,
and out of heart too: idleness to-night;
to-morrow all shall be begun again.
That lever, now, if--

Am I out of heart?
to work at once then! I'll not go to rest
with the desponding cramp clutching my heart:
a new beginning blots the failure out,
and sets one's thoughts on what's to be achieved,
letting what's lost go by. Come, foolish toy,
that should have been so much, let's see at least
what help you have to give me. Bye and bye
we'll have another like you, with the soul.

Augusta Davies Webster

Autumn’s Warnings

SOFT voices of the woods, that make
The summer air a harmony,
Winged whispers through the leaves where wake
Long wind-wafts dying in a sigh,
Replies of birds from brake to brake,
Plash of the runnel on its stones,
Soft voices, sweet for summer's sake,
There is a word in all your tones,
A word that not till now ye spake,
'Goodbye, goodbye.'

And yet, see, dearest, overhead
The branches bar a sultry sky,
No earliest fleck of tanned or red
'Mid all the leafage far and nigh,
And, with their serried curves outspread,
The fresh green fern-fronds know no frost.
Nought gone; but still some grace is dead:
Nought changed; but still some hope is lost:
Listen, and every voice has said
'Goodbye, goodbye.'

We shall not see the summer wane,
But, with a start of memory,
When the long chills have come again,
Awake and know that it did die:
So slowest loss is sudden pain;
We have not known till all is o'er;
'Tis summer till the autumn's rain.
Yet has there stolen long before
That sadness through some sweetest strain
'Goodbye, goodbye.'

Ah, love, hear all the thought that grew;
Mock it away; I'll mock it, I:
Summer, and I sit here with you,
Your great eyes smiling tenderly,
Your silence wooing me to woo,
A meaning in your lightest word
As though love made it something new—
And what if all the while I heard
The autumn whisper sighing through
'Goodbye, goodbye'?

Augusta Davies Webster

Belated

BLITHE summer blossom, born too late,
Wilt make my desert garden fair?
Lo Winter's hand is on the gate,
His breath is in the curdling air.

Still yesterweek, but yesterweek,
Thou hadst, unfolding in warm light,
Spread ripening to the crimson streak
And seed to make the next year bright.

But now there fall the latter rains,
The chills that brown the ferns are come;
Southward, above the shivering plains,
The eddying swallows hasten home.

Oh flower too frail, too late of birth,
There is no sun for such as thou:
Droop down upon the barren earth;
What boots it to have blossomed now?

Augusta Davies Webster

Betrothed

I DID not think to love her. As we go
We pluck a hedge-rose blushing in its sheath,
Fresh, and at hand; and not the less we know
That where rich garden blossoms take the breath
With eddying sweets and wear a thousand hues
We shall be fain to linger and to choose.
And who indeed
Would pass the garden by to choose the weed,
The little wayside rose we hold and lose?

Fair; and so loving. With the young surprise
Of children who still newly understand
Their right and wrong out of their mother's eyes,
She watches for my thought. Her trustful hand
Creeps into mine and rests. Ah, little one,
Hadst thou loved less I had not been undone;
My wayside rose.
I love thee, sweet: some hopes have found their close
Ere yet their aim; some joys ceased unbegun.

I had not thought to love her. She is fair;
But I had pictured eyes which, meeting mine,
Should kindle something in me that was there
But waited Her arousing; I divine
A love, that was to be, past hence unborn,
The sun o'erclouded ere it rose at morn.
I love thee, yes:
Let hopes be dead which thou couldst never guess.
Sweet, could I let thy blossom drop unworn?

Augusta Davies Webster

Beyond The Shadow

SOME quick kind tears, some easy sorrow,
And then 'tis past.
'Twas sad; yet sadness has its morrow;
Blue skies succeed skies overcast:
Why should grief last?

Something that's passing, something dying.
Well, weep one's fill,
Spend grief's sweet courtesy, go sighing;
But violets break from snow-time's chill:
Who can mourn still?

Aye, let me pass. No life will miss me
Save few first days.
A shudder, stooping down to kiss me,
A little love and tardy praise;
Then the old ways.

Augusta Davies Webster

Birds Sing I Love You, Love

Birds sing "I love you, love" the whole day through,
And not another song can they sing right;
But, singing done with, loving's done with quite,
The autumn sunders every twittering two.
And I'd not have love make too much ado
With sweet parades of fondness and delight,
Lest iterant wont should make caresses trite,
Love-names mere cuckoo ousters of the true.

Oh heart can hear heart's sense in senseless nought,
And heart that's sure of heart has little speech.
What shall it tell? The other knows its thought.
What shall one doubt or question or beseech
Who is assured and knows and, unbesought,
Possesses the dear trust that each gives each.

Augusta Davies Webster

Choosing

The thrush that, yet alone, pipes for his mate
Knows she will come in time to build the nest,
Knows she'll be she his tiny soul loves best;
'Tis love-time at the hawthorn blossom's date:
And the new flower-cups bare their hearts and wait
While careless breezes bring them love for guest;
And Youth laughs ready for the glad unrest;
But Love that chooses lingers desolate.

And I, who seek, and yearn for love to stir,
And I, who seek, and cannot love but one
And have not known her being, nor can find,
I take my homeless way for sake of her;
And love-time's here, and love-time will be done:
Birds end all singing in the autumn wind.

Augusta Davies Webster

Circe

The sun drops luridly into the west;
darkness has raised her arms to draw him down
before the time, not waiting as of wont
till he has come to her behind the sea;
and the smooth waves grow sullen in the gloom
and wear their threatening purple; more and more
the plain of waters sways and seems to rise
convexly from its level of the shores;
and low dull thunder rolls along the beach:
there will be storm at last, storm, glorious storm.

Oh welcome, welcome, though it rend my bowers,
scattering my blossomed roses like the dust,
splitting the shrieking branches, tossing down
my riotous vines with their young half-tinged grapes
like small round amethysts or beryls strung
tumultuously in clusters, though it sate
its ravenous spite among my goodliest pines
standing there round and still against the sky
that makes blue lakes between their sombre tufts,
or harry from my silvery olive slopes
some hoary king whose gnarled fantastic limbs
wear crooked armour of a thousand years;
though it will hurl high on my flowery shores
the hostile wave that rives at the poor sward
and drags it down the slants, that swirls its foam
over my terraces, shakes their firm blocks
of great bright marbles into tumbled heaps,
and makes my preached and mossy labyrinths,
where the small odorous blossoms grow like stars
strewn in the milky way, a briny marsh.
What matter? let it come and bring me change,
breaking the sickly sweet monotony.

I am too weary of this long bright calm;
always the same blue sky, always the sea
the same blue perfect likeness of the sky,
one rose to match the other that has waned,
to-morrow's dawn the twin of yesterday's;
and every night the ceaseless crickets chirp
the same long joy and the late strain of birds
repeats their strain of all the even month;
and changelessly the petty plashing surfs
bubble their chiming burden round the stones;
dusk after dusk brings the same languid trance
upon the shadowy hills, and in the fields
the waves of fireflies come and go the same,
making the very flash of light and stir
vex one like dronings of the spinning wheel.

Give me some change. Must life be only sweet,
all honey-pap as babes would have their food?

And, if my heart must always be adrowse
in a hush of stagnant sunshine, give me then
something outside me stirring; let the storm
break up the sluggish beauty, let it fall
beaten below the feet of passionate winds,
and then to-morrow waken jubilant
in a new birth: let me see subtle joy
of anguish and of hopes, of change and growth.

What fate is mine who, far apart from pains
and fears and turmoils of the cross-grained world,
dwell, like a lonely god, in a charmed isle
where I am first and only, and, like one
who should love poisonous savours more than mead,
long for a tempest on me and grow sick
of resting, and divine free carelessness!
Oh me, I am a woman, not a god;
yea, those who tend me even are more than I,
my nymphs who have the souls of flowers and birds
singing and blossoming immortally.

Ah me! these love a day and laugh again,
and loving, laughing, find a full content;
but I know nought of peace, and have not loved.

Where is my love? Does some one cry for me,
not knowing whom he calls? does his soul cry
for mine to grow beside it, grow in it?
does he beseech the gods to give him me,
the one unknown rare woman by whose side
no other woman, thrice as beautiful,
should once seem fair to him; to whose voice heard
in any common tones no sweetest sound
of love made melody on silver lutes,
or singing like Apollo's when the gods
grow pale with happy listening, might be peered
for making music to him; whom once found
there will be no more seeking anything?

Oh love, oh love, oh love, art not yet come
out of the waiting shadows into life?
art not yet come after so many years
that I have longed for thee? Come! I am here.

Not yet. For surely I should feel a sound
of his far answering, if now in the world
he sought me who will seek me--Oh ye gods
will he not seek me? Is it all a dream?
will there be never never such a man?
will there be only these, these bestial things
who wallow in my styes, or mop and mow
among the trees, or munch in pens and byres,

or snarl and filch behind their wattled coops;
these things who had believed that they were men?

Nay but he will come. Why am I so fair,
and marvellously minded, and with sight
which flashes suddenly on hidden things,
as the gods see who do not need to look?
why wear I in my eyes that stronger power
than basilisks, whose gaze can only kill,
to draw men's souls to me to live or die
as I would have them? why am I given pride
which yet longs to be broken, and this scorn
cruel and vengeful for the lesser men
who meet the smiles I waste for lack of him
and grow too glad? why am I who I am,
but for the sake of him whom fate will send
one day to be my master utterly,
that he should take me, the desire of all,
whom only he in the world could bow to him?

Oh sunlike glory of pale glittering hairs,
bright as the filmy wires my weavers take
to make me golden gauzes; oh deep eyes,
darker and softer than the bluest dusk
of August violets, darker and deep
like crystal fathomless lakes in summer noons;
oh sad sweet longing smile; oh lips that tempt
my very self to kisses; oh round cheeks,
tenderly radiant with the even flush
of pale smoothed coral; perfect lovely face
answering my gaze from out this fleckless pool;
wonder of glossy shoulders, chiselled limbs;
should I be so your lover as I am,
drinking an exquisite joy to watch you thus
in all a hundred changes through the day,
but that I love you for him till he comes,
but that my beauty means his loving it?

Oh, look! a speck on this side of the sun,
coming--yes, coming with the rising wind
that frays the darkening cloud-wrack on the verge
and in a little while will leap abroad,
spattering the sky with rushing blacknesses,
dashing the hissing mountainous waves at the stars.
'Twill drive me that black speck a shuddering hulk
caught in the buffeting waves, dashed impotent
from ridge to ridge, will drive it in the night
with that dull jarring crash upon the beach,
and the cries for help and the cries of fear and hope.

And then to-morrow they will thoughtfully,
with grave low voices, count their perils up,

and thank the gods for having let them live,
and tell of wives or mothers in their homes,
and children, who would have such loss in them
that they must weep, and may be I weep too,
with fancy of the weepings had they died.
And the next morrow they will feel their ease
and sigh with sleek content, or laugh elate,
tasting delights of rest and revelling,
music and perfumes, joyaunce for the eyes
of rosy faces and luxurious pomps,
the savour of the banquet and the glow
and fragrance of the wine-cup; and they'll talk
how good it is to house in palaces
out of the storms and struggles, and what luck
strewed their good ship on our accessless coast.
Then the next day the beast in them will wake,
and one will strike and bicker, and one swell
with puffed up greatness, and one gibe and strut
in apish pranks, and one will line his sleeve
with pilfered booties, and one snatch the gems
out of the carven goblets as they pass,
one will grow mad with fever of the wine,
and one will sluggishly besot himself,
and one be lewd, and one be gluttonous;
and I shall sickly look, and loathe them all.

Oh my rare cup! my pure and crystal cup,
with not one speck of colour to make false
the passing lights, or flaw to make them swerve!
My cup of Truth! How the lost fools will laugh
and thank me for my boon, as if I gave
some momentary flash of the gods' joy,
to drink where I have drunk and touch the touch
of my lips with their own! Aye, let them touch.

Too cruel am I? And the silly beasts,
crowding around me when I pass their way,
glower on me and, although they love me still,
(with their poor sorts of love such as they could,)
call wrath and vengeance to their humid eyes
to scare me into mercy, or creep near
with piteous fawnings, supplicating bleats.
Too cruel? Did I choose them what they are?
or change them from themselves by poisonous charms?
But any draught, pure water, natural wine,
out of my cup, revealed them to themselves
and to each other. Change? there was no change;
only disguise gone from them unawares:
and had there been one right true man of them
he would have drunk the draught as I had drunk,
and stood unchanged, and looked me in the eyes,
abashing me before him. But these things--

why, which of them has even shown the kind
of some one nobler beast? Pah, yapping wolves
and pitiless stealthy wild-cats, curs and apes
and gorging swine and slinking venomous snakes
all false and ravenous and sensual brutes
that shame the Earth that bore them, these they are.

Lo, lo! the shivering blueness darting forth
on half the heavens, and the forked thin fire
strikes to the sea: and hark, the sudden voice
that rushes through the trees before the storm,
and shuddering of the branches. Yet the sky
is blue against them still, and early stars
glimmer above the pine-tops; and the air
clings faint and motionless around me here.

Another burst of flame--and the black speck
shows in the glare, lashed onwards. It were well
I bade make ready for our guests to-night.

Augusta Davies Webster

Coming Home

Five minutes here, and they must steal two more!
shameful! Here have I been five mortal years
and not seen home nor one dear kindred face,
and these abominable slugs, this guard,
this driver, porters--what are they about?--
keep us here motionless, two minutes, three.--
Aha! at last!

Good! We shall check our minutes;
we're flying after them, like a mad wind
chasing the leaves it has tossed on in front.
Oh glorious wild speed, what giants' play!
and there are men who tell us poetry
is dead where railways come! Maybe 'tis true,
I'm a bad judge, I've had scant reading time
and little will to read ..... and certainly
I've not found railways in what verse I know:
but there's a whizz and whirr as trains go by,
a bullet-like indomitable rush
and then all's done, which makes me often think
one of those men who found out poetry,
and had to write the things just that they saw,
would have made some of their fine crashing lines
that stir one like the marches one knows best,
and the enemy knows best, with trains in them
as easily as chariots.

Anyhow
I've poetry and music too to-day
in the very clatter: it goes "Home, home, home."

And they'll think that sharp shriek a kinder sound
than sweetest singing, when it presently
pierces the quiet of the night and sends
its eager shrillness on for miles before
to say I'm no time distant. I can see
my mother's soft pink cheeks (like roses, pale
after a June week's blooming,) flush and wan,
and her lip quiver; I can see the girls,
restless between the hall door and the clock,
hear it and hush and lean expectant heads
to catch the rattle of the coming train;
my father, sitting pshawing by the fire
at all the fuss and waiting, half start up,
dropping his Times, forgetful just so long
that he is not impatient like the rest,
the tender foolish women, and, alert
to hide how he was tempted to fuss too,
reseat himself intent on politics;
and Hugh--I think Hugh must be there with them,
on leave out of his parish for a day,
a truant from the old women and the schools

to be at home with me for long enough
to say "God bless you" in--I can see Hugh,
narrow and straight in his skimp priestly coat,
pacing the room with slow and even steps,
and a most patient face, and in his eyes
that over patience we all know in them
when he is being extra good and calm.

So little change, they write me: all of them
with the same faces, scarce a day's mark there--
except our little Maude who was a child
and is a woman: little Maude grown tall:
the little Maude I left half prude half romp,
who, eager for her grown-up dignities,
tried to forego her mischiefs and would turn,
just in their midst, portentously demure
like a tired sleepy kitten, and to-day
wears all her womanhood inside her heart
and has none for her manners--some of it
for her sweet winsome face though; and a look
that's in her portrait brings my mother back,
though she's not like they tell me. I shall see;
yes I shall see! soon; almost now.

Dear home,
to think I am so near!

Ah, when I lay
in the hot thirst and fever of my wound,
and saw their faces pressing into mine,
changing and changing, never a one would stay
so long that I could see it like itself,
I scarcely hoped for this. And when I felt
that tiring weakness of my growing strong,
and was so helpless, and the babyish tears
would come without a thought to make them come,
I almost knew this day would never be:
but, oh my happy fortune, not to die,
not even to come home among them then,
with nothing done, a spoiled and worthless wreck
for them to weep at softly out of sight,
but to go stoutly to my post again,
and do my stroke of work as a man should,
and win them this.

You little dingy cross,
less precious than my sleeve-links, what a worth
lies in your worthlessness: there's not a man
but gladder lays you in his mother's hand,
or wife's, than he would bring her for his gift
the whole great jewels of an eastern king,
and not a woman but--

My mother, though--
sometimes she was not strong--have I been rash,
too thoughtless of her calm, not telling of it?
No, I'll not wear it on me, as I meant,
to take her first dear kisses in: we'll talk
before I show it--in a day or two--
perhaps to-night.

I know she'll prize it more
that a life saved went to the winning it.
And tenderhearted Ellen will forgive
my part she shudders at in the red deaths
of battle fields a little more for that--
How sad her letters were; I know she thinks
we learn a heathenish passion after blood,
and, as she said, "to throw our lives like dross
back in our Maker's face:" but bye and bye
I'll teach her how it is, and that we fight
for duty, not like either fiends or fools.

They say they are longing for my history,
told by the fire of evenings; all my deeds,
all my escapes; and I must clear their minds
of fifty puzzles of the journalists,
decide what's true, and make them understand
the battles and the marchings: but my deeds
have been to just be one among them all,
doing what we were bidden as we could,
and my escapes must have been like the rest--
one has no time to know them; just that once,
when I was dragging off the fallen boy,
I knew what death was nearest as it missed,
but I've no memory of more escapes .....
except by being wounded, as they know;
and what can I explain of battle plans
made in the councils, whether kept or not
I cannot tell? I only know my part
and theirs with whom I waited at our post
or dashed on at the word, I could not mark
the swaying of the squadrons, the recoils
and shifting ground and sudden strategies,
and had no duty to be watching them.
No, I shall make them better out in print,
and learn in our snug study what I saw
among the rush and smoke.

No, I come back
no better talker than I was before,
no readier and no deeper, not like Hugh,
and I must use my unaspiring wits
to say things as I see them, going straight;

just as a plain man's life does, tramping on
the way that lies before one, with no whys.

No whys; ah how that chance word takes me back
to pinafore-time--my father's well-known phrase
"No whying, boy, but do what you are bid."
And once my mother, when first Hugh began
to be so clever, and had found it out
and, pleased at it, perhaps a little pert,
was apt to hit on puzzles, answered him
"our nursery rule was good for afterwards,
spared headaches and spared heartaches, and, well kept,
made the best heroes and best Christians too."
How I can see Hugh looking down to say,
in an odd slow tone, "I will remember that."
And well he has remembered; never a man
went straighter into action than our Hugh;
he knows what side he's on and stands to it:
if I'd a head like his, and wished to change
soldiering for anything, I'd try to learn
a parish parson's work to do it like Hugh.

Will he read prayers to-night? I'd like to hear
my father at it, as it used to be
before we any of us went away--
the old times back again. Oh, all of us
will say our prayers to-night out of glad hearts.
Oh, thank God for the meeting we shall have!

Such joy among us! and the country side
all to be glad for us. Ah well, I fear
there's one will shrink and sadden at my sight
among the welcomes and the happiness,
remembering that her husband was my friend,
and dropped beside me. But I'll go alone--
or maybe with my mother--to her house
and let her have the pain more quietly,
before she sees me in our Sunday pew,
with all the old friends smiling through the prayers
and all but nodding, and a buzzing round
spoiling the parson's reading "Look," and "Look,"
"There's Master Harry come back from the war."

Oh, how my mother's eyes will turn to me,
half unawares, then fix upon her book
that none may see them growing large and moist;
and how my father will look stern and frown,
hiding the treacherous twinkles with the shade
of knitted brows, lest any watching him
should think him moved to have his son by him,
and proud like foolish fathers; but the girls
will be all smiles and flutter, and look round

elate as if no other girls before
had had a soldier brother. And old Will,
out of his corner by the vestry door,
will peer and blink and suck his grins in tight,
trying to mind the sermon and not think
what sport he has for me in the preserves.

Plenty of birds this year, my father writes;
we'll see next week, and--There's the long shrill yell!
Home! all but home!

Oh! there, between the trees,
that light, our house--they're waiting for me there.

Augusta Davies Webster

Day is dead, and let us sleep

DAY is dead, and let us sleep,
Sleep a while or sleep for aye,
'Twere the best if we unknew
While to-morrow dawned and grew;
It may bring us time to weep:
We were glad to-day.
Joy a little while is won,
Joy is ending while begun;
Then the setting of the sun.
Afterwards is long to rue.

Augusta Davies Webster

Dear love, good-night

DEAR love, good-night. And, tender sleep
,Seal up her lids like these drowsed flowers,
To make day fair when they unclose.
Be hushed around her, Night, and keep
Thy silent guard on her repose;
But speed thine hours.

Dear love, sleep on. This weary space
I wake and long for day and thee,
And count the slow stars from their west.
Sleep while I hunger for thy face,
Sleep, dearest, in unbroken rest;
But dream of me.

Augusta Davies Webster

Dearest, this one day we own

DEAREST, this one day we own,
Stolen from the crowd and press,
Let it be sweet silence's.
We two, heart in heart, alone;
Any speech were less.

We are weary, even thus,
Talk might turn to discontent
Else be practised merriment:
Earth and sky will speak for us
Nearer as we meant.

We two in the stillness, dear,
Fair dreams come without our quest;
Not to talk of life is best.
Ah, our holiday is here,Let it all be rest.

Augusta Davies Webster

Deserted

No, mother, I am not sad:
Why think me sad? I was always still,
You remember, even when my heart was most glad
And you used to let me dream at my will;
And now I like better to watch the sea
And the calm sad sky than to laugh with the rest.
You know they are full of chatter and glee,
And I like the quietness best.

Nay, mother, you look so grave.
I know what you're thinking and will not say;
But you need not fear; I am growing brave
Now that the pain is passing away,
And I never weep for him now when alone,
For perhaps it was better -- who can tell? --
That it ended so. I shall soon be well
Now that the hardest is known.

I am so much stronger to-day
I can look at all past and think how it grew
And how by degrees it faded away,
That light of my life. Ah! when I first knew
I had only been a plaything to him
Through all my loving, it seemed so strange.
If the high noontide at once grew night-dim
It would not be such a change.

I wonder I did not die.
Mother, I'll own it you now I am strong,
I used to wake in the night and lie
Wishing and wishing it might not be long --
Oh! it was wicked, and you all so kind,
How could I wish to bring you a grief?
But too much unhappiness makes one blind
To all but one's own relief.

I am not so wicked now;
You need not fear. I am hoping that still,
I am learning to lean on God, and I bow,
Yes I think I bow my heart to His will.
I found it a long hard struggle to make,
To clasp my sorrow and say "It is best,"
But, believe it, you need not fear for my sake;
Yes, mother, I am at rest:

Yet, listen, if I should die soon --
And I know what they say, though you hide it from me --
Mother, you'll grant me my last-asked boon,
That you'll try not to think it his fault, and if he,
Mother, if he should seek you some day,
You will not make him a hard reply,
But tell him, before I passed away,

I sent him kind good-bye.

Mother, kiss me, do not cry.
I could not keep from speaking of this;
It is nothing to say "If I should die,"
It cannot bring death more near than it is;
And I am much stronger. You shall not weep --
Who is it tells me that weeping is wrong?
But let me lean on your lap and sleep,
I lay waking last night too long.

Augusta Davies Webster

Disenchanted

Alas, I thought this forest must be true,
And would not change because of my changed eyes;
I thought the growing things were as I knew,
And not a mock; I thought at least the skies
Were honest and would keep that happy blue
They used to wear before I learned to see
.But woe the day!
Lo, I have wandered forth and thought to stay
Here where some gladness still might be for me,
Where some delight
Should still break on my now too faithful sight;
And, lo, not even here may I go free.
Oh, hateful knowledge, pass and let me be:
Why am I made thy slave? why am I wise
Who once beheld all life with glamoured eyes?

Ah, woe the day! this bleak and shrivelled wood,
These rotted leaves, and all the wild flowers dead:
And here the ferns lie bruised and brown that stood
My tall green shelter: and, above my head,
The naked creaking branches show the sky
Athwart their lattice one murk sunless grey
Ah, woe the day!
I see, and beauty has all passed away.
Woe for my desolate wisdom, woe! Ah why
Must the sweet spell be broken ere I die?

Dear glad-tongued lark, come down and talk with me;
Tell me, oh tell me, hast thou caught, maybe,
Some little word,
Some word from heaven to make the meaning plain
Of this great change, or change me back again?
And, chattering sparrow from the eaves, come here
And tell me, thou who seest men so near,
Canst thou have heard
Some talk among them, out of all their lore,
To teach me, who have learned to see as they,
To be like them still more
And smile at hateful things or pass them o'er?
Sky-bird and house-bird, do you know the way?

Come hither, let me tell you all my woe;
Have you not known me in my carelessness?
I was that joyous child, not long ago,
The fairies hid away from life's distress
And eager weariness of burdened men
To live their darling in the elfin glen;
I was that thing of mirth and fantasies,
More antic than young squirrels at their play,
More wilful wanton than coy butterflies
Teasing the flowers with make-believes to kiss,
More happy than the early thrush whose lay

Awakes the woodlands with spring melodies
And sings the year to summer with his bliss:
And now I am so sad:
For, listen, I am wise, my eyes see truth,
And nothing wears the brightness that it had,
Nothing is fair or glad;
All joy and grace were dreams, dead with my fairy youth.

Ah, had you seen our home!
For the great hall one amethyst clear dome
Fretted with silver or, who could say which,
With white pure moonbeams; and the floors made rich
With patens of all rare translucent gems
And musky flower-buds bending down their stems
For weight of diamonds that hung like dews;
And everywhere the radiance of carved gold,
And pearls' soft shimmer, and quick various hues
Of mystic opals glinting manifold;
And everywhere the music and the gleams
Of clear cool water's sparkling iris beams
In emerald and crystal fountains wrought
Like river lilies with their buds and leaves,
Or as late briar shoots caught
In the first glittering rime-webs blithe October weaves.

Ah me, so fair, so bright!
Had you but seen! But, lo, the other night
I was alone and watching how the sky
Made a new star each moment and grew dim,
And singing to the moon, when he came by,
The wise weird man—what need had I of him?—
The wise weird man who can see fairy folk
And break all spells, he saw me and he spoke
'Poor changeling child,
How is thy heart beguiled,
And thy blind eyes made foolish with false sight!
Let the spell end: be wise, and see aright.'
Then with a frozen salve that brought sharp tears
Signed both my eyes, and went. And from that hour
I am made weary with the cruel dower
Of sight for evil. For mine eyes before
Made beauty where they looked, and saw no more.
Ah happy eyes! Ah sweet, blind, cheated years!

Alas! the glories of our fairy halls:
Alas! the blossoms and the gems and gold:
Dreams, dreams, and lies.
Broken and clammy are the earthen walls,
The mildew is their silvering; where of old
The jewels shimmered shimmers moist and cold
The dew of oozing damps; and, for the dyes
And the fair shapes of diamond laden flowers,

Foul toadstool growths that never saw the skies;
And, for the fountains,pools; and, for the bowers,
Blank caves. Nought, nought in its old gracious guise.
And what is left for beauty is a mock:
Spangles and gilt and glass for precious things,
Bedraggled tinsel gauzes to enfrock
Unlovely nakedness of earth and rock,
And painted images and cozenings.
Ah me! ah me! the beauty, the delight:
Dreams, dreams, and lies.
Ah me! and a curse more has come with sight;
There is no sweetness left me for my ears:
For when they sing the fairy melodies,
Like voice of laughters and like voice of sighs
And voice of running brooks and voice of birds
And voice of lovers' wooing, and the words
Are those that fill the heart of each who hears,
I hate the song, for I hear all the while
'Dreams, dreams, and lies.'
Yea, and I see no loving in a smile;
For, when they soothe me tenderly, and praise,
And speak the soft words of the former days,
My heart is cold and wise as are mine eyes,
And I grow sick of pleasant flatteries
And talk of bliss and ancient merry ways:
For, lo, the hollow old content was vain, How shall it live again?
Dreams, dreams, and lies.

And even here is change. For not till now
Have I seen barrenness, and leaves lie dank.
For me the leaf was green upon the bough
The livelong year, my tall ferns never sank,
Some sweet and tender blossom always grew,
The summer and the winter skies were blue;
And when the snow came in a winter freak
To make the blossoms play me hide and seek
I laughed because I knew that they were there.
Ah woe is me!
I said 'I will steal forth and make my lair,
Like some strayed foxcub, in the sheltered wood,
For that will be as it was wont to be:
And I will live among the careless birds
And happy forest beasts and insect herds
Who in blithe wanderings find their easy food,
And feed and sport and rest in ceaseless glee,
Having their world all real and all fair.'

Alas! for it was falseness even here!
The beauty has gone by, it was my dream,
And all the black and dripping trees lie bare,
Soddening in fog and in dull mists that steam
From the unwholesome barren earth and where

The dead leaves fester that were born this year.
Ah me, I am grown wise, my sight is clear:
And to see clear is weeping, wisdom is despair.

Kind birds, oh tell me, whither shall I hie?
Dear lark, hast thou looked down out of thy sky
On the sweet quiet of some summer land
Where truth and beauty yet go hand in hand?—
Nay, but would'st thou be here!
Tell me, half human sparrow, hast thou seen,
Among the homes of men where thine has been,
A home where I might be among my kind
And love it, and love them, not being blind?
Tell me; draw near.
Oh answer me, for now I learn desires
For men's strong life to stir me, and were fain
To lose old dreams, warm by their hearthside fires.
Yea, and I must go, though it all were pain:
The doom of my new'wisdom is on me.
Woe for my fairy youth! Man among men
I must go forth and suffer, for I see.
Woe for the blind days in the happy glen!

And the lark answered 'Nay, I am not wise;
I can teach nought. Only, the other day,
I heard them singing who sing in the skies,
And ceaselessly I whisper low that lay,
To sing it when the summer comes again:
'In the world are Love and Pain:
Foes yet lovers they remain:
Pain strengthens Love till Love slay Pain.''
The sparrow said 'I could not hear thee plain,
For I was chirruping the merry rhyme
I heard men sing last night at supper-time:
'Reap the grain, and sow the grain,
To grow by sunshine and by rain.''
Then the sad fairies' foster-child arose,
And saw the grey day darkening to its close,
And passed out from the wood, and wandered down,
Along the misty hillside, to the town.

Augusta Davies Webster

Farewell

FAREWELL: we two shall still meet day by day,
Live side by side;
But never more shall heart respond to heart.
Two stranger boats can drift adown one tide,
Two branches on one stem grow green apart.
Farewell, I say.

Farewell: chance travellers, as the path they tread,
Change words and smile,
And share their travellers' fortunes, friend with friend,
And yet are foreign in their thoughts the while,
Several, alone, save that one way they wend.
Farewell; 'tis said.

Farewell: ever the bitter asphodel
Outlives love's rose;
The fruit and blossom of the dead for us.
Ah, answer me, should this have been the close,
To be together and be sundered thus?
But yet, farewell.

Augusta Davies Webster

Hark the sky-lark in the cloud

HARK the sky-lark in the cloud,
Hark the cricket in the grass,
Trilling blitheness clear and loud,
Chirping glee to all who pass.
Oh, the merry summer lay!
Earth and sky keep holiday.

Hear the leaves that kiss the air,
Hear the laughter of the bees:
Who remembers winter care
In the shining days like these?
Oh, the merry lay of June!
All our hearts are glad in tune.

Augusta Davies Webster

Her Memories

NOT by her grave: thither I bid them take
Fresh garlands of the flowers that pleased her best,
And lay them by the headstone, for my sake,
My token and remembrance with the rest:
But here, where in the brightening of the west
I see her mountains grow into the sky,
Her native world, and mine because of her,
Here, where that low sigh of the pinewood's stir,
That was her dearest music, fills all sound
,I am with her;
And always, always, past comes passing by,
Lost in her grave, but here as if half found.

Not by her grave: it is too still, too cold,
And save my loss is nothing with me there.
What memories have I there of her of old?
They came not there, the dear lost days that were;
Not she lies there, but only my despair;
Not she, but death and all my loneliness.
What memories save all memories love must shun?
I would not think of death and her as one;
She shall be only life-ful in my mind,
With life's self one;
A name of glad remindings and old bliss,
So something of her presence left behind.

Not by her grave: some day will I return,
When sorrow keeps its wont unvexed by place,
And, sitting on the turf beside, will learn
To call before me there her waking face,
Not that white face that slept and took no trace
Of change because I kissed it, nor for tears.
Some day; for now I should forget her so,
Lose the fair happy woman and but know
The coldness and the silence when she died,
Lose her all so,
My love that was my life of all for years.
She loved this music when the pinewoods sighed.

Augusta Davies Webster

If?

If I should die this night, (as well might be,
So pain has on my weakness worked its will),
And they should come at morn and look on me

Lying more white than I am wont, and still
In the strong silence of unchanging sleep,
And feel upon my brow the deepening chill,

And know me gathered to His time-long keep,
The quiet watcher over all men's rest,
And weep as those around a death-bed weep --

There would no anguish throb my vacant breast,
No tear-drop trickle down my stony cheek,
No smile of long farewell say "Calm is best."

I should not answer aught that they should speak,
Nor look my meaning out of earnest eyes,
Nor press the reverent hands that mine should seek;

But, lying there in such an awful guise,
Like some strange presence from a world unknown
Unmoved by any human sympathies,

Seem strange to them, and dreadfully alone,
Vacant to love of theirs or agony,
Having no pulse in union with their own.

Gazing henceforth upon infinity
With a calm consciousness devoid of change,
Watching the current of the years pass by,

And watching the long cycles onward range,
With stronger vision of their perfect whole,
As one whom time and space from them estrange.

And they might mourn and say "The parted soul
"Is gone out of our love; we spend in vain
"A tenderness that cannot reach its goal."

Yet I might still perchance with them remain
In spirit, being free from laws of mould,
Still comprehending human joy and pain.

Ah me! but if I knew them as of old,
Clasping them in vain arms, they unaware,
And mourned to find my kisses leave them cold,

And sought still some part of their life to share
Still standing by them, hoping they might see,
And seemed to them but as the viewless air!

For so once came it in a dream to me,
And in my heart it seemed a pang too deep,
A shadow having human life to be.

For it at least would be long perfect sleep
Unknowing Being and all Past to lie,
Void of the growing Future, in God's keep:

But such a knowledge would be misery
Too great to be believed. Yet if the dead
In a diviner mood might still be nigh,

Their former life unto their death so wed
That they could watch their loved with heavenly eye,
That were a thing to joy in, not to dread.

Augusta Davies Webster

In After Years

LOVE is dying. Why then, let it die.
Trample it down, that it die more fast.
What is a rose that has lost its bloom?
What is a fruit with its freshness past?
And where is the worth of the twilight gloom?
Let the night come when the day has gone by:
Let the dying die.

Leave your useless smiles and your tears,
Weepings and wooings are, oh, so vain!
Sunlights and rains bid the blossoms blow,
But waken no waning blossom again.
Nay, but say 'It was always so;
Love was not love in the other years,
There is nought for tears.'

Say 'We lose what was never ours,
Lo, we were fooled by a fond deceit;
Because we chanced to be side by side,
Because we were young and love is sweet,
Love seemed there: but could love have died?
When has decay touched immortal hours?
Love was never ours.'

Ah, my heart, is it true? is it true?
Did all longings and fears mean no more?
Whispers and vows and the gladness mean this?
What, we grow wiser when years are o'er,
And weary in soul of a mimic bliss!
Did we but dream, hand in hand, we two?
Must it needs be true?

Augusta Davies Webster

In an Almshouse

Oh the dear summer evening! How the air
is mellow with the delicate breath of flowers
and wafts of hay scent from the sunburnt swathes:
how the glad song of life comes everywhence,
from thousand harmless voices, from blithe birds
that twitter on incessant sweet good-nights,
from homeward bees that, through the clover tufts,
stray booming, pilfering treasures to the last,
from sleepless crickets clamouring in the grass.
to tell the world they're happy day and night,
from the persistent rooks in their high town,
from sheep in far off meadows: life, life, life,
it is the song they sing, and to my mind
the song is very happy, very good.
My God, I thank thee I have known this life,
although, I doubt not, dying I shall learn
how greater and how happier is death.

Oh beautiful and various earth of ours,
how good God made thee. Ah, I have lost much,
mine is a very grey and dim earth now,
but I can feel and hear and take in so
the joy of present beauty to my soul,
and then I see it there. O strange blurred mists,
that mean the sky to me, my twilight eyes
discern no more than you, but I see more;
I see this gold and glowing sunset spread,
and break the pale blue sky with flashing clouds,
I see the shadows soften on the hills,
and the green summits brighten one by one
and purple in the nightfall one by one.
Oh, seeing can be done without the eyes.

Are those St Mary's church-bells in the town?
How far sound spreads to-night! St Mary's bells,
chiming for evensong. I would the way
were not so over long for feeble limbs,
and that the pathway and the still canal
had not so like a glimmer in the dusk;
for I could gladly feel the peace of prayer
among the others in the quiet church,
with silent graves seen through the open door,
and rustling heard of slowly stirring leaves.
And then 'tis pleasant too to hear the rhythm
of scholars' English and of words in books:
'tis like the voice of some rare foreign tongue
familiar once and loved, that, howso heard,
takes the glad ear with sweetness of old wont.
Oh, there's no sermon now so trite and crude
but makes for me a sort of literature:
'tis my one echo now from that far world
where books are read and written, my world once;

I listen as one listens, note by note,
to some great symphony one knows by heart,
played powerlessly, uncertainly, with change
and thinner chords to suit a learner's hand,
listening with pleasure part for what there is
and more for what there should be and what was
when long ago one used to hear the strain:
I seem to love words now because they are words.

Not that I'll call our Vicar's sermon words:
no, no; he loves his God and loves his poor;
he makes his life one task of doing good;
can such a man speak idly? What he does
is proof to what he urges, his week's life
soul to his Sunday preachings, his shown faith
the key to his expoundings; one may learn
from such a man more things than he can teach:

Alas, the busy patience of his life,
eager and resolute for little things,
strenuous on petty labours, which no voice
shall ever herald past the parish bounds,
which maybe those who see them do not see,
and those whose gain they are know not for gain,
does it not twit me with my languid years
drifted along expectant of a day
when all my world should thank me I had waked?
My world--ah, after all, a lesser one
than I discerned when I was of it still,
my world of men who learn and teach and learn,
and then have only learned and taught and learned--
my world that has forgotten me, a waif
floated away from it on too rough tides,
left spoiled and stranded to drop piece by piece.

Ah me, the difference: I have not known
what envy means unless I know it now
when, in my helplessness, sick, blind, and poor,
past all fulfilling now, with nought fulfilled,
I see our Vicar, with his cheery look,
hurried and overladen with small cares,
glad in his work because it is his work.
And he'll not envy me my garnered lore,
stored up for moth and mildew; what to him
is any wisdom but to work and pray?
the denizens of our rustic market town,
which ignorant strangers take, and break our hearts,
or just a village, know no Tübingen,
have never heard of varying codices,
love, or love not, the Christ of Luke and John,
and have no guess of Renan's; to their minds
belief and unbelief are simplest things,

mere Yes and No, and God must side with Yes,
as kings must with the loyal. But the love
that comes of faith and faith that comes of love;
they can learn those of him and he can teach,
that plain man, ignorant of philosophies
but wise enough to do good all the day.
Ah, why was I too weak for such a life,
which once I might have chosen? A high life,
full of most blessed service.

But I thought
it was not my life meant for me by God:
and now I know not what I should have done,
only I mourn that I have lived in vain,
still daily dreaming some completed task
that never was begun, still waiting force
of impulse more than mine to waken mine,
still dimly pondering "Shall I? Can I? How?"
and waiting to be ready to begin.

Ah tardy useless labourer in the fields,
who waits to think what weed he shall rout first;
ah laggard sailor, who will not put out
till the direct fair wind sets for his port.
And time will never linger, and the world
can wait for no man, must have its wants fed
at the want's birth-cry--soldiers to the gap
on the hot instant, else no need of you,
no space for you to stand in. Long long since
I thought to have been somewhat, to perhaps
set some regardful honour round my name,
but surely to receive a destined place,
a part among the workers: for it seemed
to have so far uptrodden, half alone,
from peasant lowliness should prelude me
a future as of one of whom they say
"so low he was" to show how high he is.
Dreams, dreams! I never had the pith, the sap,
the strong aspiring pulses; I was one
to think, and shiver, by the study fire
"outside is the cold boisterous sea of life
where I will plunge to-morrow and snatch pearls,"
to wait like a late sleeper in the morn,
that with a drowsy logic lulls himself,
and chides his tardiness on their delay
who will not come to tell him it is time.

And yet I did not sleep; no, to my thought
I always was at school for work to come:
but these days leave us little schooling time.
Long since, and when the wisdom of the wise
was to accept to live one with to learn,

and men might find their work for half a life
in thinking silent, and the other half
in thinking out aloud, those were my days
I should have lived in: I came out of date:
like a reprinted tome of theories
made reasonably ere the science shaped,
which, all uncut, stands on the library shelf
amid new essays on the daily art
born long since of the science, and men say
"'Tis learned, curious, looks well on the shelf"
and take its slighter useful neighbour down,
so I showed wise and useless to the world.

Wise with the oldworld wisdom grown unapt
to this changed morrow, for the lesson now
is to accept to live one with to do--
the wisest wisdom plainly in this stir,
this over crowding, this hot hurrying on,
that make a tempest of our modern days.
This anxious age is driven half mad with work,
it bids us all work, world no need, no room,
for contemplating sages counting life
a time allowed for solving problems in
and its own self a problem to be solved;
on in the rush, or be swept out of sight,
on in the rush, and find your place, and work.

'Tis right, 'tis very right; not only ours
to fit what state God gives us but what times;
and he who is thrown out in a fierce race
can hardly chide, "the others ran too fast."
And, as for me, if I grow old alone,
hid out of memory of springtime peers,
and have my roof and food by dead men's alms,
it is that I have been an alien son,
a dronish servant careful of his ease,
to the master-Present, the strong century
that gave our lives and will have use of them.
I knew it always, but still while I thought.
"To-morrow I go forth," the sudden Now
had gone before I judged it had been there:
I knew it always, but the stealthy years
slid on while I was busy at my books,
and when I, startled, waked and saw it time,
lo the "Too late" which God has spoken me
in blindness and in sickness.

A strange life;
fair bud, fair blossom, never perfect fruit;
the river that seemed destined to push on
long eager miles among its busy mills,
among its teeming meadows and its towns,

hemmed stagnant by some little feeble dykes,
some trivial sand-mounds barred against its way,
and rounding to an issueless dull pool.

And yet, but for that wondering vague remorse
not to have been one stronger than myself,
I look back very kindly on my life
so changeful yet so still, not sorrowless
and yet not sad; I love to think of it
and tell it to myself like an old tale
dear for its homely long-familiar turns.
Oh, often I, the grey-haired palsied man,
am yet again the child beneath the hedge,
the village urchin, truant to his task,
of scaring crows, to con a dog's-eared book,
stealing his indolent scholar's luxury
by naughty half-hours through the lonely day.
Oh happy child, I never saw my guilt
nor dreamed of trust betrayed and pence ill-earned,
and it was such a joy to learn and pore
and read great words and wonder what they meant,
and sometimes see, as if a faint new star
dawned on one through a dusky gap at night,
a sudden meaning breaking on the doubt:
poor as I was, ill cared for, with no kin
but the sharp stepmother who, good at heart,
for widow's duty called me hers, not love,
and little Grace, the toddling sister thing
she'd not let love me and not let me touch,
who learned to scold me in her sweet babe's lisp
and would not kiss me even when we played,
no friends, no playmates, every way alone,
yet 'twas a happy boyhood; not forlorn
with the thumbed book for gossip, not forlorn
with all the outdoor world for company.
Oh, many and many a balmy eve like this,
beside my pollard willows by the brook,
I sat and watched the greyness creeping on,
thinking 'twas pity days must end in nights
and one must sleep away so many hours,
losing such sweetness of the summer time.

Dulled wistful eyes, you cannot show me now
the brown-ribbed hill behind whose rounded slope
my village stands among its fields of flax;
last year I still could find it, where to me
it seemed a smooth dusk cloud against the sky,
could say "there lies my home," and fancy out
the well known landmarks, and go step by step
mind-pilgrimage among the dear old haunts;
but now the hill and sky are both one haze,
the dusk cloud's place is lost in larger dusk.

Well, well, 'tis present to me none the less,
and I am glad to feel it near in sight
with its white winding road that, from the top,
looks on my home, and sudden slants to it.

My home! and now 'tis twenty years and odd
since I have journeyed down the slanting road
and seen our envied boasts, the bridge and spire;
yes, twenty years and odd since the last time,
and then they called me stranger; yet I feel
my true home there. Not in my happy town,
my placid scholar's town of colleges,
where the smooth river, lagging by its elms,
bears on its painted breast oriels and towers
and grey monastic courts made reverend
with elder learning and historic lives;
not in my Cornish schoolhouse near the rocks,
where from the granite headland, with its crown
of glossy sward and wee white heather bloom
and rare and southern wildflowers of the moors,
one looked on the illimitable plain,
the vague mysterious ocean stretching forth
into the space and silence of the sky;
not in the city of the million homes,
the throbbing heart of England--No, not there,
how could I find home there? those pent black streets,
that skyless prison room, where day by day
my heart and head grew number, day by day
I and my schoolboys seemed to grow less apt,
that whirr and whirl of traffic, ceaseless change
of unknown faces thronging to and fro!
my life went shrivelling there as if one brought
some thirsty field plant maimed of half its root
amid a ball-night glare of flashing lamps.
And if I, even in this haven nook,
sheltered out of the cold winds of the world,
if here on the free hill-side, with the sounds
of woodland quiet soothing in my ears,
here where the dear home breezes blow to me
over the well known meadows, yet have longed,
like a sick schoolboy for his mother's face,
to look on my remembered trees and fields,
to touch them, to feel kin with them again,
how else could it be with me in the din
the blackness and the crowding?

Oh my heart,
how faint it grew long ere I grew all faint;
long ere there came this swift decrepitude
of too usurping age forestalling time;
how desolate I felt, like a man wrecked
on some far island in a burning clime

where every voice clangs strangely, and all thoughts
come to him yet more foreign than the words,
and very kindness wears unhomeliness;
how in my weariness I grew to loathe
those prison bars of roofs across the sky.
Well, when He pleased, God gave me the release,
gave His good way not mine, I thank Him for it.
Yes, it is well with me: life grows mere rest--
I sit apart and am done with the world,
no hopes, no fears, no changes; I have lost
all part in aims and duties, like a tool
blunted with little use I am laid by
never to serve again; I sit apart
useless, forgotten, a lone purblind man
hid in an almshouse--but the rest is good,
is very peaceful, and I feel God near,
near as I never knew Him in old days
when yet I thought I loved Him.

Did I not?
Was it because I did not love Him then
I could not choose His service? It seems strange:
they all said I was fit, they urged me to it:
and there on one hand was my worldly ease
and (if I were fit) service to my God,
on the other, chance and my poor single strength
to wrest a pittance from the world's clenched hand:
yes one might say it had been granted me
to choose both God and Mammon virtuously:
and yet I could not--never might my lips
have spoken the great answers "Christ has called,"
"The Holy Ghost has moved me." Day by day
I urged myself, I prayed to hear the call,
and the call came not. Was it want of love?
and would my warmer heart have been more brave,
and known a summons where I did not know?

Ah no, there was no need for such as I,
who have no ministering gift, no rule on minds.
Oh, the poor souls had perished which must lean
on such a pastor; I, who never found
the teacher's common secret how to write
the accurate human lore on willing minds,
how could I teach God's mysteries of love?
how could I force rebellious hearts to know?
I, who must reason with myself an hour
to cross a room and give a friend good-day,
where were my ready words to greet the poor,
my instant tact, my sympathy, command?
Oh, rather was I one to be content,
to be most happy, cloistered in the peace
of some grey convent where the even hours

go measured out by prayers and each still day
melts stealthily to night and has but seen
change between chapel and the studious cell.
Had such a life been granted by my creed
I could have snatched at it ..... yes, even then
before the silent too delusive hope
died at her careless bidding.

Susan Lee,
you never guessed, I but half knew myself,
how close a part you had of all my life
from the first time my schoolboy heart grew proud
to feel itself beat quicker at a smile.
I loved you patiently, content to dream
what happy fireside future should be ours
if you should ever love me; afterwards
I sorrowed patiently; and in both whiles
lived in my peace as if you had not been:
but yet you always have been part of me,
I cannot think upon my earlier self
and not remember you. It was but chance
that you were near me, following up the brook
for water-cresses, on that birthday morn
of my new life, when, as I basked and read,
the young squire's tutor came and saw my book,
and sat with me beneath my willow tree;
it was but chance that, for your good-girl treat,
you went a twelve miles' journey to your aunt's
and saw the prize-day splendours of our school
where I stood in my class-boy eminence
(a shamefaced hero, conscious of renown,
and bearing such a greatness bashfully),
and that your face, set in a window frame,
was still the one I saw when I looked up;
it was but chance that made your merry voice
the one to greet me first when, all elate
with budding freshman honours of first term,
I came back to our village ... where, good lack,
I found small reverence for my dignities,
and no one turned to watch me as I walked;
it was but chance that I could see you lead
a romping battle, armed with pelts of hay,
against my Gracie and her rival band
the time I got the germ and ringingest lines
of the Greek ode which gained my earliest prize;
it was but chance made Grace's letter come,
talking of only you, the selfsame day
I heard my name sound in the topmost list,
the very roll of fame as I thought then--
maybe I thought it too long afterwards,
poor lad, who fancied I had won a race
because I gained a vantage post to start;

yes, chance and only chance so mingles you
with the young promise halos, but you stand
always a star behind them, shining through,
and, though I once was sad because of you,
I have my happy memories of you now.

They said you were not pretty, owed your charm
to choice of ribbons from your father's shop,
but, as for me, I saw not if you wore
too many ribbons or too few, nor sought
what charms you had beyond that one I knew,
the kind and honest look in your grey eyes.

Well, you chose fitlier; and you prosper well,
and I can fancy you in your content,
a busy prudent farmwife all the week
and wearing silk on Sundays when you go
to church among your children, proud to take
your husband's arm ... a man who holds his own
and rents a few more acres every year.

And Grace chose wisely too, the wilful girl
I would have made a lady of--not she,
she would not stay at school, she would not learn
your monkey French, she would not chirp words small
like twittering birds, she would not crotchet lace;
and she would marry sturdy William Ford;
so found some rainy days at first, 'tis true,
but they both took them with a cheery heart,
and now she writes from their far western home
that all goes well with them, and, as for her,
she's happier than a queen the whole day through,
and all the bairns as fresh as buttercups.

'Tis far away, my Gracie, far from me:
I'd like to feel your hand in mine at last,
for I have only you, and, as I think,
you bear a kind heart to me; but that's vain,
there'll be no meeting for us in this world.
But bye and bye, my Gracie, bye and bye.

Aye, there's the answer to one's every want,
one's every doubt, that promise bye and bye;
it gives this life a beauty, as the glimpse
between near hills of the great open sea
gives to some inland nook among the woods;
it is the full completed melody
the shifting prelude hints at. Life is good,
but most because, in its best perfectness,
it comes like memory of that other life
we have not known, but shall.

What, little one,
my truant playmate, "Mother gives you leave
to come and say good night for half an hour":
well; on my knee--so. Stories must it be?
"The story about Jesus"? Yes, my child,
that is the best one ..... story of our peace;
you'll know that someday, maybe. Now begins...

Augusta Davies Webster

Joy that's half too keen, and true

Joy that's half too keen, and true,
Makes us tears.
Oh! the sweetness of the tears!
If such joy at hand appears,
Snatch it, give thine all for it;
Joy that is so exquisite,
Lost, comes not new.
One blossom for a hundred years.

Grief that's fond and dies not soon
Makes delight.
Oh! the pain of the delight!
If thy grief be love's aright,
Tend it close and let it grow:
Grief so tender not to know
Loses Love's boon.
Sweet Philomel sings all the night.

Augusta Davies Webster

Love's Mourner

'Tis men who say that through all hurt and pain
The woman's love, wife's, mother's, still will hold,
And breathes the sweeter and will more unfold
For winds that tear it, and the sorrowful rain.
So in a thousand voices has the strain
Of this dear patient madness been retold,
That men call woman's love. Ah! they are bold,
Naming for love that grief which does remain.

Love faints that looks on baseness face to face:
Love pardons all; but by the pardonings dies,
With a fresh wound of each pierced through the breast.
And there stand pityingly in Love's void place
Kindness of household wont familiar-wise,
And faith to Love--faith to our dead at rest.

Augusta Davies Webster

Marjory

Spring Stornelli.

THE RIVULET.

OH clear smooth rivulet, creeping through our bridge
With backward waves that cling around the shore,
And is thy world beyond the dim blue ridge
More dear than this, or does it need thee more?
Oh lingering stream, upon thy ceaseless way
Glide to to-morrow; yet 'tis fair to-day:
Beyond the hills and haze to-morrows hide;
To-day is fair; glide lingering, ceaseless tide.

SPRING AND SUMMER.

And summer time is good; but at its heat
The fair poor blossoms wither for the fruit,
And song-birds go that made our valley sweet
With useless ecstasies, and the boughs are mute.
And I would keep the blossoms and the song,
And I would have it spring the whole year long:
And I would have my life a year-long spring
To never pass from hopes and blossoming.

THE PRIMROSE.

Dear welcome, sweet pale stars of hope and spring,
Young primroses, blithe with the April air;
My darlings, waiting for my gathering,
Sit in my bosom, nestle in my hair.
But, oh! the fairest laughs behind the brook,
I cannot have it, I can only look:
Oh happy primrose on the further beach,
One can but look on thee, one cannot reach.

LINNET AND LARK.

Oh buoyant linnet in the flakes of thorn,
Sing thy loud lay; for joy and song are one.
Oh skylark floating upwards into morn,
Pour out thy carolling music of the sun.
Sing, sing; be voices of the life-ful air,
Glad things that never knew the cage nor snare:
Be voices of the air, and fill the sky,
Glad things that have no heed of by-and-by.

Summer Stornelli.

THE BEES IN THE LIME.

AMID the thousand blossoms of the lime,

The gossip bees go humming to and fro:
And oh the busy joy of working time!
And oh the fragrance when the lime trees blow!
Take the sweet honeys deftly, happy bees,
And store them for the later days than these:
Store, happy bees, these honeys for the frost,
That sweetness of the blossom be not lost.

THE CORNFLOWER.

A field-plant in my sheltered garden bed,
And I have set it there to love it dear;
It makes blue flowers to match skies overhead,
Blue flowers for all the while the summer's here.
Sky-blooms that woke and budded with the wheat,
Ye last and make the livelong summer sweet:
Spread while the green wheat passes into gold,
Sky-blooms I planted in the garden-mould.

THE FLOWING TIDE.

The slow green wave comes curling from the bay
And leaps in spray along the sunny marge,
And steals a little more and more away,
And drowns the dulse, and lifts the stranded barge.
Leave me, strong tide, my smooth and yellow shore;
But the clear waters deepen more and more:
Leave me my pathway of the sands, strong tide;
Yet are the waves more fair than all they hide.

THE WHISPER.

Some one has said a whispered word to me;
The whisper whispers on within my ear.
Oh little word, hush, hush, and let me be;
Hush, little word, too vexing sweet to hear.
And, if it will not hush, what must I do?
The word was 'Love'; perchance the word was true:
And, if it will not hush, must I repine?
I am his love; perchance then he is mine.

THE HEART THAT LACKS ROOM.

I love him, and I love him, and I love:
Oh heart, my love goes welling o'er the brim.
He makes my light more than the sun above,
And what am I save what I am to him?
All will, all hope I have, to him belong;
Oh heart, thou art too small for love so strong:
Oh heart, grow large, grow deeper for his sake;
Oh love him better, heart, or thou wilt break!

THE LOVERS.

And we are lovers, lovers he and I:
Oh sweet dear name that angels envy us;
Lovers for now, lovers for by and by,
And God to hear us call each other thus.
Flow softly, river of our life, and fair;
We float together to the otherwhere:
Storm, river of our life, if storm must be,
We brunt thy tide together to that sea.

THE NIGHTINGALE.

From the dusk elm rings out a changing lay;
The human-hearted nightingale sings there.
Why not, like little minstrels of the day,
Sweet voice, fling only raptures on the air?
'Tis that she's kin to us and has our woe,
Something that's lost or something yet to know:
'Tis that she's kin to us and sings our bliss,
Loving, to know love is yet more than this.

THE STORM.

Storm in the dimness of the purpled sky,
And the sharp flash leaps out from cloud to cloud:
But the blue, lifted, corner spreads more high,
Brightness, and brightness, bursts the gathered shroud.
Aye, pass, black storm, thou hadst thy threatening hour;
Now.the freed beams make rainbows of the shower:
Now the freed sunbeams break into the air;
Pass, and the sky forgets thee and is fair.

BABY EYES.

Blue baby eyes, they are so sweetest sweet,
And yet they have not learned love's dear replies;
They beg not smiles, nor call for me, nor greet,
But clear, unshrinking, note me with surprise.
But, eyes that have your father's curve of lid,
You'll learn the look that he keeps somewhere hid:
You'll smile, grave baby eyes, and I shall see
The look your father keeps for only me.

THE BINDWEED.

In all fair hues from white to mingled rose,
Along the hedge the clasping bindweed flowers;
And when one chalice shuts a new one blows,
There's blooming for all minutes of the hours.
Along the hedge beside the trodden lane
Where day by day we pass and pass again:

Rosy and white along the busy mile,
A flower for every step and all the while.

Autumn Stornelli.

THE HEATHER.

THE leagues of heather lie on moor and hill,
And make soft purple dimness and red glow;
No butterfly may call the blithe wind chill
That brings the ruddy heather-bells a-blow.
The song-birds half forget the world is fair,
And pipe no lays because the heather's there:
Oh foolish birds that have no joyous lay,
With hill and moor a garden ground to-day!

LATE ROSES.

The swallows went last week, but 'twas too soon;
For, look, the sunbeams streaming on their eaves;
And, look, my rose, a very child of June,
Spreading its crimson coronet of leaves.
Was it too late, my rose, to bud and blow?
For when the summer wanes her roses go:
Bloom, rose, there are more roses yet to wake,
With hearts of sweetness for the summer's sake.

THE BRAMBLES.

So tall along the dusty highway row,
So wide on the free heath the brambles spread;
Here's the pink bud, and here the full white blow,
And here the black ripe berry, here the red.
Bud, flower, and fruit, among the mingling thorns;
And dews to feed them in the autumn morns:
Fruit, flower, and bud, together, thou rich tree!
And oh but life's a happy time for me!

WE TWO.

The road slopes on that leads us to the last,
And we two tread it softly, side by side;
'Tis a blithe count the milestones we have passed,
Step fitting step, and each of us for guide.
My love, and I thy love, our road is fair,
And fairest most because the other's there:
Our road is fair, adown the harvest hill,
But fairest that we two are we two still.

WE TWO.

We two, we two! the children's smiles are dear—
Thank God how dear the bonny children's smiles!—
But 'tis we two among our own ones here,
We two along life's way through all the whiles.
To think if we had passed each other by;
And he not he apart, and I not I!
And oh to think if we had never known;
And I not I and he not he alone!

THE APPLE ORCHARD.

The apple branches bend with ripening weight,
The apple branches rosy as with flowers;
You'd think red giant fuchsias blooming late
Within this sunny orchard ground of ours.
Give us your shade, fair fountain trees of fruits;
We rest upon the mosses at your roots:
Fair fountain trees of fruits, drop windfalls here;
Lo, ripening store for all the coming year.

Winter Stornelli.

THE SNOWS.

THE green and happy world is hidden away;
Cold, cold, the ghostly snows lie on its breast;
The white miles reach the shadows wan and grey
'Neath wan grey skies unchanged from east to west.
Sleep on beneath the snows, chilled, barren, earth;
There are no blossoms for thy winter dearth:
Break not nor melt, fall still from heaven, wan snows;
Hide the spoiled earth, and numb her to repose.

THE HOLLY.

'Tis a brave tree. While round its boughs in vain
The warring wind of January bites and girds,
It holds the clusters of its crimson grain,
A winter pasture for the shivering birds.
Oh patient holly, that the children love,
No need for thee of smooth blue skies above:
Oh green strong holly, shine amid the frost;
Thou dost not lose one leaf for sunshine lost.

THE GRAVEYARD.

They sleep here well who have forgotten to-day,
They weep not while we weep, nor wake each morn
To bitter new surprise, as mourners may
That knew not in their rest they were forlorn.
Calm graveyard, 'tis more pleasant to sit here

Than where loud life pretends its eager cheer:
Calm graveyard, where he waits and I shall be,
Thou hast the spot of earth most dear to me.

THE FROZEN RIVER.

Dead stream beneath the icy silent blocks
That motionless stand soddening into grime,
Thy fretted falls hang numb, frost pens the locks;
Dead river, when shall be thy waking time?
'Not dead;' the river spoke and answered me,
'My burdened current, hidden, finds the sea'
'Not dead, not dead;' my heart replied at length,
'The frozen river holds a hidden strength.'

THE DAUGHTER.

Go forth, my darling, in the wreath and veil;
My hand shall place them for thee; so goodbye.
Thou hast Love's rose, and tend it without fail;
It withers, dear, if lovers let it lie.
Go, my own singing bird, and be his now;
And I am more than half as glad as thou.
Ah me! the singing birds that were our own
Fly forth and mate: and 'tis long life alone.

WE TWO.

We two that could not part are parted long;
He in the far-off Heaven, and I to wait.
A fair world once, all blossom-time and song;
But to be lonely tires, and I live late.
To think we two have not a word to change:
And one without the other here is strange!
To think we two have nothing now to share:
I wondering here, and he without me there!

WE TWO.

We two, we two! we still are linked and nigh:
He could not have forgotten in any bliss;
Surely he feels my being yet; and I,
I have no thought but seems some part of his.
Oh love gone out of reach of yearning eyes,
Our hearts can meet to gather-in replies:
Oh love past touch of lip and clasp of hand,
Thou canst not be too far to understand.

THE FLOWERS TO COME.

The drift is in the hollows of the hill,
Yet primrose leaves uncurl beneath the hedge;

Frosts pierce the dawn, and the north wind blows chill,
Yet snowdrop spikelets rim the garden edge.
Dear plants that will make bud in coming spring,
Ye were not for one only blossoming:
More than one blossoming for all fair flowers;
And God keeps mine till spring is somewhere ours.

Augusta Davies Webster

Medea in Athens

Dead is he? Yes, our stranger guest said dead--
said it by noonday, when it seemed a thing
most natural and so indifferent
as if the tale ran that a while ago
there died a man I talked with a chance hour
when he by chance was near me. If I spoke
"Good news for us but ill news for the dead
when the gods sweep a villain down to them,"
'twas the prompt trick of words, like a pat phrase
from some one other's song, found on the lips
and used because 'tis there: for through all day
the news seemed neither good nor ill to me.

And now, when day with all its useless talk
and useless smiles and idiots' prying eyes
that impotently peer into one's life,
when day with all its seemly lying shows
has gone its way and left pleased fools to sleep,
while weary mummers, taking off the mask,
discern that face themselves forgot anon
and, sitting in the lap of sheltering night,
learn their own secrets from her--even now
does it seem either good or ill to me?
No, but mere strange.

And this most strange of all
that I care nothing.

Nay, how wild thought grows.
Meseems one came and told of Jason's death:
but 'twas a dream. Else should I, wondering thus,
reck not of him, nor with the virulent hate
that should be mine against mine enemy,
nor with that weakness which sometimes I feared
should this day make me, not remembering Glaucè,
envy him to death as though he had died mine?

Can he be dead? It were so strange a world
with him not in it.

Dimly I recall
some prophecy a god breathed by my mouth.
It could not err. What was it? For I think;--
it told his death[1].

Has a god come to me?
Is it thou, my Hecate? How know I all?
For I know all as if from long ago:
and I know all beholding instantly.
Is not that he, arisen through the mists?--
a lean and haggard man, rough round the eyes,
dull and with no scorn left upon his lip,

decayed out of his goodliness and strength;
a wanned and broken image of a god;
dim counterfeit of Jason, heavily
wearing the name of him and memories.

And lo, he rests with lax and careless limbs
on the loose sandbed wind-heaped round his ship
that rots in sloth like him, and props his head
on a half-buried fallen spar. The sea,
climbing the beach towards him, seethes and frets,
and on the verge two sunned and shadowed clouds
take shapes of notched rock-islands; and his thoughts
drift languid to the steep Symplegades
and the sound of waters crashing at their base.

Su d, wsper eikos, katqanei kakos kakws, Argous kara son leiyanw peplhgmenos. EUR. Med. 1386, 7.

And now he speaks out to his loneliness
"I was afraid and careful, but she laughed:
'Love steers' she said: and when the rocks were far,
grey twinkling spots in distance, suddenly
her face grew white, and, looking back to them,
she said, 'Oh love, a god has whispered me
'twere well had we died there, for strange mad woes
are waiting for us in your Greece': and then
she tossed her head back, while her brown hair streamed
gold in the wind and sun, and her face glowed
with daring beauty, 'What of woes', she cried,
'if only they leave time for love enough?'
But what a fire and flush! It took one's breath!"
And then he lay half musing, half adoze,
shadows of me went misty through his sight.

And bye and bye he roused and cried "Oh dolt!
Glaucè was never half so beautiful."
Then under part-closed lids remembering her,
"Poor Glaucè, a sweet face, and yet methinks
she might have wearied me:" and suddenly,
smiting the sand awhirl with his angry hand,
scorned at himself "What god befooled my wits
to dream my fancy for her yellow curls
and milk-white softness subtle policy?

Wealth and a royal bride: but what beyond?
Medea, with her skills, her presciences,
man's wisdom, woman's craft, her rage of love
that gave her to serve me strength next divine,
Medea would have made me what I would;
Glaucè but what she could. I schemed amiss
and earned the curses the gods send on fools.
Ruined, ruined! A laughing stock to foes!

No man so mean but he may pity me;
no man so wretched but will keep aloof
lest the curse upon me make him wretcheder.
Ruined!"

And lo I see him hide his face
like a man who'll weep with passion: but to him
the passion comes not, only slow few tears
of one too weary. And from the great field
where the boys race he hears their jubilant shout
hum through the distance, and he sighs "Ah me!
she might have spared the children, left me them:--
no sons, no sons to stand about me now
and prosper me, and tend me bye and bye
in faltering age, and keep my name on earth
when I shall be departed out of sight."

And the shout hummed louder forth: and whirring past
a screaming sea-bird flapped out to the bay,
and listlessly he watched it dip and rise
till it skimmed out of sight, so small a speck
as a mayfly on the brook; and then he said
"Fly forth, fly forth, bird, fly to fierce Medea
where by great Ægeus she sits queening it,
belike a joyful mother of new sons;
tell her she never loved me as she talked,
else had no wrong at my hand shewn so great:
tell her that she breaks oaths more than I broke,
even so much as she seemed to love most--
she who fits fondling in a husband's arms
while I am desolate." And again he said
"My house is perished with me--ruined, ruined!"

At that he rose and, muttering in his teeth
still "ruined, ruined," slowly paced the sands:
then stood and, gazing on the ragged hulk,
cried "Oh loathed tool of fiends, that, through all storms
and sundering waters, borest me to Medea,
rot, rot, accursed thing," and petulant
pashed at the side--

Lo, lo! I see it part!
a tottering spar--it parts, it falls, it strikes!

He is prone on the sand, the blood wells from his brow,
he moans, he speaks, "Medea's prophecy."
See he has fainted.

Hush, hush! he has lain
with death and silence long: now he wakes up--
"Where is Medea? Let her bind my head."
Hush, hush! A sigh--a breath--He is dead.

* * * * * *

Medea!
What, is it thou? What, thou, this whimpering fool,
this kind meek coward! Sick for pity art thou?
Or did the vision scare thee? Out on me!
do I drivel like a slight disconsolate girl
wailing her love?

No, not one foolish tear
that shamed my cheek welled up for any grief
at his so pitiful lone end. The touch
of ancient memories and the woman's trick
of easy weeping took me unawares:
but grief! Why should I grieve?

And yet for this,
that he is dead. He should still pine and dwine,
hungry for his old lost strong food of life
vanished with me, hungry for children's love,
hungry for me. Ever to think of me--
with love, with hate, what care I? hate is love--
Ever to think and long. Oh it was well!
Yea, my new marriage hope has been achieved:
for he did count me happy, picture me
happy with Ægeus; he did dream of me
as all to Ægeus that I was to him,
and to him nothing; and did yearn for me
and know me lost--we two so far apart
as dead and living, I an envied wife
and he alone and childless. Jason, Jason,
come back to earth; live, live for my revenge.

But lo the man is dead: I am forgotten.
Forgotten; something goes from life in that--
as if oneself had died, when the half self
of one's true living time has slipped away
from reach of memories, has ceased to know
that such a woman is.

A wondrous thing
to be so separate having been so near--
near by hate last and once by so strong love.
Would love have kept us near if he had died
in the good days? Tush, I should have died too:
we should have gone together, hand in hand,
and made dusk Hades glorious each to each.

Ah me, if then when through the fitful seas
we saw the great rocks glimmer, and the crew

howled "We are lost! lo the Symplegades!"
too late to shun them, if but then some wave,
our secret friend, had dashed us from our course,
sending us to be shivered at the base,
well, well indeed! And yet what say I there?
Ten years together were they not worth cost
of all the anguish? Oh me, how I loved him!
Why did I not die loving him?

* * * * * *

What thou!
Have the dead no room, or do they drive thee forth
loathing thee near them? Dost thou threaten me?
Why, so I saw thee last, and was not scared:
think not to scare me now; I am no babe
to shiver at an unavailing shade.
Go, go, thou canst not curse me, none will hear:
the gods remember justice. Wrongs! thy wrongs!
the vengeance, ghost! What hast thou to avenge
as I have? Lo, thy meek-eyed Glaucè died,
and thy king-kinsman Creon died: but I,
I live what thou hast made me.

Oh smooth adder,
who with fanged kisses changedst my natural blood
to venom in me, say, didst thou not find me
a grave and simple girl in a still home,
learning my spells for pleasant services
or to make sick beds easier? With me went
the sweet sound of friends' voices praising me:
all faces smiled on me, even lifeless things
seemed glad because of me; and I could smile
to every face, to everything, to trees,
to skies and waters, to the passing herds,
to the small thievish sparrows, to the grass
with sunshine through it, to the weed's bold flowers:
for all things glad and harmless seemed my kin,
and all seemed glad and harmless in the world.
Thou cam'st, and from the day thou, finding me
in Hecate's dim grove to cull my herbs,
didst burn my cheeks with kisses hot and strange,
the curse of thee compelled me. Lo I am
The wretch thou say'st; but wherefore? by whose work?
Who, binding me with dreadful marriage oaths
in the midnight temple, led my treacherous flight
from home and father? Whose voice when I turned,
desperate to save thee, on my own young brother,
my so loved brother, whose voice as I smote
nerved me, cried "Brave Medea"? For whose ends
did I decoy the credulous girls, poor fools,

to slay their father? When have I been base,
when cruel, save for thee, until--Man, man,
wilt thou accuse my guilt? Whose is my guilt?
mine or thine, Jason? Oh, soul of my crimes,
how shall I pardon thee for what I am?

Never. And if, with the poor womanish heart
that for the loving's sake will still love on,
I could let such a past wane as a dream
and turn to thee at waking--turn to thee!
I, put aside like some slight purchased slave
who pleased thee and then tired, still turn to thee!--
yet never, not if thou and I could live
thousands of years and all thy years were pain
and all my years were to behold thy pain,
never could I forgive thee for my boys;
never could I look on this hand of mine
that slew them and not hate thee. Childless thou,
what is thy childlessness to mine? Go, go,
thou foolish angry ghost, what wrongs hast thou?
would I could wrong thee more. Come thou sometimes
and see me happy.

Dost thou mock at me
with thy cold smiling? Aye, can I not love?
What then? am I not folded round with love,
with a life's whole of love? There doth no thought
come near to Ægeus save what is of me:
am I no happy wife? And I go proud,
and treasure him for noblest of the world:
am I no happy wife?

Dost mock me still?
My children is it? Are the dead so wise?
Why, who told thee my transport of despair
when from the Sun who willed me not to die
nor creep away, sudden and too late came
the winged swift car that could have saved them, mine,
from thee and from their foes? Tush, 'twas best so;
If they had lived, sometimes thou hadst had hope:
for thou wouldst still have said "I have two sons,"
and dreamed perchance they'd bring thee use at last
and build thy greatness higher: but now, now,
thou hast died shamed and childless, none to keep
thy name and memory fresh upon the earth,
none to make boast of thee "My father did it."

Yea, 'twas best so: my sons, we are avenged.
Thou, mock me not. What if I have ill dreams
to see them loathe me, fly from me in dread,
when I would feed my hungry mouth with kisses?
what if I moan in tossing fever thirsts,

crying for them whom I shall have no more,
here nor among the dead, who never more,
here nor among the dead, will smile to me
with young lips prattling "Mother, mother dear"?
what if I turn sick when the women pass
that lead their boys, and hate a child's young face?
what if--

Go, go, thou mind'st me of my sons,
and then I hate thee worse; go to thy grave
by which none weeps. I have forgotten thee.

Augusta Davies Webster

Miles and miles of here and there

MILES and miles of here and there
Our eager river forced its way,
Bent to be it knew not where.

It had no rest in delay;
And for its haste it had no aim;
Wherefore go? But wherefore stay?

Here and there led both the same;
By any winding it could make
Near its secret goal it came.

When it reached the crystal lake
It knew its aim and found its rest;
All the miles were for love's sake.

Mid the blue hills of the west
Our river lies in the lake's breast.

Augusta Davies Webster

Mother and Daughter- Sonnet Sequence

I
Young laughters, and my music! Aye till now
The voice can reach no blending minors near;
'Tis the bird's trill because the spring is here
And spring means trilling on a blossomy bough;
'Tis the spring joy that has no why or how,
But sees the sun and hopes not nor can fear--
Spring is so sweet and spring seems all the year.
Dear voice, the first-come birds but trill as thou.

Oh music of my heart, be thus for long:
Too soon the spring bird learns the later song;
Too soon a sadder sweetness slays content
Too soon! There comes new light on onward day,
There comes new perfume o'er a rosier way:
Comes not again the young spring joy that went.
ROME, November 1881.

II
That she is beautiful is not delight,
As some think mothers joy, by pride of her,
To witness questing eyes caught prisoner
And hear her praised the livelong dancing night;
But the glad impulse that makes painters sight
Bids me note her and grow the happier;
And love that finds me as her worshipper
Reveals me each best loveliness aright.

Oh goddess head! Oh innocent brave eyes!
Oh curved and parted lips where smiles are rare
And sweetness ever! Oh smooth shadowy hair
Gathered around the silence of her brow!
Child, I'd needs love thy beauty stranger-wise:
And oh the beauty of it, being thou!

III
I watch the sweet grave face in timorous thought
Lest I should see it dawn to some unrest
And read that in her heart is youth's ill guest,
The querulous young sadness, born of nought,
That wearies of the strife it has not fought,
And finds the life it has not had unblest,
And asks it knows not what that should be best,
And till Love come has never what it sought.

But she is still. A full and crystal lake
So gives it skies their passage to its deeps
In an unruffled morn where no winds wake,
And, strong and fretless, 'stirs not, nor yet sleeps.
My darling smiles and 'tis for gladness' sake;
She hears a woe, 'tis simple tears she weeps.

IV
'Tis but a child. The quiet Juno gaze
Breaks at a trifle into mirth and glow,
Changed as a folded bud bursts into blow,
And she springs, buoyant, on some busy craze,
Or, in the rhythm of her girlish plays,
Like light upon swift waves floats to and fro,
And, whatsoe'er's her mirth, needs me to know,
And keeps me young by her young innocent ways.

Just now she and her kitten raced and sprang
To catch the daisy ball she tossed about;
Then they grew grave, and found a shady tree,
And kitty tried to see the notes she sang:
Now she flies hitherward--'Mother! Quick! Come see!
Two hyacinths in my garden almost out!'

V
Last night the broad blue lightnings flamed the sky;
We watched, our breaths caught as each burst its way,
And through its fire out-leaped the sharp white ray,
And sudden dark re-closed when it went by:
But she, that where we are will needs be nigh,
Had tired with hunting orchids half the day.
Her father thought she called us; he and I,
Half anxious, reached the bedroom where she lay.

Oh lily face upon the whiteness blent!
How calm she lay in her unconscious grace!
A peal crashed on the silence ere we went;
She stirred in sleep, a little changed her place,
'Mother,' she breathed, a smile grew on her face:
'Mother,' my darling breathed, and slept content.

VI
Sometimes, as young things will, she vexes me,
Wayward, or too unheeding, or too blind.
Like aimless birds that, flying on a wind,
Strike slant against their own familiar tree;
Like venturous children pacing with the sea,
That turn but when the breaker spurts behind
Outreaching them with spray: she in such kind
Is borne against some fault, or does not flee.

And so, may be, I blame her for her wrong,
And she will frown and lightly plead her part,
And then I bid her go. But 'tis not long:
Then comes she lip to ear and heart to heart.
And thus forgiven her love seems newly strong,
And, oh my penitent, how dear thou art!

VII
Her father lessons me I at times am hard,
Chiding a moment's fault as too grave ill,
And let some little blot my vision fill,
Scanning her with a narrow near regard.
True. Love's unresting gaze is self-debarred
From all sweet ignorance, and learns a skill,
Not painless, of such signs as hurt love's will,
That would not have its prize one tittle marred.

Alas! Who rears and loves a dawning rose
Starts at a speck upon one petal's rim:
Who sees a dusk creep in the shrined pearl's glows,
Is ruined at once: 'My jewel growing dim!'
I watch one bud that on my bosom blows,
I watch one treasured pearl for me and him.

VIII
A little child she, half defiant came
Reasoning her case--'twas not so long ago--
'I cannot mind your scolding, for I know
However bad I were you'd love the same.'
And I, what countering answer could I frame?
'Twas true, and true, and God's self told her so.
One does but ask one's child to smile and grow,
And each rebuke has love for its right name.

And yet, methinks, sad mothers who for years,
Watching the child pass forth that was their boast,
Have counted all the footsteps by new fears
Till even lost fears seem hopes whereof they're reft
And of all mother's good love sole is left--
Is their Love, Love, or some remembered ghost?

IX
Oh weary hearts! Poor mothers that look back!
So outcasts from the vale where they were born
Turn on their road and, with a joy forlorn,
See the far roofs below their arid track:
So in chill buffets while the sea grows black
And windy skies, once blue, are tost and torn,
We are not yet forgetful of the morn,
And praise anew the sunshine that we lack.

Oh, sadder than pale sufferers by a tomb
That say 'My dead is happier, and is more'
Are they who dare no 'is' but tell what's o'er--
Thus the frank childhood, those the lovable ways--
Stirring the ashes of remembered days
For yet some sparks to warm the livelong gloom.

X

Love's Counterfeit.

Not Love, not Love, that worn and footsore thrall
Who, crowned with withered buds and leaves gone dry,
Plods in his chains to follow one passed by,
Guerdoned with only tears himself lets fall.
Love is asleep and smiling in his pall,
And this that wears his shape and will not die
Was once his comrade shadow, Memory--
His shadow that now stands for him in all.

And there are those who, hurrying on past reach,
See the dim follower and laugh, content,
'Lo, Love pursues me, go where'er I will!'
Yet, longer gazing, some may half beseech,
'This must be Love that wears his features still:
Or else when was the moment that Love went?'

XI

Love's Mourner.

'Tis men who say that through all hurt and pain
The woman's love, wife's, mother's, still will hold,
And breathes the sweeter and will more unfold
For winds that tear it, and the sorrowful rain.
So in a thousand voices has the strain
Of this dear patient madness been retold,
That men call woman's love. Ah! they are bold,
Naming for love that grief which does remain.

Love faints that looks on baseness face to face:
Love pardons all; but by the pardonings dies,
With a fresh wound of each pierced through the breast.
And there stand pityingly in Love's void place
Kindness of household wont familiar-wise,
And faith to Love--faith to our dead at rest.

XII
She has made me wayside posies: here they stand,
Bringing fresh memories of where they grew.
As new-come travellers from a world we knew
Wake every while some image of their land,
So these whose buds our woodland breezes fanned
Bring to my room the meadow where they blew,
The brook-side cliff, the elms where wood-doves coo--
And every flower is dearer for her hand.

Oh blossoms of the paths she loves to tread,

Some grace of her is in all thoughts you bear:
For in my memories of your homes that were
The old sweet loneliness they kept is fled,
And would I think it back I find instead
A presence of my darling mingling there.

XIII
My darling scarce thinks music sweet save mine:
'Tis that she does but love me more than hear.
She'll not believe my voice to stranger ear
Is merely measure to the note and line;
'Not so,' she says; 'Thou hast a secret thine:
The others' singing's only rich, or clear,
But something in thy tones brings music near;
As though thy song could search me and divine.'

Oh voice of mine that in some day not far
Time, the strong creditor, will call his debt,
Will dull--and even to her--will rasp and mar,
Sing Time asleep because of her regret,
Be twice thy life the thing her fancies are,
Thou echo to the self she knows not yet.
CASERTA, April, 1882.

XIV
To love her as to-day is so great bliss
I needs must think of morrows almost loth,
Morrows wherein the flower's unclosing growth
Shall make my darling other than she is.
The breathing rose excels the bud I wis,
Yet bud that will be rose is sweet for both;
And by-and-by seems like some later troth
Named in the moment of a lover's kiss.

Yes, I am jealous, as of one now strange
That shall instead of her possess my thought,
Of her own self made new by any change,
Of her to be by ripening morrows brought.
My rose of women under later skies!
Yet, ah! my child with the child's trustful eyes!

XV
That some day Death who has us all for jest
Shall hide me in the dark and voiceless mould,
And him whose living hand has mine in hold,
Where loving comes not nor the looks that rest,
Shall make us nought where we are known the best,
Forgotten things that leave their track untold
As in the August night the sky's dropped gold--
This seems no strangeness, but Death's natural hest.

But looking on the dawn that is her face
To know she too is Death's seems mis-belief;
She should not find decay, but, as the sun
Moves mightier from the veil that hides his place,
Keep ceaseless radiance. Life is Death begun:
But Death and her! That's strangeness passing grief.

XVI
She will not have it that my day wanes low,
Poor of the fire its drooping sun denies,
That on my brow the thin lines write good-byes
Which soon may be read plain for all to know,
Telling that I have done with youth's brave show;
Alas! and done with youth in heart and eyes,
With wonder and with far expectancies,
Save but to say 'I knew such long ago.'

She will not have it. Loverlike to me,
She with her happy gaze finds all that's best,
She sees this fair and that unfretted still,
And her own sunshine over all the rest:
So she half keeps me as she'd have me be,
And I forget to age, through her sweet will.

XVII
And how could I grow old while she's so young?
Methinks her heart sets tune for mine to beat,
We are so near; her new thoughts, incomplete,
Find their shaped wording happen on my tongue;
Like bloom on last year's winterings newly sprung
My youth upflowers with hers, and must repeat
Old joyaunces in me nigh obsolete.
Could I grow older while my child's so young?

And there are tales how youthful blood instilled
Thawing frore Age's veins gave life new course,
And quavering limbs and eyes made indolent
Grew freshly eager with beginning force:
She so breathes impulse. Were my years twice spent,
Not burdening Age, with her, could make me chilled.

XVIII
'Tis hard that the full summer of our round
Is but the turn where winter's sign-post's writ;
That to have reached the best is leaving it;
That final loss bears date from having found.
So some proud vessel in a narrow sound
Sails at high water with the fair wind fit,
And lo! the ebb along the sandy spit,
Lower and lower till she jars, aground.

'Tis hard. We are young still but more content;

'Tis our ripe flush, the heyday of our prime;
We learn full breath, how rich of the air we are!
But suddenly we note a touch of time,
A little fleck that scarcely seems to mar;
And we know then that some time since youth went.

XIX
Life on the wane: yes, sudden that news breaks.
And yet I would 'twere suddenly and less soon;
Since no forewarning makes loss opportune.
And now I watch that slow advance Time makes:
Watch as, while silent flow spreads broad the lakes
Mid the land levels of a smooth lagoon,
One waiting, pitiful, on a tidal dune,
Aware too long before it overtakes.

Ah! there's so quick a joy in hues and sun,
And will my eyes see dim? Will vacant sense
Forget the lark, the surges on the beach?
Shall I step wearily and wish 'twere done?
Well, if it be love will not too go hence,
Love will have new glad secrets yet to teach.

XX
There's one I miss. A little questioning maid
That held my finger, trotting by my side,
And smiled out of her pleased eyes open wide,
Wondering and wiser at each word I said.
And I must help her frolics if she played,
And I must feel her trouble if she cried;
My lap was hers past right to be denied;
She did my bidding, but I more obeyed.

Dearer she is to-day, dearer and more;
Closer to me, since sister womanhoods meet;
Yet, like poor mothers some long while bereft,
I dwell on toward ways, quaint memories left,
I miss the approaching sound of pit-pat feet,
The eager baby voice outside my door.

XXI
Hardly in any common tender wise,
With petting talk, light lips on her dear cheek,
The love I mean my child will bear to speak,
Loth of its own less image for disguise;
But liefer will it floutingly devise,
Using a favourite jester's mimic pique,
Prompt, idle, by-names with their sense to seek,
And takes for language laughing ironies.

But she, as when some foreign tongue is heard,
Familiar on our lips and closely known,

We feel the every purport of each word
When ignorant ears reach empty sound alone,
So knows the core within each merry gird,
So gives back such a meaning in her own.

XXII
The brook leaps riotous with its life just found,
That freshets from the mountain rains have fed,
Beats at the boulders in its hindered bed,
And fills the valley with its triumphing sound.
The strong unthirsty tarn sunk in deep ground
Has never a sigh wherewith its wealth is said,
Has no more ripples than the May-flies tread:
Silence of waters is where they abound.

And love, whatever love, sure, makes small boast:
'Tis the new lovers tell, in wonder yet.
Oh happy need! Enriched stream's jubilant gush!
But who being spouses well have learned love's most,
Being child and mother learned not nor forget,
These in their joyfulness feel the tarn's strong hush.

XXIII
Birds sing 'I love you, love' the whole day through,
And not another song can they sing right;
But, singing done with, loving's done with quite,
The autumn sunders every twittering two.
And I'd not have love make too much ado
With sweet parades of fondness and delight,
Lest iterant wont should make caresses trite,
Love-names mere cuckoo ousters of the true.

Oh heart can hear heart's sense in senseless nought,
And heart that's sure of heart has little speech.
What shall it tell? The other knows its thought.
What shall one doubt or question or beseech
Who is assured and knows and, unbesought,
Possesses the dear trust that each gives each.

XXIV
'You scarcely are a mother, at that rate.
Only one child!' The blithe soul pitied loud.
And doubtless she, amid her household crowd,
When one brings care in another's fortunate;
When one fares forth another's at her gate.
Yea, were her first-born folded in his shroud,
Not with a whole despair would she be bowed,
She has more sons to make her heart elate.

Many to love her singly, mother theirs,
To give her the dear love of being their need,
To storm her lap by turns and claim their kiss,

To kneel around her at their bed-time prayers;
Many to grow her comrades! Some have this.
Yet I, I do not envy them indeed.
RAMSGATE, 1886.

XXV
You think that you love each as much as one,
Mothers with many nestlings 'neath your wings.
Nay, but you know not. Love's most priceless things
Have unity that cannot be undone.
You give the rays, I the englobed full sun;
I give the river, you the separate springs:
My motherhood's all my child's with all it brings--
None takes the strong entireness from her: none.

You know not. You love yours with various stress;
This with a graver trust, this with more pride;
This maybe with more needed tenderness:
I by each uttermost passion of my soul
Am turned to mine; she is one, she has the whole:
How should you know who appraise love and divide?

XXVI
Of my one pearl so much more joy I gain
As he that to his sole desire is sworn,
Indifferent what women more were born,
And if she loved him not all love were vain,
Gains more, because of her--yea, through all pain,
All love and sorrows, were they two forlorn--
Than whoso happiest in the lands of morn
Mingles his heart amid a wifely train.

Oh! Child and mother, darling! Mother and child!
And who but we? We, darling, paired alone?
Thou hast all thy mother; thou art all my own.
That passion of maternity which sweeps
Tideless 'neath where the heaven of thee hath smiled
Has but one channel, therefore infinite deeps.

XXVII
Since first my little one lay on my breast
I never needed such a second good,
Nor felt a void left in my motherhood
She filled not always to the utterest.
The summer linnet, by glad yearnings pressed,
Builds room enough to house a callow brood:
I prayed not for another child--nor could;
My solitary bird had my heart's nest.

But she is cause that any baby thing
If it but smile, is one of mine in truth,
And every child becomes my natural joy:

And, if my heart gives all youth fostering,
Her sister, brother, seems the girl or boy:
My darling makes me mother to their youth.

Augusta Davies Webster

My Loss

IN the world was one green nook I knew,
Full of roses, roses red and white,
Reddest roses summer ever grew,
Whitest roses ever pearled with dew;
And their sweetness was beyond delight,
Was all love's delight.

Wheresoever in the world I went,
Roses were; for in my heart I took
Blow and blossom and bewildering scent;
Roses never with the summer spent,
Roses always ripening in that nook,
Love's far summer nook.

In the world a soddened plot I know
Blackening in this chill and misty air,
Set with shivering bushes in a row,
One by one the last leaves letting go:
Wheresoe'er I turn I shall be there,
Always sighing there.

Ah, my folly! Ah, my loss, my pain!
Dead, my roses that can blow no more!
Wherefore looked I on our nook again?
Wherefore went I after autumn's rain,
Where the summer roses bloomed before,
Bloomed so sweet before?

Augusta Davies Webster

News to the king, good news for all

'NEWS to the king, good news for all,'
The corn is trodden, the river runs red.
'News of the battle,' the heralds call,
'We have won the field; we have taken the town;
We have beaten the rebels and crushed them down.'
And the dying lie with the dead.

'Who was my bravest?' quoth the king,
The corn is trodden, the river runs red.
'Whom shall I honour for this great thing?'
'Threescore were best, where none were worst;
But Walter Wendulph was aye the first.'
And the dying lie with the dead.

'What of my husband?' quoth the bride,
The corn is trodden, the river runs red.
'Comes he to-morrow; how long will he bide?'
'Put off thy bridegear, busk thee in black;
Walter Wendulph will never come back.'
And the dying lie with the dead.

Augusta Davies Webster

Ni-Chan’s Dirge For Yen-Oey

SO soon asleep! Now must the coming years
Weep ignorantly their loss they cannot know,
And life miss ever what has never been
We weep to-day, let theirs be sadder tears
Who have not seen thee near as we have seen,
Who shall but learn a hope died long ago.
Alas for flowers untimely winds have broken,
That should have scattered seed of following flowers!
Alas for ruin of unbuilded towers!
Alas for ripening words that die unspoken!
But let them weep with sadder tears than ours
Who shall but learn a hope died long ago,
A world's hope long ago.

Augusta Davies Webster

No News From The War

I.— At The Camp.

'IS she sitting in the meadow
Where the brook leaps to the mill,
Leaning low against the poplar,
Dreamily and still?

Now, with joined hands, grave, now smiling,
Gathering now and then
From her lap her woodland darlings,
Pale sweet cyclamen?

Sitting as she sat that evening,
Trying to feel that sweet same
Who was waiting me and knew not,
Feel as when I came?

Feel again the strange shy newness,
The betrothing one first kiss?
Oh, my own, you are remembering
In an hour like this.'

II.— In The Meadow.

'HERE, here it was he made me promise him;
He stood beneath that branch; here was his seat,
Just where the bole's shade makes the sunlights dim,
Beside me, at my feet.

Ah, since, so many times we have sat here:
And who can tell when that shall be again?
My love! my love!—But what have I to fear?
Could prayers like mine be vain?

He will not fall, my hero; he will come
Bringing ripe honours more to honour me;
He will come scatheless back, and tell his home
He helped to keep it free.

Oh, love! I was so proud of you before,
How can I be so much much prouder now?
And how can I grow prouder more and more?
Ah! but my heart knows how.'

III.— From A Special Correspondent's Letter.

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'AND still no news to matter. Fights each day;
Hundreds of killed and wounded; but we wait
This great impending battle which, they say,
Will be more terrible even than the late.

It must come soon: to-morrow it might be.
Now, since I can tell nothing, let me give
An incident, merely to make you see
How near to death all of us here must live.

This morning, on my chosen slope, from whence
My watch, I thought, was safe, I chanced to see
A young and stalwart captain leap a fence
To pluck a cyclamen, not far from me,

Which made me note his face: this afternoon
On that same slope I saw his body lie
Among a dozen. Well, you may look soon
For tidings of some moment. Now, good-bye.'

Augusta Davies Webster

Not Love

I HAVE not yet I could have loved thee, sweet;
Nor know I wherefore, thou being all thou art,
The engrafted thought in me throve incomplete,

And grew to summer strength in every part
Of root and leaf, but hath not borne the flower.
Love hath refrained his fullness from my heart.

I know no better beauty, none with power
To hold mine eyes through change and change as thine,
Like southern skies that alter with each hour,

And yet are changeless, and their calm divine
From light to light hath motionlessly passed,
With only different loveliness for sign.

I know no fairer nature, nor where, cast
On the clear mirror of thine own young truth,
The imaged things of Heaven lie plainer glassed;

Nor where more fit alike show tender ruth,
And anger for the right, and hopes aglow,
And joy and sighs of April-hearted youth.

But some day I, so wont to praise thee so
With unabashed warm words for all to hear,
Shall scarcely name another, speaking low.

Some day, methinks, and who can tell how near?
I may, to thee unchanged, be praising thee
With one not worthier but a world more dear;

With one I know not yet, who shall, maybe,
Be not so fair, be not in aught thy peer;
Who shall be all that thou art not to me.

Augusta Davies Webster

Not To Be

THE rose said 'Let but this long rain be past,
And I shall feel my sweetness in the sun
And pour its fullness into life at last.'
But when the rain was done,
But when dawn sparkled through unclouded air,
She was not there.

The lark said 'Let but winter be away,
And blossoms come, and light, and I will soar,
And lose the earth, and be the voice of day.'
But when the snows were o'er,
But when spring broke in blueness overhead,
The lark was dead.

And myriad roses made the garden glow,
And skylarks carolled all the summer long—
What lack of birds to sing and flowers to blow?
Yet, ah, lost scent, lost song!
Poor empty rose, poor lark that never trilled!
Dead unfulfilled!

Augusta Davies Webster

Once

I SET a lily long ago;
I watched it whiten in the sun;
I loved it well, I had but one.
Then summer-time was done,
The wind came and the rain,
My lily bent, lay low.
Only the night-time sees my pain—
Alas, my lily long ago!

I had a rose-tree born in May;
I watched it burgeon and grow red,
I breathed the perfume that it shed.
Then summer-time had sped,
The frost came with its sleep
My rose-tree died away.
Only the silence hears me weep—
Alas, lost rose-tree! lost, lost May!

The garden's lily blows once more;
The buried rose will wake and climb;
There is no thought of rain and rime
After, next summer-time.
But the heart's blooms are weak;
Once dead for ever o'er.
Not night, not silence knows me seek
My joy that waned and blooms no more.

Augusta Davies Webster

Once a sea-nymph loved a boy

ONCE a sea-nymph loved a boy:
He and she they loved so well.
'Oh the foamy billow's joy!
Oh the rippling in the sun!
Oh the round waves, one by one, Swaying, swaying, swaying, To and fro.
Oh my pearl and coral cell, And the long weeds playing,
While the surges come and go, Come and go!'

Boy and nymph were hand in hand:
He and she they had much love.
'Oh the green and ripening land!
Oh the lime-scent in the trees!
Oh the langour of the breeze,

Wooing, wooing, wooing, Light and low!
Oh the twilight in my grove, And the cushats cooing;
While the brook steals soft and slow, Soft and slow.'

Love, that heard them, laughed aloud, Took them to the side of him.
Was it land or leafy cloud?
Was it billowy cloud or sea? 'Twas the home that eyes, kissed dim,
Look on as they'd have it be.

Augusta Davies Webster

One star only for Love's heaven

ONE star only for Love's heaven;
One rose only for Love's breast;
One love only to be given.

Star that gathers all stars' glory
Rose all sweetness of the rest;
Love that is all life's glad story.

Augusta Davies Webster

Poulain The Prisoner

I.

BEYOND his silent vault green springs went by,
The river flashed along its open way,
Blithe swallows flitted in their billowy play,
And the sweet lark went quivering up the sky.
With him was stillness and his heart's dumb cry
And darkness of the tomb through hopeless day,
Save that along the wall one single ray
Shifted, through jealous loop-holes, westerly.

One single ray: and where its light could fall
His rusty nail carved saints and angels there,
And warriors, and slim girls with braided hair,
And blossomy boughs, and birds athwart the air.
Rude work, but yet a world. And light for all
Was one slant ray upon a prison wall.

II.

One ray, and in its track hlie lived and wrought,
And in free wideness of the world, I know,
One said, 'Fair sunshine, yet it serves not so,
It needs a tenderer when I shape my thought;'
And, ''Tis too brown and molten in the drought,'
And, ''Tis too wan a greyness in this snow,'
And would have toiled, but wearied and was woe,
While days stole past and had bequeathed him nought.

Maybe in Gisors, round the fortress mead—
Gisors where now, when fair-time brings its press,
They seek the prisoner's tower to gaze and guess
And love the work he made in loneliness—
One cursed the gloom, and died without a deed,
The while he carved where his one ray could lead.

III.

'Oh loneliness! oh darkness!' so we wail,
Crying to life to give we know not what,
The hope not come, the ecstasy forgot,
The things we should have had and, needing, fail,
Nor know what thing it was for which we ail,
And, like tired travellers to an unknown spot,
Pass listless, noting only 'Yet 'tis not,'
And count the ended day an empty tale.

Ah me! to linger on in dim repose
And feel the numbness over hand and thought,
And feel the silence in the heart, that grows.
Ah me! to have forgot the hope we sought.
One ray of light, and a soul lived and wrought,

And on the prison walls a message rose.

Augusta Davies Webster

Questions And Answer

HAD I a heart till that day?
Who knows, who knows?
Ere the leaf burst upwards can any say
'Here is a green thing hidden away
In the lingering new year snows'?

Could I have loved one not her?
Can I tell, can I tell?
When northern seas feel their life, and stir
In their one day's dawn, can they judge and aver
'Some other dawn were as well'?

Could I, she lost, love again?
May be, may be.
The dead man moulders through sun and rain,
While a soul forgets his joy and his pain;
Yet that soul which forgets is still he.

Augusta Davies Webster

Safe

Wild wintry wind, storm through the night,
Dash the black clouds against the sky,
Hiss through the billows seething white,
Fling the rock-surf in spray on high.

Hurl the high seas on harbour bars,
Madden them with thy havock-shriek
Against the crimson beacon-stars --
Thy rage no more can make me weak.

The ship rides safely in the bay,
The ship that held my hope in her --
Whirl on, wild wind, in thy wild fray,
We hear our whispers through the stir.

Augusta Davies Webster

Seeds with wings, between earth and sky

Seeds with wings, between earth and sky
Fluttering, flying;
Seeds of a lily with blood-red core
Breathing of myrrh and of giroflore:
Where winds drop them there must they lie,
Living or dying.

Some to the garden, some to the wall,
Fluttering, falling;
Some to the river, some to earth:
Those that reach the right soil get birth;
None of the rest have lived at all.—
Whose voice is calling:

'Here is soil for winged seeds that near,
Fluttering, fearing,
Where they shall root and burgeon and spread.
Lacking the heart-room the song lies dead:
Half is the song that reaches the ear,
Half is the hearing '?

Augusta Davies Webster

She Has Made Me Wayside Posies

She has made me wayside posies: here they stand,
Bringing fresh memories of where they grew.
As new-come travellers from a world we knew
Wake every while some image of their land,
So these whose buds our woodland breezes fanned
Bring to my room the meadow where they blew,
The brook-side cliff, the elms where wood-doves coo--
And every flower is dearer for her hand.

Oh blossoms of the paths she loves to tread,
Some grace of her is in all thoughts you bear:
For in my memories of your homes that were
The old sweet loneliness they kept is fled,
And would I think it back I find instead
A presence of my darling mingling there.

Augusta Davies Webster

Siste Viator

WHAT is it that is dead?
Somewhere there is a grave, and something lies
Cold in the ground, and stirs not for my sighs,
Nor songs that I can make, nor smiles from me,
Nor tenderest foolish words that I have said;
Something that was has hushed, and will not be.

Did it go yesterday?
Or did it wane away with the old years?
There hath not been farewell, nor watchers' tears,
Nor hopes, nor vain reprieves, nor strife with death,
Nor lingering in a meted out delay;
None closed the eyes nor felt the latest breath.

But, be there joyous skies,
It is not in their sunshine; in the night
It is not in the silence, and the light
Of all the silver stars; the flowers asleep
Dream no more of it, nor their morning eyes
Betray the secrets it has bidden them keep.

Birds that go singing now
Forget it and leave sweetness meaningless;
The fitful nightingale, that feigns distress
To sing it all away, flows on by rote;
The seeking lark, in very heaven, I trow,
Shall find no memory to inform her note.

The voices of the shore
Chime not with it for burden; in the wood,
Where it has soul of the vast solitude,
It hath forsook the stillness; dawn and day
And the deep-thoughted dusk know it no more;
It is no more the freshness of the May.

Joy hath it not for heart;
Nor music for its second, subtler, tongue,
Sounding what music's self hath never sung;
Nor very Sorrow needs it help her weep.
Vanished from everywhere! what was a part
Of all and everywhere; lost into sleep!

What was it ere it went?
Whence had it birth? What is its name to call,
That gone unmissed has left a want in all?
Or shall I cry on Youth, in June-time still?
Or cry on Hope, who long since am content?
Or Love, who hold him ready at my will?

What is it that is dead?
Breath of a flower? sea-freshness on a wind?
Oh, dearest, what is that that we should find,

If you and I at length could win it back?
What have we lost and know not it hath fled?
Heart of my heart, could it be love we lack?

Augusta Davies Webster

St. Ame

A SUNNY glade below the bridge;
Clear shadows branching through a stream;
A hillock purple to the ridge
With velvet thyme; and the far gleam
Of white clouds in a dream,
Floating above the dusky lines
Of silent mountains black with pines.

An idle hour to lose away,
To question not, nor muse, nor know:
The ripples ripple where they may
From brown into the amber glow;
The moments drift and go.
And what is life, and toil, and fret?
We only breathe, and we forget.

So in their summer fields might rest
Disprisoned shades that henceforth share
The careless strength of souls possessed
By but the moment that is there,
The strength which children wear;
Might so be stilled from thought or speech,
Passed into calm beyond their reach.

And lo, the dragon-fly's locked wings
Upon the leaf my breath could stir;
And on my sleeve undoubting springs
A merry-minded grasshopper;
And, see, behind that fir,
A rat across our brook has come,
And rustles past us to his home.

And the sweet air is hushed with sound
More tranceful than low lullabies,
The plashings of the waters drowned
In babble of small insect cries
And surge of leafy sighs.
We hear, not heed: enough for us
Resting to feel that rest is thus.

Not now. Oh vacant hour long past,
Wherefore to-day live back in thee?
Ill hour that grew no growth to last,
Flower without seed, unfruitful tree,
Hast thou still right to be?
Fade out forgotten, ghost of nought,
What worth or wisdom hast thou brought?

Nay, seedless, fruitless hour, not so;
Fade not, but hide from sterner looks.
We have a secret we two know,
The secret of the woods, the brooks,

Of wild flowers in their nooks,
Of all glad growing things' delight
That live and never long for night:

A secret hidden from thought and will,
And only given to those who cease
From toil and pondering and are still,
The secret of that soulless peace,
The soul's joy and release,
To sit and see the sun and smile
Only because we live the while.

Augusta Davies Webster

Tell me not of morrows, sweet

TELL me not of morrows, sweet;
All to-day is fair, and ours,
Thine and mine;
Mar not Now with needing more.
Neither speak of yesterdays;
Lose not Now with backward gaze,
Lingering on what went before.
Watch for all to-day's new flowers,
Mine and thine,
Else to-day were incomplete.

Nay, but speak of morrows, sweet;
Lest to-day seem loss of ours,
Thine and mine,
Leaving nought to come again.
Nay, but speak of yesterdays,
Lest, forgetting trodden ways,
We have trodden them in vain.
Make one love-time of all hours,
Mine and thine,
Else to-day were incomplete.

Augusta Davies Webster

Tell thee truth, sweet; no

TELL thee truth, sweet; no.
Truth is cross and sad and cold:
Lies are pitiful and kind,
Honey-soft as Love's own tongue:
Let me, love, lie so.
Lies are like a summer wind,
Wooing flower-buds to unfold
Lies will last while men are young.
Tell thee truth, love; no.

Let me, sweet, lie so.
Lies are Hope's light ministers,
Footless birds upon the wing:
Truth's a name for plodding care:
Tell thee truth, sweet; no.
Truth's the east wind on the Spring—
'Tis the wind, not Spring-time, errs.
Lies will last while maids are fair.
Let me lie, love, so.

Augusta Davies Webster

The Brook Leaps Riotous

The brook leaps riotous with its life just found,
That freshets from the mountain rains have fed,
Beats at the boulders in its hindered bed,
And fills the valley with its triumphing sound.
The strong unthirsty tarn sunk in deep ground
Has never a sigh wherewith its wealth is said,
Has no more ripples than the May-flies tread:
Silence of waters is where they abound.

And love, whatever love, sure, makes small boast:
'Tis the new lovers tell, in wonder yet.
Oh happy need! Enriched stream's jubilant gush!
But who being spouses well have learned love's most,
Being child and mother learned not nor forget,
These in their joyfulness feel the tarn's strong hush.

Augusta Davies Webster

The Brook Rhine

SMALL current of the wilds afar from men,
Changing and sudden as a baby's mood;
Now a green babbling rivulet in the wood,
Now loitering broad and shallow through the glen,
Or threading 'mid the naked shoals, and then
Brattling against the stones, half mist, half flood,
Between the mountains where the storm-clouds brood;
And each change but to wake or sleep again;
Pass on, young stream, the world has need of thee;
Far hence a mighty river on its breast
Bears the deep-laden vessels to the sea;
Far hence wide waters feed the vines and corn.
Pass on, small stream, to so great purpose born,
On to the distant toil, the distant rest.

Augusta Davies Webster

The Butterfly

VIATOR loquitur

'Royal in purple and gold and red,
Free, and unknowing sorrow,
Blithely and lithely to and fro,
With flowers for thy choosing still a-blow,
Flaunt through the idle noon:
But the day is short and the summer sped,
And alas for the end of joy so soon;
The days are short and the rose is dead,
And thou wilt be dying to-morrow.'

BUTTERFLY loquitur

'Sunshine and blossoms are on my way;
What is thy talk of sorrow?
Blithe on the wing, with the flowers for rest,
Hither and thither as likes me best:
Oh! the joy of the while!
Minutes are many to bask and to play,
The earth is glad and the blue skies smile;
Minutes are many and joy is to-day;
Dying is far till to-morrow.'

Augusta Davies Webster

The First Spring Day

THE sunshine died long ago,
Stifled out long ago,
And the waste of the world was grey,
And night was the best to know,
For night was to doze and forget the day,
To be warm and forgetting and still,
And need not the sun and know not the chill:
But oh, for the day that was darkened so!

Why gaze on a barren heaven,
Void and unchanging heaven,
On a barren earth in the grime,
And not a poor blossom given,
No thing that was thinking of sunshine time,
For a promise, a praise of the past?
And so one forgot the sunshine at last;
And sleep could avail, but what to have striven?

The sunshine wakes once anew,
Wakes and is born anew,
And the Age of the earth grows young,
And heaven has its youth for hue,
And hope is the tune of the spring-bird's tongue,
And the leaves in their prisons all hark,
And blossoms will know there is end of the dark:
One hour of the sun, and the spring-time grew!

The sunshine new on the earth,
Heaven to brighten the earth,
And the deathful dimness gone by,
The barren and winter dearth!
And to-day is the best till the next is nigh,
And to-night is to-morrow begun,
To-morrow, when blossoms remember the sun!
Dead hopes, are ye born with the blossoms birth?

Augusta Davies Webster

The Flower By The Path

A FLOWER was growing alone,
Then alone and for ever alone:
Some one came by,
Saw the flower how fair it had grown,
Chose it, plucked it to die.

And what is a flower alone,
Then alone and for ever alone,
Come no one by?
Why should a flower be fair for its own?
Choose it, pluck it to die.

Augusta Davies Webster

The Happiest Girl in the World

A week ago; only a little week:
it seems so much much longer, though that day
is every morning still my yesterday;
as all my life 'twill be my yesterday,
for all my life is morrow to my love.
Oh fortunate morrow! Oh sweet happy love!

A week ago; and I am almost glad
to have him now gone for this little while,
that I may think of him and tell myself
what to be his means, now that I am his,
and know if mine is love enough for him,
and make myself believe it all is true.

A week ago; and it seems like a life,
and I have not yet learned to know myself:
I am so other than I was, so strange,
grown younger and grown older all in one;
and I am not so sad and not so gay;
and I think nothing, only hear him think.

That morning, waking, I remembered him
"Will he be here to-day? he often comes; --
and is it for my sake or to kill time?"
and, wondering "Will he come?" I chose the dress
he seemed to like the best, and hoped for him;
and did not think I could quite love him yet.
And did I love him then with all my heart?
or did I wait until he held my hands
and spoke "Say, shall it be?" and kissed my brow,
and I looked at him and he knew it all?

And did I love him from the day we met?
but I more gladly danced with some one else
who waltzed more smoothly and was merrier:
and did I love him when he first came here?
but I more gladly talked with some one else
whose words were readier and who sought me more.
When did I love him? How did it begin?

The small green spikes of snowdrops in the spring
are there one morning ere you think of them;
still we may tell what morning they pierced up:
June rosebuds stir and open stealthily,
and every new blown rose is a surprise;
still we can date the day when one unclosed:
but how can I tell when my love began?

Oh, was it like the young pale twilight star
that quietly breaks on the vacant sky,
is sudden there and perfect while you watch,
and, though you watch, you have not seen it dawn,

the star that only waited and awoke?

But he knows when he loved me; for he says
the first time we had met he told a friend
"The sweetest dewy daisy of a girl,
but not the solid stuff to make a wife;"
and afterwards the first time he was here,
when I had slipped away into our field
to watch alone for sunset brightening on
and heard them calling me, he says he stood
and saw me come along the coppice walk
beneath the green and sparkling arch of boughs,
and, while he watched the yellow lights that played
with the dim flickering shadows of the leaves
over my yellow hair and soft pale dress,
flitting across me as I flitted through,
he whispered inly, in so many words,
"I see my wife; this is my wife who comes,
and seems to bear the sunlight on with her:"
and that was when he loved me, so he says.

Yet is he quite sure? was it only then?
and had he had no thought which I could feel?
for why was it I knew that he would watch,
and all the while thought in my silly heart,
as I advanced demurely, it was well
I had on the pale dress with sweeping folds
which took the light and shadow tenderly,
and that the sunlights touched my hair and cheek,
because he'd note it all and care for it?

Oh vain and idle poor girl's heart of mine,
content with that coquettish mean content!
He, with his man's straight purpose, thinking "wife,"
and I but that 'twas pleasant to be fair
and that 'twas pleasant he should count me fair.
But oh, to think he should be loving me
and I be no more moved out of myself!
The sunbeams told him, but they told me nought,
except that maybe I was looking well.
And oh had I but known! Why did no bird,
trilling its own sweet lovesong, as I passed,
so musically marvellously glad,
sing one for me too, sing me "It is he,"
sing "Love him," and "You love him: it is he,"
that I might then have loved him when he loved,
that one dear moment might be date to both?

And must I not be glad he hid his thought
and did not tell me then, when it was soon
and I should have been startled, and not known
how he is just the one man I can love,

and, only with some pain lest he were pained,
and nothing doubting, should have answered "No."
How strange life is! I should have answered "No."
Oh, can I ever be half glad enough
he is so wise and patient and could wait!

He waited as you wait the reddening fruit
which helplessly is ripening on the tree,
and not because it tries or longs or wills,
only because the sun will shine on it:
but he who waited was himself that sun.

Oh was it worth the waiting? was it worth?
For I am half afraid love is not love,
this love which only makes me rest in him
and be so happy and so confident,
this love which makes me pray for longest days
that I may have them all to use for him,
this love which almost makes me yearn for pain
that I might have borne something for his sake,
this love which I call love, is less than love.
Where are the fires and fevers and the pangs?
where is the anguish of too much delight,
and the delirious madness at a kiss,
the flushing and the paling at a look,
and passionate ecstasy of meeting hands?
where is the eager weariness at time
that will not bate a single measured hour
to speed to us the far-off wedding day?
I am so calm and wondering, like a child
who, led by a firm hand it knows and trusts
along a stranger country beautiful
with a bewildering beauty to new eyes
if they be wise to know what they behold,
finds newness everywhere but no surprise,
and takes the beauty as an outward part
of being led so kindly by the hand.
I am so cold: is mine but a child's heart,
and not a woman's fit for such a man?
Alas am I too cold, am I too dull,
can I not love him as another could?
And oh, if love be fire, what love is mine
that is but like the pale subservient moon
who only asks to be earth's minister?
And, oh, if love be whirlwind, what is mine
that is but like a little even brook
which has no aim but flowing to the sea,
and sings for happiness because it flows?

Ah well, I would that I could love him more
and not be only happy as I am;
I would that I could love him to his worth,

with that forgetting all myself in him,
that subtle pain of exquisite excess,
that momentary infinite sharp joy,
I know by books but cannot teach my heart:
and yet I think my love must needs be love,
since he can read me through -- oh happy strange,
my thoughts that were my secrets all for me
grown instantly his open easy book! --
since he can read me through, and is content.

And yesterday, when they all went away,
save little Amy with her daisy chains,
and left us in that shadow of tall ferns,
and the child, leaning on me, fell asleep,
and I, tired by the afternoon long walk,
said "I could almost gladly sleep like her,"
did he not answer, drawing down my head,
"Sleep, darling, let me see you rest on me,"
and when the child, awaking, wakened me,
did he not say "Dear, you have made me glad,
for, seeing you so sleeping peacefully,
I feel that you do love me utterly,
no questionings, no regrettings, but at rest."

Oh yes, my good true darling, you spoke well
"No questionings, no regrettings, but at rest:"
what should I question, what should I regret,
now I have you who are my hope and rest?

I am the feathery wind-wafted seed
that flickered idly half a merry morn,
now thralled into the rich life-giving earth
to root and bud and waken into leaf
and make it such poor sweetness as I may;
the prisoned seed that never more shall float
the frolic playfellow of summer winds
and mimic the free changeful butterfly;
the prisoned seed that prisoned finds its life
and feels its pulses stir, and grows, and grows.
Oh love, who gathered me into yourself,
oh love, I am at rest in you, and live.

And shall I for so many coming days
be flower and sweetness to him? Oh pale flower,
grow, grow, and blossom out, and fill the air,
feed on his richness, grow, grow, blossom out,
and fill the air, and be enough for him.

Oh crystal music of the air-borne lark,
so falling, nearer, nearer, from the sky,
are you a message to me of dear hopes?
oh trilling gladness, flying down to earth,

have you brought answer of sweet prophecy?
have you brought answer to the thoughts in me?
Oh happy answer, and oh happy thoughts!
and which is the bird's carol, which my heart's?

My love, my love, my love! And I shall be
so much to him, so almost everything:
and I shall be the friend whom he will trust,
and I shall be the child whom he will teach,
and I shall be the servant he will praise,
and I shall be the mistress he will love,
and I shall be his wife. Oh days to come,
will ye not pass like gentle rhythmic steps
that fall to sweetest music noiselessly?

But I have known the lark's song half sound sad,
and I have seen the lake, which rippled sun,
toss dimmed and purple in a sudden wind;
and let me laugh a moment at my heart
that thinks the summer-time must all be fair,
that thinks the good days always must be good:
yes let me laugh a moment -- may be weep.

But no, but no, not laugh; for through my joy
I have been wise enough to know the while
some tears and some long hours are in all lives,
in every promised land some thorn plants grow,
some tangling weeds as well as laden vines:
and no, not weep; for is not my land fair,
my land of promise flushed with fruit and bloom?
and who would weep for fear of scattered thorns?
and very thorns bear oftentimes sweet fruits.

Oh the black storm that breaks across the lake
ruffles the surface, leaves the deeps at rest --
deep in our hearts there always will be rest:
oh summer storms fall sudden as they rose,
the peaceful lake forgets them while they die --
our hearts will always have it summer time.

All rest, all summer time. My love, my love,
I know it will be so; you are so good,
and I, near you, shall grow at last like you;
and you are tender, patient -- oh I know
you will bear with me, help me, smile to me,
and let me make you happy easily;
and I, what happiness could I have more
than that dear labour of a happy wife?
I would not have another. Is it wrong,
and is it selfish that I cannot wish,
that I, who yet so love the clasping hand
and innocent fond eyes of little ones,

I cannot wish that which I sometimes read
is women's dearest wish hid in their love,
to press a baby creature to my breast?
Oh is it wrong? I would be all for him,
not even children coming 'twixt us two
to call me from his service to serve them;
and maybe they would steal too much of love,
for, since I cannot love him now enough,
what would my heart be halved? or would it grow?
But he perhaps would love me something less,
finding me not so always at his side.

Together always, that was what he said;
together always. Oh dear coming days!
O dear dear present days that pass too fast,
although they bring such rainbow morrows on!
that pass so fast, and yet, I know not why,
seem always to encompass so much time.
And I should fear I were too happy now,
and making this poor world too much my Heaven,
but that I feel God nearer and it seems
as if I had learned His love better too.

So late already! The sun dropping down,
and under him the first long line of red --
my truant should be here again by now,
is come maybe. I will not seek him, I;
he would be vain and think I cared too much;
I will wait here, and he shall seek for me,
and I will carelessly -- Oh his dear step --
he sees me, he is coming; my own love!

Augusta Davies Webster

The Manuscript of Saint Alexius

There came a child into the solemn hall
where great Pope Innocent sat throned and heard
angry disputings on Free-Will in man,
Grace, Purity, and the Pelagian creed--
an ignorantly bold poor child, who stood
shewing his rags before the Pope's own eyes,
and bade him come to shrive a beggar man
he found alone and dying in a shed,
who sent him for the Pope, "not any else
but the Pope's self." And Innocent arose
and hushed the mockers "Surely I will go:
servant of servants, I." So he went forth
to where the man lay sleeping into death,
and blessed him. Then, with a last spurt of life,
the dying man rose sitting, "Take," he said,
and placed a written scroll in the Pope's hand,
and so fell back and died. Thus said the scroll:

Alexius, meanest servant of the Lord,
son of Euphemianus, senator,
and of Aglaia, writes his history,
God willing it, which, if God so shall will,
shall be revealed when he is fallen asleep.
Spirit of Truth, Christ, and all saints of Heaven,
and Mary, perfect dove of guilelessness,
make his mind clear, that he write utter truth.

That which I was all know: that which I am
God knows, not I, if I stand near to Him
because I have not yielded, or, by curse
of recreant longings, am to Him a wretch
it needs Such grace to pardon: but I know
that one day soon I, dead, shall see His face
with that great pity on it which is ours
who love Him and have striven and then rest,
that I shall look on Him and be content.

For what I am, in my last days, to men,
'tis nothing; scarce a name, and even that
known to be not my own; a wayside wretch
battening upon a rich lord's charity
and praying, (some say like the hypocrites),
a wayside wretch who, harboured for a night,
is harboured still, and, idle on the alms,
prays day and night and night and day, and fears
lest, even praying, he should suddenly
undo his prayer and perish and be great
and rich and happy. Jesu, keep me Thine.

Father and mother, when ye hear of me,
(for I shall choose so sure a messenger
whom God will shew me), when ye hear these words,

and Claudia, whom I dead will dare count mine,
bidding her pray she be Christ's more than mine,
believe I loved you; know it; but, beloved,
you never will know how much till at length
God bids you know all things in the new life.
Alas, you have had little joy of me:
beloved, could I have given drops of blood
in place of your shed tears, the cruellest wounds
had been my perfect joys: but both my love
and your distress needs were my cross to bear.
Forgive me that you sorrowed. And be glad
because you sorrowed and your sorrow was
holy to God, a sacrifice to Him.

Know now, all men who read or hear my words,
that I, Alexius, lived in much delights
of a dear home where they who looked on me
looked with a smile, and where I did but smile
to earn sweet praises as for some good deed:
I was the sunlight to my mother's eyes,
that waked their deepest blueness and warm glow,
I was my father's joy, ambition, boast,
his hope and his fulfilment. It may be
I grew too strong a link betwixt their hearts
and this poor world whose best gifts seemed to them
destined for me, grew, when they looked on Heaven,
a blur upon their sight, too largely near,
as any trivial tiny shape held close
will make eclipse against the eye it fills:
and so, maybe. for their sake, not for mine,
God took me from them, me, their only son,
for whom they prayed, and trebled pious deeds,
and took thought in this life.

I grew by them,
learning all meet for my estate on earth,
but learning more, what they taught more, of God,
and loving most that learning. And at times,
even from childhood, would my heart grow still
and seem to feel Him, hear Him, and I knew,
but not with ears, a voice that spoke no words
yet called me. And, as ignorant children choose
"I will be emperor when I am big,"
my foolish wont was "I will be a saint:"
later, when riper sense brought humbleness,
I said "When I am grown a man, my lot
Shall be with those who vow their lives to Christ."

But, when my father thought my words took shape
of other than boy's prattle, he grew grave,
and answered me "Alexius, thou art young,
and canst not judge of duties; but know this

thine is to serve God, living in the world."

And still the days went on, and still I felt
the silent voice that called me: then I said
"My father, now I am no more a child,
and I can know my heart; give me to God:"
but he replied "God gives no son save thee
to keep our fathers' name alive, and thus
He shews thy place and duty:" and, with tears,
my mother said "God gives no child save thee;
make me not childless." And their words seemed God's
more than my heart's, theirs who had rule on me.

But still my longing grew, and still the voice:
and they both answered "Had God need of thee
to leave thy natural place none else can fill,
there would be signs which none could doubt, nor we
nor thou thyself." And I received that word;
knowing I doubted since they bade me doubt.

And still the days went on, and still the voice
and then my father said "The bride is chosen,
if thou wilt have her; if not, choose thyself."
And more and more I prayed "Give me to God:"
and more and more they urged "Whom gives He us
save thee to keep our name alive? whom else
to stay us from a desolate old age,
and give us children prattling at our knees?"
and more and more they answered "Shew to us
how He has called thee from thy certain path
where He has set thy feet?" Wherefore I said
"I will obey, and will so serve my God
as you have bidden me serve Him, honouring you:"
and they two blessed me, and we were agreed.

And afterwards Euphemianus laughed
"He asks not of the bride; but, boy, art pleased?
'tis thy fair playmate Claudia, fair and good."
I, who asked not because I nothing cared,
was glad in afterthinking: for the girl
lad been my playmate, and of later time
knew her beauty with familiar eyes
and no more feared it than I feared the grace
of useless goddesses perfect in stone,
lingering dishonoured in unholy nooks
where comes no worship more; so that I mused
"The damsel brings no perilous wedding gift
of amorous unknown fetters for my soul;
my soul shall still be spared me, consecrate,
virgin to God until the better days
when I may live the life alone with Him:"
so was I comforted.

But, in the hour
when all the rite was done and the new bride
come to her home, I sitting half apart,
my mother took her fondly by the hand
and drew her, lagging timidly, to me,
and spoke "Look up my daughter, look on him:
Alexius, shall I tell what I have guessed,
how this girl loves you?" Then she raised her head
a moment long, and looked: and I grew white,
and sank back sickly. For I suddenly
knew that I might know that which men call love.

And through the tedious feast my mind was torn
with reasonings and repentance. For I said
"But I may love her," and kept marshalling forth
such scriptures as should seem to grant it me:
then would an anguish hurl my fabric down,
while I discerned that he who has put hand
upon the plough must never turn again
to take the joyaunce granted easy lives.
And bye and bye I stole away and went,
half conscious, through the darkling garden groves,
amid the evening silence, till I came
to a small lonely chapel, little used,
left open by I know not what new chance,
where there was patterned out in polished stones
Peter denying Christ. I hastened in,
and threw me on the floor, and would have prayed;
but, in a rush of tears, I fell asleep.

And there I dreamed: meseemed the easy years
had slipped along, and I sat, pleased and proud,
among my ruddy children, and I held
my wife's smooth hand, who but so much had changed
as to grow fairer in her womanhood;
and, facing us, a carved and marble Christ
hung on a Cross and gazed with Its dumb eyes,
I looking on It: and I turned my head
to smile to Claudia, and then looked again;
behold Its right arm moved, and then was still,
And a low voice came forth "Alexius, come."

And I replied "Oh Lord I am content;
but lo my father."

Then my father stood,
meseemed, beside me, leading in his hand
a sturdy urchin, copy of himself,
and answered "Son, my ears do hear thee called;
and now I have this son of thine: go forth."

And once again the voice, "Alexius, come."

And I replied "My Lord, I am content;
but lo my mother."

Then my mother stood,
meseemed, beside me, and her arm was wound
round my wife's neck, and clinging to her skirt
a baby boy and girl that teased and played
and clamoured for her kisses: so she stood,
and answered "Son, my ears do hear thee called;
and now this daughter hast thou given me,
and now I have these babes of thine: go forth."

And louder then the voice, "Alexius, come."

And I replied "Dear Lord, I am content;
I come."

Then Claudia's hand grew tight in mine,
and I looked on her face and saw it so
as when my mother bade her look on me,
and I replied "Oh Lord I were content,
but lo my wife."

And still again the voice;
and still again her hand that drew mine back;
and I replied "My wife: I cannot come."

And still again the voice, "Alexius, come,"
loud and in wrath.

And I replied "My wife:
I will not come."

And with that word I woke.

I was in darkness, and the door was locked,
(doubtless while I, asleep or tranced, lay dumb
some one had sought me there and had not found,
and so had gone, unconscious, prisoning me);
I groped my way toward the altar steps,
and thanked my God, and prayed.

When morning broke
I heard without two voices, as it seemed
of holy pilgrims talking, and one said

"The youth Alexius surely has fled forth
to serve God safelier;" the other said
"Then doth he well; for now that better part
shall none take from him, he shall be all God's

and only God's, not father's, mother's, son's,
nor any fond fair woman's." Then they went.

But I was still there prisoned. Day moved on,
and brightened, and then waned, and darkness came,
broken by one white moonbeam, for an hour,
that seemed a promise, and, in that good hope,
I prayed, then slept.

But when morn grew again,
and no deliverance came, but frequent steps,
and voices passing, I grew scared with doubts
if, keeping silence, as from enemies,
and by my silence dying, I should be
self-murdered or God's martyr; and I thought
how, maybe, at the last my fainting voice
should vainly cry too late, and I should pass
with none to give God's comfort. But I thought
"If God wills even that, then let it be."

But when the noon sun glowed I heard a hand
touch at the door, and crouched me in a nook,
and scarce had crouched when Claudia passed by me
with slow steps to the altar: she prayed long;
praying, poor child, to have me given back,
claiming me back of Heaven, as if her right
could equal That right, crying out for me
by loving names, and weeping, that my heart
went out of me towards her, wondering,
and yearned for her. But God was pitiful,
so that I swerved not.

When I heard her vow
to pray there daily, I perceived through her
deliverance should come shortly: and I planned
to stand within the shadow the noon light
threw from a massive column by the door,
and, when she had passed in and hid her face,
get me forth softly.

But the flesh was weak,
and when I waked again the noon beams fell
full on the face of Peter where he wept
repenting; Claudia was already there.

I thought a moment should I not come forth,
and charge her let none know, and go my way;
but, did she give one startled sudden cry,
womanlike, I had been betrayed: and then
I feared her if she wept.

May God forgive

my weak heart then, my weak heart all my days,
which never has been so strong as not feel
always the fall at hand, but then so weak
that some few urgent tears and soft sad words
might, haply might, have bought me from my God.

So she went forth, unconscious: and I prayed
death should not come at night, with none at hand
to minister beside me, and in faith
I laid me down to wait what God should send.

And in a little while she came again,
and sought and found a gold and emerald pin,
(one of the gifts they made me give to her),
dropped from her loosened hair, then, kissing it,
passed out, and, for a moment long, forgot
to make the door fast, turned back to the task,
then, murmuring "Why? For it is better thus,
when whoso wills can enter in and pray,"
left it and went.

Then free, I made my vow
to live unknown, unhonoured, with no ties,
no certain home, no aims, no rights, no name,
an unregarded wanderer, whose steps,
by whichsoever road they passed, but passed
to travel nearer Heaven. And, for a sign,
I made a secret place and hid my ring
under the altar.

You will find it there:
at the right hand a cross upon an A
cut on the floor, so small you must look well,
and near it, at the altar-base, a crack
I found there in the chiselling, (just behind
a cherub's wing), is closed with dust and earth;
there lies the ring. Give it me mine again,
it and my name I take back for my grave,
as I take back my kinsfolk and my friends
to pray and mourn for me and give God thanks.

That done, I got me forth, and saw none nigh,
(the search near home being over, as it seemed),
and with my best poor speed I found a copse
whose green thick tangles hid me: there I lay
till the cool nightfall came and patient stars
watched Earth asleep, as if they prayed for her;
and other eyes saw not save theirs, and those
that look from Heaven, when I came sickly forth
and dragged my limp and failing limbs along.

I made my clothes in tatters; thus I went

and begged food at a convent for my life
that else were flickered out: so they gave food,
and they gave shelter: and at dawn I went,
while none who could have known had looked on me,
and, hastening on my journey, followed forth
my fellow-Roman Tiber's seaward strides,
and reached the port. There, as I since have learned,
Euphemianus had left men in wait
while he searched otherwhere: but God ruled all.

A little ship was just launched out to sea,
her heel still caught upon the grating beach,
the men were good and took the pilgrim in
who at the farewell moment called to them,
and, in what while I know not, but it seemed
as short as in a dream are days and years,
I saw my shores grown narrow purple clouds,
and then (for I write truth though shaming me)
I broke into such weeping that the men
felt whiteness in their cheeks, and, marvelling,
sent whispers to and fro, in doubt of me
lest witchcraft held me or my some deep crime
had set a curse demoniac; and they schemed
if they should put back to be rid of me,
but one said "Tush! the youth weeps for his home;
at his age, maybe, some of us could weep;
let him alone."

A rough and grizzled man,
who after, at the haven, came and clapped
a great hand on my shoulder, "Look, my boy,
you keep your secrets safer: for I heard
of a hot hunt after a great man's son,
and when I saw you weep ..... Well go your way,
my tongue shall earn no wages by its blab.
Maybe at your age I should have fled too,
if yoked against my will; but I am old
and preach go home again. Some say she's fair;
and a fair woman, love her or not love,
is a fair woman: but, or fair or foul,
be wise, young sir, be wise; never go starve
because your cake's not candied to your taste."
I said "Kind friend, I have no home to seek;
God gives me not a home till bye and bye,"
and left him. So my pilgrimage began.

But, oh vain heart of man! can this be true
which I remember, that I, plodding on,
whither I did not ask me, as God willed,
undoubting and ungrieving, yea, puffed up
to feel my heart was numb of all regret,
carrying upon my lips (as men will burr

a day long some persistent measured strain)
for refrain-catch "Now all and only God's,"
drew from my bosom, with my crucifix,
a withered crumpled weed, a clinging thing
that, green and dainty, new brushed from its root,
with one white flower-speck on it, trailed its sprays
athwart the purple hem of Claudia's veil
the last time in the chapel while she prayed;
it lay upon the floor when she was gone.
A worthless grass, what good was it to me?
and, lo, made fellow with my crucifix!
yet surely I had done it scarce aware,
for now I gazed on it so stupidly
as though a secret hand had placed it there
to set a riddle so, nor could recall
what thought I took it with. But see what snares
I fled from, flying Claudia; suddenly
the thing was at my lips, in such a kiss
as, maybe, lovers kiss on women's mouths,
in such a kiss howbeit as brought forth shame
almost in its own birth. I hurled the weed,
the viperous thing, into the battling surf
that dragged and sucked the booming shingles down,
lashing the beach before a coming storm;
I hurled it forth and went.

It seems to me,
looking back now, as if that made an end.
I think I had no temptings afterwards.

Natheless my grief was bitter many times
remembering home: but that I felt not sin,
because 'twas as a soul among the dead
might sorrow, never wishing to come back.
And Claudia was not of my memories:
scarcely at all: a stray bad dream at night
would bring her to me, make me dream I wept
because I might not love her, but not dream
that I did love; in daytime she came not.

Ten years I wandered: who cares know the whither?
a pilgrim and alone I trod my way,
no man regarding me. Alone with God:
whether in deserts or the throng of towns;
whether upon the mountain-tops, whence earth
shows sometimes so too exquisite for man
as though the devil had leave to fashion it
and cozen us with its beauty; or below,
where in the valleys one beholds the hills
grow nearer Heaven at sunset; or my ears
full of the hymn of waters, where the sea
breaks at one's feet among the rough brown rocks;

whether in pain, in weariness, in fear,
or, thankful, taking comfortable rest;
always alone with God.

So for ten years:
and in the later of them I had peace:
so for ten years, and then, by what degrees
I know not, (for the stupor crept like sleep,
slowly yet sudden on one at the last),
my peace became a blankness. And one day
I sought to rouse me, questioning "Where is God?"
and could not weep because I found him not,
yea, could not rouse me. And my prayers were words,
like trite goodmorrows when two gossips meet
and never look for answers; and my praise
was rounded like the song the poet makes
to one who never lived for him to love.
I was my Pharisee to cheat myself
and make myself believe me that God's friend
I had forgotten what it felt to be.

So, when I saw this plainly, I took thought,
pondering how it should be that when I pined
for thirst of human love I loved God more
and felt His love more near me than when now
my heart was swept and garnished, void for Him:
at last I saw my need of quickening pain
to stir the sluggish soul awake in me,
and knew I offered nothing to my Lord,
offering Him that it cost me nought to give;
what good to turn to Him, "Lord I leave all,"
if all be noway precious?

I arose
and set my face to Rome, making all haste.

On the forty-seventh day I saw the sun
droop to the hills behind my father's house,
and lo, while I toiled up the rude ascent,
our last slope of the Aventine, there came,
riding apart and grave, from the far side,
Euphemianus. When he reached the gate
he entered not, but seemed to point me out
to the servitors that followed with his hawks,
and watched me coming upwards painfully.
And when he saw me footsore and so spent
he had compassion: ere my prayer was done,
"Food, my good lord, and rest, for charity,"
he bade them take me in.

Six years ago:
and now I die here. No one bade depart;

they gave me daily scraps, and let me live
in the shed for harbouring squalid wanderers
that sleep a night, and take their alms, and go.

None knew me; who should know me? Gone away,
past ten years since, a comely petted boy,
and now a half decrepit sickly wretch,
a lean and shrivelled carcase, the ten years
writ twenty on my leathery wrinkled face,
how was I their Alexius? Nay, they looked
and saw the stranger in the beggar's shed
they called, for want of name, Old Lazarus.

In the beggar's shed with God: with God again!
Oh exquisite pain that brought so exquisite joy!
even by instant peril to be lost
lo I was saved. Oh blessed exquisite pain!
my heart awoke, for anguish, and felt God.

I saw my father pass out and pass in;
sometimes he noted me and spoke a word
or looked a careless greeting, oftenest not;
I saw him daily, and I learned his face
how stern long sorrow made it and how still,
and, when some days he could not make a smile,
I heard the servants whisper "Do you see?
this is his lost son's birthday," or "the day
his son fled forth," or else "his baptism,"
"confirming," "going to school," all such home dates
as parents count who watch their children grow:
and he was changed, they said, cared not to see
friends' faces greeting him, nor join in talk,
but would be solitary; changed, they said,
since that strange losing of his only child.
My mother I saw not in the first days,
for she came never forth, but sat and slept,
and wakened querulous, and slept again.
And Claudia tended her: I had not thought
to find her here; I looked she'd count me dead
and marry her, ('tis known what women are),
and was all startled when I saw her first:
but only for the strangeness, after that
she was no more to me than I to her,
she might have smiled to me, or in my sight,
that dangerous smile and I be no more moved
than if a babe had laughed as I passed by.

Then a day came, a still and sultry day
when one might take count of each leaf that stirred
and think the one shrill grasshopper too loud,
my mother waked and heard a hymn I sang,
and took a whim to have the singer brought:

only a whim, belike, for could my voice
bring back the stripling's voice she had thought sweet?
they fetched me, I stood by her: ah my mother!
and she so changed! nothing of her old self;
the goodliness, the sweetness, the delight,
gone, waned out from her, as the light of day
was waning from her eyes long dulled by tears.
Ah, could I but have clung about her feet,
crying out "Mother, take thy son again!"
But yet for her it would have been too late.

She talked to me, inconsequent grave talk
like children's, whispered after when I prayed,
and made me sing her hymns, so was content
longer than was her wont, then bade me go
and come again to-morrow: ever since
she calls me every day.

And every day
is Claudia there. More than two thousand days,
and every day I look on Claudia's face
grown wistful and more sweet, and every day
behold her patience, hear her wise grave words,
and better know her all she is.

What then?
Have I not striven? have I not prevailed?

And now death is at hand: some few days more
and I shall lay me down and be at rest.
There will be no farewell at last, I think;'
they will not know of me that I lie sick
and pass away; and, even if they knew,
why should they come to close my dying eyes?
the beggar Lazarus can die alone,
as he has lived alone. My mother, though,
will lack me, ask for me, Claudia will send
to bid me hasten, then the word will come
"He died this morning," and she will not weep
but say "Poor wretch: God rest the parted soul,"
and turn to soothe my mother with some wile
to make her never miss me: and may be
Euphemianus will not hear the news,
or will not note it if he ever hears.
So I shall lie in the grave and they not care,
but wait for lost Alexius to come home,
and mourn for him, half hating him for their grief.

Give me fruit, give me fruit, oh Christ give my earned fruit,
for all my sufferings: I have mine for me,
but I claim theirs, give fruit for them I smote.

Have I written wildly? I will cancel nought.
for I have written looking death in face,
thinking God bade me write: and words come so
must stand untouched. But surely this much grace
my Lord hath given me, that they shall know.

Behold, I make this paper, being forced
as by the Spirit, and it comes on me
that God doth choose his highest in the world
to be the beggar's messenger: he first,
and I the last, so thereto he is called;
servant of servants. This, which I have witten,
do I entrust to him, my testament:
some shall learn patience from it and to do
what God bids and not doubt; for all is good,
all happy, if it be to do His will,
the suffering ye may guess, but not the bliss
till ye have tasted it.

And I desire
that, having scanned the scroll, he shall, or then
or later, as seems to his wisdom wise,
deliver all its words to them and her,
my father and my mother and my wife,
(lo, this once in my life I call her so).
I pray Thee, Lord, give the poor words the power
to comfort them and strengthen; and, I pray,
give the words power to strengthen and stir souls
which hear Thee call and pause to count with Thee.

And now, oh Lord, let earth be dim to me,
and Heaven come near mine eyes: the time is short,
and I am fain for thee. Lord Jesus come.

Now, when Pope Innocent had read the scroll,
he bade one with him enter in the house
and call the lord Euphemianus thither,
and Claudia, and Aglaia. So they came,
Aglaia feebly leaning on the two,
and questioning them who knew not; so they came;
and the Pope pointed them to the dead man,
"Behold, for this is one whom you should know."
Euphemianus gazed and was perplexed:
and the poor purblind mother gazed and peered,
"Old Lazarus? no, yes, old Lazarus;
asleep or dead? Why is it? is he dead?"
but Claudia answered softly "Yes I know;
I knew it;" and then, suddenly, borne down
by one strong gust of passion, flung herself
beside the corpse, her head upon its breast,
her arms clasped straining round it, weeping out.
And Innocent answered the father's eyes,

"This was Alexius, thy long lost son."
But yet the father, stricken dumb, looked doubt:
Aglaia cried "My boy, where is he then?"
and fretfully "This is old Lazarus:
where is my boy? show me Alexius."

Then Innocent bade peace, and read the scroll:
Euphemianus, with his face hid down
between his hands, listened and never stirred;
and Claudia listened, weeping silently;
but Aglaia whispered always "Is it true?
is the tale of Lazarus or of my boy?
I cannot understand." And, when 'twas read,
Euphemianus gazed upon his son,
"Yet did he well?" he said "he was our son,
he was her husband: how could it be well?
for look upon his mother, what she is."
But Claudia rose up tearless, and replied
"Alexius did all well: he knew God called:"
and Innocent, not tearless, raised his hand
and spoke "She answers wisely: he obeyed;
he knew, being a very saint of God:
let us bless God for him." And they all knelt.
But still Aglaia could not understand.

Augusta Davies Webster

The Missing Star

WHY did the star leave the sky,
The far, pure sky?
Shone she not high and hallowed and fair?
Could she not tarry her life-time there?
Why must she fall and fade?
She had heaven nigh.
I of the earth, I would she had stayed
In her lonely air.

Higher than love lived my star,
My clear, cold star.
Why must she droop to our mists below?
Ah, for the glory of long ago!
Ah, for the pride no more!
When she stood so far.
Would she were lost in the days before,
In the perished glow.

Star wandered out of my light,
Once all my light,
Seeing the sky through a dullness of tears,
Crying for thee to the empty years,
Where should I seek for thee
Mid the. desert night?
Not on the earth.
Ah! the star that nears
Has forgotten to be.

Augusta Davies Webster

The Old Dream

NAY, tell me not. I will not know.
Because of her my life is bare,
A waste where blow-seeds spring and grow
Then die because the soil is spent,
And leave no token they were there;
A soddened mere where marsh-lights gleam,
But no star sees the ray it lent
Because of her despoiled and bare.
What then? she did a wrong unmeant.
Leave me my dream.

Tell me no more. I will not know.
My life, if she had harsher eyes,
Did her sweet voice not deepen so,
Had maybe missed this bitterness;
Maybe I should have been more wise
If she were sterner, or could seem,
If she could have been pitiless.
Too sweet low voice! too trustful eyes!
What then? she could not judge their stress
Leave me my dream.

I will not know. Rob not my heart:
It is too poor to lose yet more.
Leave the old dream where she was part:
Are all smiles ill, all sweetness lies?
One blossom once my life-time bore,
It wakened at her April beam,
Then froze; yet dead 'tis still some prize
It shows mine blossoms were of yore.
Let be: I need some memories:
Leave me my dream.

Augusta Davies Webster

The Old Love

I
You love me, only me. Do I not know?
If I were gone your life would be no more
Than his who, hungering on a rocky shore,
Shipwrecked, alone, observes the ebb and flow
Of hopeless ocean widening forth below,
And is remembering all that was before.
Dear, I believe it, at your strong heart's core
I am the life; no need to tell me so.
And yet--Ah, husband, though I be more fair,
More worth your love, and though you loved her not,
(Else must you have some different, deeper name
For loving me), dimly I seem aware,
As though you conned old stories long forgot,
Those days are with you--hers--before I came.

II
The mountain traveller, joyous on his way,
Looks on the vale he left and calls it fair,
Then counts with pride how far he is from there,
And still ascends. And, when my fancies stray,
Pleased with light memories of a bygone day,
I would not have again the things that were.
I take their thought like fragrance in the air
Of flowers I gathered in my childish play.
And thou, my very soul, can it touch thee
If I remember her or I forget?
Does the sun ask if the white stars be set?
Yes, I recall, shall many times, maybe,
Recall the dear old boyish days again,
The dear old boyish passion. Love, what then?

Augusta Davies Webster

The Oldest Inhabitant

'AND when came I to this town?' did he say!
A question asked for the asking's sake,
Answered merely an answer to make,
As stranger to stranger may;
Answered enough with ''Twas yesterday,'
And a talk of the journey travelled so fast.
Had I said, 'Since I dwelt here first have passed
Hundreds of years away'!

Aye, and there be who, if they knew,
Would envy me, as a cripple must long,
Looking on limbs erect and strong,
To have his freedom given him too
And rise and reach to whither he would:
'What!' they would think, 'Is the gift not good
Beyond all gifts for earth or for time?
Life, and no shadow of death o'ercast,
Life, and the joy of manhood's prime,
Life, and the lore of a boundless past,
Life, and still life to come and to last! '
And I even, even now,
I know not what that spirit might be,
Whether of love or of hate to me,
That stood in the dusk on the mountain's brow,
Alone with the stars I had climbed to see nigh,
And smiled, and gave, and was no more there.
There was no trace broke the sky,
There was no breath stirred the air,
Nought from the heaven or the earth to tell
If it were well:
And how much surer to-day know I
Whether he meant me a boon or a curse,
Whether to wait or to die be worse?

Ah, how I joyed for so many years!
Death under my heel with his hindering fears,
And I the lord of my life for ever!
Leisure and labour limitless,
And always the joy of the earned success
Crowned with the joy of the new endeavour!
And I thought 'I will make all wisdoms mine;'
And I thought 'The world shall be glad of me.'
Ah, how I joyed! for could I divine
What the fruit of immortal days must be?
But alas for the numbness of wont on all,
For the heart that has loved too often to prize,
For the eyes that have wept too often for tears,
For the listless feet and the careless ears,
For the brain that has learned that to learn is vain,
For forgotten joy and forgotten pain,
For the life too frequent for memories!
And I taste no joy because it will pall,

And I watch no grace because it will wane,
And I seek no good for it will not remain,
And I knit no tie because it will sever.

If I were not alone: if the gift were shared
With but some one soul in the world beside,
Some one for whom I might have cared,
Who would not so soon have grown old and died.
But ever and ever to build all anew,
And ever and ever to see all decay;
To fashion my life as the others do
And have my place among fellow-men,
To sit content in my home—and then
To have lived, and the rest has faded away:
There are the graves, and I part of the past,
Forgotten with them whom I outlast.
Let it be; 'tis a foolish game,
The game that children play on the beach,
With its ending always the same,
Building amain till the tide-waves reach
And the sands will be bare to build on to-morrow.
Let it be; for what is the worth?
Long since I wearied of saying good-bye:
And what or whom should I cherish on earth
Where I go as might one from some world on high
Unmeet for the short-lived pleasure or sorrow?
Only the men who look to die
Can have or hope in a world where death reigns:
Do I pity that slight ephemerous fly,
Whirling and resting there in the sun,
Because his day will be so soon done?
All remains while his day remains;
He will not have known that a rosebud wanes.
How if he lived for ever, as I?

Truly 'tis even so,
To die betimes is scarcely to know
How death is around us everywhere.
But ever for me the birth and blow
Are but a part of decay that is there,
And the living come but to go:
Till at length I am one who, drawing aside,
Where the crowd sweeps by in one jostling race,
Stands unstirred in his lonely place
And leaves off noting face after face;
I am one who wait stranded, alone, by the tide
Of Life, which has also Death for name
Because for the world the two are the same,
The tide that goes winding back whence it came,
Bearing all thither save me;
And I dream and I scarcely seem to be,
And I know no count of time as it flies,

And the river passes, passes, passes,
Smooth and for ever, and changelessly glasses
Summers and winters and changing skies,
Passes, and passes, and passes,
And nothing abides and nothing is strange;
And oh for rest to my languid eyes
Weary of change that is never change!

Ah! men might marvel to hear me say
The world of my youth is the world of to-day;
Here, in this very home of my birth,
How they would answer from some old book,
'Thus and thus was the past; now look,
Are we as they of the older earth,
We and our ways, and the fields we plough?'
And the first-met gossip who knows but Now
Counts chances a score in half a year,
Tells me this was that, and there was here,
A hall is burnt, a new market is made,
A railway runs where the school-boys played,
He is married, and he is dead,
And he so rich goes begging his bread;
''Tis a world of change,' he will soberly sigh
For point to his tales: why, and so say I;
Chances and changes enough, I deem,
In a world that goes on like a shifting dream;
But, oh, the long sameness! Ebb and flow:
Billows that come, and billows that go!
Nothing is but will drift away,
Nothing was but will come:
Future finds Past, old becomes new;
What men have done that they will do.
'Tis but the counting coins of to-day
To measure the former sum,
But the naming laterwise
Things and thoughts of an ancient guise:
And what change for me who see life as some star,
The expanses of earth in one from afar?
Hill grows valley and valley grows hills
'Tis a world of hills and valleys still.

Did I dream I could have been wearied thus,
With truth and with wisdoms left to seek?
Alas, my learners who heard me speak
'Is not to learn enough for us?
Is not to strive a strength for the soul,
Though she never gained one foot to the goal?'
If you could waken now where you lie,
You and your graves forgotten as I
In our town that would tell our names for its praise;
If you could hear, and your pitying gaze
Could know the teacher who made you bold!

Nay, sleep on unconscious there in the mould:
You died with a joy as of something gained,
Something given to the world you left;
I laboured on to be ever bereft
Of the skill achieved, of the science attained.
For, lo, the end of all learning is this,
Only to know one has learned amiss,
Only to know that the art or the lore
With its rules and its axioms was nothing more
Than a working guess that did for the while;
Only to know that sage after sage
Has passed on a dream from age to age,
Till the world awakes, and the children smile
At the thoughts of the foolish grown-men of old.
Aye, sleep, ye who counted your lives well spent,
Sleep, ye who dreamed; ye are content
Thou who hadst gained the secret of gold,
Save that one last fusion left me to find;
Thou who hadst tracked the sun's path through the air;
Thou with thy skill of the stars; thou there
In the chapel vault, with thy name still shown
To sauntering strangers, cut on the stone,
With thy chronicle of the world left behind;
Thou who hadst learned and hadst lighted on cures
For every ill man's body endures,
And leftst me thy leechcrafts for legacy;
Thou; and thou; and thou; oh, poor fools,
Who dreamed ye had found the thing ye sought,
Sleep, sleep and know not. All goes by,
Lores, and crafts, and beliefs, and schools;
Wrought is unravelled; thought is new-thought;
Till meseems that truth's very self must die,
And be born again unto younger rules.

Whereto is life for me? And I would
I had now departed and knew the end.
Death—'tis a way even I might wend—
But were it evil or good?
Oh, had it been but a word to speak,
But a blow at once, or a venomous draught,
Long since I had said, or struck, or quaffed:
But all a seven days' week!

Each dawn and each dusk of a seven days' week,
To will it unwavering: all a week!
Vain, vain, o'er and o'er,
A thousand times and a thousand yet:
Lo, life with some one poor hope once more,
Some one poor grace worth a while for regret;
Lo, death grown awful with dread and doubt.
And oh, feeble will, and oh, sluggish heart,
Almost too weary to long to depart!

Yet, dusk is at hand, see, the sunset fades out:
And here where was home life is loneliest to bear,
'Twere a goodly time to renew the test;
And I will it—Nay, is it worth the care?
'Tis but beginning a strife and unrest.
Seven days for life to lure back her thrall.
Oh, if I knew the end! knew all!
But, what if even life were the best?
What, if death were a new despair?

Augusta Davies Webster

The Pine

The elm lets fall its leaves before the frost,
The very oak grows shivering and sere,
The trees are barren when the summer's lost:
But one tree keeps its goodness all the year.

Green pine, unchanging as the days go by,
Thou art thyself beneath whatever sky:
My shelter from all winds, my own strong pine,
'Tis spring, 'tis summer, still, while thou art mine.

Augusta Davies Webster

The Sea-Maid’s Song

'OH, love me! love me!'
The sea-maid sings ori the pebbly shore—
'Love me! oh, love me!'
The tears they gather, the tears run o'er;
She looks to the sea, she looks to the hill,
But no one comes, and the night is still—
'Oh, love me! love me!'

'Oh, love me I love me!'
Singing so sadly, singing so long—
'Love me! oh, love me!
I would give true love, so deep, so strong,
To him who would give true love to me.'
Nought on the hill, and nought on the sea—
'Oh, love me! love me!'

'Love me! oh, love me!'
Singing so long, and singing so late—
'Love me! oh, love me!
My heart is lone, I weep while I wait.'
She looks to the sea, she looks to the hill,
But no one comes, and the night is still—
'Oh, love me! love me!'

Augusta Davies Webster

The Sky-Lark’s Song

WINGED voice to tell the skies of earth,
Dear earth-born lark, sing on, sing clear,
Sing into heaven that she may hear
;Sing what thou wilt, so she but know
Thine ecstasy of summer mirth
And think ''Tis from the world below!'

Instant, old wont returns fresh brought,
And her desire goes seeking me,
For whom her whole world used to be
And all my world for sake of her;
She cannot think an earthward thought
That shall not seem my messenger.

She will be glad for love, and smile,
Saying 'Thank God for joy like ours:
Saying 'There come the kind home hours:
His work-day will be sped ere long,
That keeps him hence this little while.
'Sing, lark, until she know thy song.

Sing of the earth, but sing no care,
Sing thine own measureless content;
She will remember what it meant;
Griefs are too base, but, carolling thus,
Thou with thy joy mayst reach her there,
And she joy too remembering us.

Augusta Davies Webster

The Swallows

AH! swallows, is it so?
Did loving lingering summer, whose slow pace
Tarried among late blossoms, loth to go,
Gather the darkening cloud-wraps round her face
And weep herself away in last week's rain?
Can no new sunlight waken her again?
'Yes,' one pale rose a-blow
Has answered from the trellised lane;
The flickering swallows answer 'No.'

From out the dim grey sky
The arrowy swarm breaks forth and specks the air,
While, one by one, birds wheel and float and fly,
And now are gone, then suddenly are there;
Till lo, the heavens are empty of them all.
Oh, fly, fly south, from leaves that fade and fall,
From shivering flowers that die;
Free swallows, fly from winter's thrall,
Ye who can give the gloom good-bye.

But what for us who stay
To hear the winds and watch the boughs grow black,
And in the soddened mornings, day by day,
Count what lost sweets bestrew the nightly track
Of frost-foot winter trampling towards his throne?
Swallows, who have the sunlight for your own,
Fly on your sunward way;
For you has January buds new blown,
For us the snows and gloom and grey.

On, on, beyond our reach,
Swallows, with but your longing for a guide:
Let the hills rise, let the waves tear the beach,
Ye will not balk your course nor turn aside,
But find the palms and twitter in the sun.
And well for them whose eager wings have won
The longed for goal of flight;
But what of them in twilights dun
Who long, but have no wings for flight?

Augusta Davies Webster

The Violet And The Rose

The violet in the wood, that's sweet to-day,
Is longer sweet than roses of red June;
Set me sweet violets along my way,
And bid the red rose flower, but not too soon.
Ah violet, ah rose, why not the two?
Why bloom not all fair flowers the whole year through?
Why not the two, young violet, ripe rose?
Why dies one sweetness when another blows?

Augusta Davies Webster

The Wind’s Tidings In August 1870

'OH voice of summer winds among the trees,
What soft news art thou bringing to us here?
Dost thou come whispering of hushed scenes like these,
Languid in sunlight, while the drowsy deer
Couch placidly at rest, and from the brake
The song of fearless wild birds rings out clear,
And groves and meadows and this baby lake
Are dreaming to thy dreaming lullaby?
Art telling of hushed scenes like these? Awake,
Answer, sweet dying wind, and do not die.'

And the voice of the faint winds, dying away,
Answered me, 'Nay.'

'Oh voice of summer winds, then art thou come
From fluttering in the tangles of the vines
Beside the blue blue seas, in the far home
Of the dim olives and the dusky pines,
And from the cypress bosks, and where the air
Grows lush and heavy 'twixt the dark starred lines
Of orange hedge a-bloom, and the wide glare
Floods soft round hills with southern perfect day?
Answer again, low voice, hast thou been there?
Art telling of the dreamland far away?'

And the voice of the winds sighed over my head,
'Nay, nay,' it said.

'Oh sweet low voice of winds, whose wavering flights
Smoothly, like flickering swallows, come and go,
What, is thy tale of where the ceaseless heights
Rest white and cloudlike in their virgin snow?
Hast thou been wandering round the scented firs,
And where the dauntless shrub-flowers bud and blow
Against the pale chill sea that never stirs,
And where the midway foam hangs o'er the cleft?
Speak, slumbrous voice, to slumbrous listeners,
Art telling us of these that thou hast left?'

And the voice of the dying winds breathed low,
'Nay, nay; not so.'

'Oh voice of dying winds, make sweet reply,
Whence hast thou come?
What does thy whisper say?
Answer, oh dying voice, and do not die.'
It whispered in a hush, 'The dead men lay
Fallen together like the sickled grain;
Onward still dashed the whirlwind and the fray;
The thunders and the tramplings shook the plain;
There was the crash and clash of host to host,
Throes, and the blood-pools widening, death and pain.'

And waning in a murmur it was lost.

Augusta Davies Webster

Tired

No not to-night, dear child; I cannot go;
I'm busy, tired; they knew I should not come;
you do not need me there. Dear, be content,
and take your pleasure; you shall tell me of it.
There, go to don your miracles of gauze,
and come and show yourself a great pink cloud.

So, she has gone with half a discontent;
but it will die before her curls are shaped,
and she'll go forth intent on being pleased,
and take her ponderous pastime like the rest--
patient delightedly, prepared to talk
in the right voice for the right length of time
on any thing that anybody names,
prepared to listen with the proper calm
to any song that anybody sings;
wedged in their chairs, all soberness and smiles,
one steady sunshine like an August day:
a band of very placid revellers,
glad to be there but gladder still to go.
She like the rest: it seems so strange to me,
my simple peasant girl, my nature's grace,
one with the others; my wood violet
stuck in a formal rose box at a show.

Well, since it makes her happier. True I thought
the artless girl, come from her cottage home
knowing no world beyond her village streets,
come stranger into our elaborate life
with such a blithe and wondering ignorance
as a young child's who sees new things all day,
would learn it my way and would turn to me
out of the solemn follies "What are these?
why must we live by drill and laugh by drill;
may we not be ourselves then, you and I?"
I thought she would have nestled here by me
"I cannot feign, and let me stay with you."
I thought she would have shed about my life
the unalloyed sweet freshness of the fields
pure from your cloying fashionable musks:
but she "will do what other ladies do"--
my sunburnt Madge I saw, with skirts pinned up,
carrying her father's dinner where he sat
to take his noon-day rest beneath the hedge,
and followed slowly for her clear loud song.

And she did then, she says, as others did
who were her like. 'Tis logical enough:
as every woman lives, (tush! as we all,
following such granted patterns for our souls
as for our hats and coats), she lived by rules
how to be as her neighbours, though I, trained

to my own different code, discerned it not
(mistaking other laws for lawlessness,
like raw and hasty travellers): and now
why should she, in a new world, all unapt
to judge its judgments, take so much on her
she did not in her old world, pick and choose
her pleasures and her tastes, her aims, her faiths,
breaking her smooth path with the thorny points
of upstart questions? She is just a bird
born in a wicker cage and brought away
into a gilded one: she does not pine
to make her nest in uncontrolled far woods,
but, unconceiving freedom, chirrups on,
content to see her prison bars so bright.

Yes, best for her; and, if not best for me,
I've my fault in it too: she's logical,
but what am I, who, having chosen her
for being all unlike the tutored type,
next try and mould her to it--chose indeed
my violet for being not a rose,
then bade it hold itself as roses do,
that passers by may note no difference?
The peasant ways must go, the homely burr,
the quaint strong English--ancient classic turns
mixed up with rustic blunders and misuse,
old grammar shot with daring grammarlessness;
the village belle's quick pertness, toss of head,
and shriek of saucy laughter--graces there,
and which a certain reckless gracefulness,
half hoydenish, half fawnlike, made in her
graces in even my eyes ... there; the ease
of quick companionship; the unsoftened "no's;"
the ready quarrels, ready makings up;
all these must go, I would not have her mocked
among the other women who have learned
sweet level speech and quiet courtesies--
and then they jarred upon me like the noise
of music out of rule, which, heard at first,
took the fresh ear with novel melody,
but makes you restless, listened to too long,
with missing looked for rhythms. So I teach,
or let her learn, the way to speak, to look,
to walk, to sit, to dance, to sing, to laugh,
and then ..... the prized dissimilarity
was outer husk and not essential core:
my wife is just the wife my any friend
selects among my any friend's good girls,
(a duplicate except that here and there
the rendering's faulty or touched in too strong);
my little rugged bit of gold I mined,
cleared from its quartz and dross and pieced for use

with recognized alloy, is minted down
one of a million stamped and current coins.

My poor dear Madge, it half seems treasonous
to let regret touch any thought of you,
loyal and loving to me as you are;
and you are very very dear to me,
I could not spare you, would not change your love
to have the rich ideal of my hope
in any other woman; as you are
I love you, being you. And for the rest,
if I, my theory's too eager fool,
mistook the freedom of blunt ignorance
for one with freedom of the instructed will,
and took yours for a nature made to keep
its hardiness in culture, gaining strength
to be itself more fully; if I looked
for some rare perfectness of natural gifts,
developing not changed, pruned and not dwarfed;
if I believed you would be that to me
so many men have sung by women's names
and known no woman for, where is your fault,
who did but give yourself as you were then,
and with so true a giving? Violet,
whose is the blame if, rooted from your place,
where you grew truly to your natural law,
set by my hand in artificial soil,
bound to unwonted props, whose blame if you
are not quite violet and not quite rose?

She's happy though, I think: she does not bear
the pain of my mistake, and shall not bear;
and she'll not ever guess of a mistake.

Mistake--'tis a hard word. Well let it pass:
it shall not wrong her: for was it in her
or in myself I was mistaken most?
What, I, who have been bold to hurl revolt
at great Queen Bugaboo Society,
did I not teach her suit and service first,
wincing when she infringed some useless law?
do I not wince to-day beside the fire
at every word or gesture she shall use
not scheduled in the warrant what to do?
do I not bid her have the table thus,
assort such viands, use such furniture,
wear such a stuff at morning, such at night,
all to the warrant of Queen Bugaboo,
and feel a something missing when she fails,
a discord setting all my teeth on edge?
Why, what a score of small observances;
mere fashionable tricks, are to my life

the butter on the bread, without which salve
the bit's too coarse to swallow; what a score
of other small observances and tricks,
worn out of fashion or not yet come in,
reek worse than garlic to my pampered taste,
making the wholesomest food too difficult!
And that which in an ancient yesterday
was but some great man's humour is to me
duty by rote to-day. I had not felt
my own life that punctilious copy-book,
writ to stock patterns set to all a school,
I have called usual lives, but my poor Madge
has unawares informed me of myself.

We can no other; 'tis as natural
to men to take this artificial kind
as to the flowers, which, grown in neighbour ranks,
taste the same winds and feed on the same soil,
to take inoculation by the bees
of one another's dyes and be alike
in new unlikeness to their primal types.

Our gift is imitation and to share
the subtle current of all sympathies;
we breathe each other's thoughts, as in a crowd
we breathe each other's breaths, unconsciously;
and if there could be a mere human man
to singly be creator, make the thing
which none has hoped for near him, say the things
which none has thought beside him, were there one
to be the god we claim in our rash word
original, needs were he such a one
as we call savage, one apart in woods
and friendless deserts, planning by himself
some first instinctive art, or questioning
blank ignorance and wonder into thoughts.
And as for us, the men who live in days
when what the West has whispered finds the East
across an ocean in a breath of time;
when the old era's painful manuscripts,
too choice and rare for less than sage's needs,
reach the new era changed to daily showers
of schoolboys' text-books raining from the press;
when we shake hands with our antipodes
for being neighbour to us; when, like streets
of the city where we are burghers, half the world
is our admitted home, the other half
our summer pleasure-grounds outside our walls;
we, who are scholars of all times and lands,
must be content, each several man, to feel
we are no sovereign units each to rule
the small world of himself, but knitted links,

one drawing on the other in a chain--
A bondage say, but have we not its worth,
help, movement, and the chain grows lengthening on
to span the universe? A braggart whim,
were it a possible, if any link,
breaking away from hundreds side by side,
would be a separate spangle.

Yet, alack,
sometimes we links get drawn we know not where,
but think there's mud about us. Still the chain
lies in God's hands, though the sly devil comes
and gives a crooked tug or so at times.

Links in a chain--my metaphor goes well,
convinces me where first I was convinced--
links in a chain, drawing each other on:
but never yet material metaphor
would fit a mind's whole thought, and the hitch comes
where I bid mine good-bye. Links in a chain,
but what of hearts and wills that are in us,
hopes, aims, beliefs? must we go measuring them
Ay "the world says," "so other people think,"
dock our near tastes and natures to the shapes
in common wear, make lay figures of our lives,
as women of their bodies, to be decked
and draped or trimmed and swathed or let go bare
by strict indefinite despots out of sight?
Why, let us have that freedom we accord
inanimate things, to grow each to his kind
and to his best, cattle and servile beasts,
to grow each to his kind and to his best;
but we--oh, monstrous folly--we, designed
each man so much unlike to all men else
as one whole kind of beasts to other kinds,
must train and pattern our reluctant souls
into one liveried sameness!

Oh, I am tired!
tired, tired, of this bland smiling slavery,
monotonous waste of life. And, while we fools
are making curtsies and brave compliments
to our rare century, and, courtierly,
swaddling our strength in trammels of soft silk,
the rotten depths grow rottener. Every day
more crime, more pain, more horror. We are good
no doubt, we "better classes"--oh, we boast
our modern virtues in the dead men's teeth
that were our fathers--we are earnest now,
and charitable, and we wash ourselves,
and have a very fair morality;
most well brought up, in fine, of any men

that any age has nurtured, and besides
so equal in our manners and our coats:
and then the classes which, though bettering,
are not quite better yet, are the most shrewd,
most apt, most honest, most intelligent,
that ever the world saw yet. True all of it
for aught I know, some of it as I think,
but underneath--great God, how many souls
are born an hour as provender for hell!

Oh horrible days! our goodness growing ripe,
a spreading scent of sweets, but with no power
to disinfect the spreading foulnesses;
and by mere birth-rate vice made multiplex!
From the murk lanes, and from the fetid courts,
and from the shameful dens where poverty
hobnobs with wolfish crime, out of the reek
of lust and filth, out of the festering homes
of pestilence and famine, the hoarse cry
grows multitudinous, the cavernous cry
of shame and ignorance hunger and greed
become despair and devilishness ..... And we
gravely thank God for culture and new lights!

Most horrible days: and we who know the worst,
(or dream it, sitting in our easy chairs,
sorry that all men have not easy chairs,)
and would do somewhat, do it all amiss.
We pelt our broad-cast gold into the mire,
then comes a scramble, foul grows fouler yet;
with a Samaritan hand we feed and feed
the daughters of the horseleech, drunkenness
and dissolute idleness, that cry "give, give,"
sucking the lifeblood from our people's heart;
we pension beggars, buy the burglar tools
and the sot gin, and pay the harlot's rent:
societies, committees, vestry rooms,
with fingers in our purses, lavish wealth,
past common counting, to keep up the tale
of pauper legions and bribe new recruits,
sow coin that, like the pestilent dragon's teeth,
bear us a poisonous crop of human harm:
all all endeavours go, like witches' prayers,
backwards against the meaning, and bring down
the counter-curse of blessings that were asked.

What should we do? I know not; but I think
there's moral in a hackneyed classic tale:
when the great gulf still yawned, after the gold
and treasures had been thrown, there came a man
and gave himself, and then the great gulf closed.

But how? how? And I know not; but I think
if the strong pith and freshness of our lives
were not so sucked and dried away, our span
not maimed and dwarfed, our sight not warped untrue,
by eating custom, petty disciplines,
footlight perspectives cramped to suit our stage,
if we were men, not types and portraitures
and imitative shadows, some of us
might learn--

Learn, learn, and if we learned,
saw by what boldness, or what sacrifice,
or what endurance, or what vehemence,
the goal of our beginning might be reached,
the padded skeleton we call the world,
that mumming glib Duessa who usurps
the true world's rule and rights, would trip us up
with half a league of silken barriers
too soft for us to break and breaking us.
Oh, but I know it, I, who time by time,
fierce with the turbulent goodness of my youth,
rushed to the clamourous call of new crusades,
and time by time dropped baffled and worn weak
before a rampart as of dancing pumps,
a wind as if it blew from ladies' fans,
till now I sit a weary man growing old
among the ruins of his purposes,
hopeless of any good to be by him.

Oh, with how full a hope, when morning glowed,
I donned my armour, who at night ride back
foolish and broken! I have set myself
to fight with shadows stronger than a man,
being impalpable and everywhere,
and striking done no hurt but to myself;
and I have ridden at ranks in adamant
and fallen, strained and useless, under foot;
and I have sieged impenetrable walls
and waited day by day till I grew faint;
and never have I triumphed in my cause,
whether it were a great one, or a dream,
a pettish whim, or too divinely large:
for if I strove against contagious ills
cankering the core of us or but at spots
that fleck the smooth gloss of our drawingrooms,
and if I rose to claim some wide desire
of general good or but my own escape
from some small prickings of our social gyves,
always I was against the multitude,
against strong Custom's army plodding on,
unconquerable, calm, like a great stream
whose power is that its waters drift one way.

Tired, tired--grown sick of battle and defeat,
lying in harbour, like a man worn out
by storms, and yet not patient of my rest:
how if I went to some kind southern clime
where, as they say, lost in long summer dreams,
the mind grows careless with sun-drunkenness
and sleeps and wakens softly like a child?
Would Madge be over sorry to come out
into free loneliness with me a while?
clear tints and sunshine, glowing seas and skies,
beauty of mountains and of girdled plains,
the strangeness of new peoples, change and rest,
would these atone to her for so much lost
which she counts precious? For she loves that round
of treadmill ceremonies, mimic tasks,
we make our women's lives--Good heavens what work
to set the creatures to, whom we declare
God purposed for companions to us men...
companions to each other only now,
their business but to waste each other's time.
So much to do among us, and we spend
so many human souls on only this!
in petty actress parts in the long game
(grave foolery like children playing school,
setting themselves hard tasks and punishments,)
that lasts till death and is Society:
the sunlight working hours all chopped and chipped
in stray ten minutes by some score of friends
who, grieved their friend's not out, come rustling in
by ones and twos to say the weather's fine;
or paid away, poor soul, on pilgrimage
reciprocally due to tell them so:
each woman owing tax of half her life
as plaything for the others' careless hours,
each woman setting down her foot to hold
her sister tightly to the tethered round,
will she or nill she: all with rights on each
greater than hers ... and I might say than God's,
since He made work the natural food of minds,
cheated of which they dwindle and go dead
like palsied limbs, and gives to each that sense
of beasts, who know their food, to know its work,
choosing the great or little.

But myself,
have I befooled the instinct by warped use?
for is not the fruit rotten I have found
by all my labours; nothing to the world
and to me bitterness? And I forget
the strong joy of endeavour, and the fire
of hope is burned out in me; all grows dull,

rest is not rest and I am sick of toil:
I count the cost, and--

Ready, love, at last?
Why, what a rosy June! A flush of bloom
sparkling with crystal dews--Ah silly one,
you love these muslin roses better far
than those that wear the natural dew of heaven.
I thought you prettier when, the other day,
the children crowned you with the meadow-sweets:
I like to hear you teach them wild flowers' names
and make them love them; but yourself--

What's that?
"The wild flowers in a room's hot stifling glare
would die in half a minute." True enough:
your muslin roses are the wiser wear.
Well, I must see you start. Draw your hood close:
and are you shawled against this east wind's chills?

Augusta Davies Webster

Tis Hard

'Tis hard that the full summer of our round
Is but the turn where winter's sign-post's writ;
That to have reached the best is leaving it;
That final loss bears date from having found.
So some proud vessel in a narrow sound
Sails at high water with the fair wind fit,
And lo! the ebb along the sandy spit,
Lower and lower till she jars, aground.

'Tis hard. We are young still but more content;
'Tis our ripe flush, the heyday of our prime;
We learn full breath, how rich of the air we are!
But suddenly we note a touch of time,
A little fleck that scarcely seems to mar;
And we know then that some time since youth went.

Augusta Davies Webster

To-Day

OH God, where hast thou hidden Truth? Oh Truth,
Where is the road to God?
Lo, we, that should be old, have learned our youth;
We are not manly ripe; we have not dower
Of all the wisdom that a world can gain
In the centuries of work, peace, war, hope, pain;
We are not strong with all the gathered power
From age to age left our inheritance;
We stand not near the goal, there by the advance
Of step on step, through mire and blood and tears,
Forgotten fathers trod;
We are new in a new world; where shall we know,
Where in the ancient years,
Sign-marks to guide us on the way we go?

We are new in a new world. As children learn
Life by surprise and doubt,
So life must learn itself at each return
Of the upsoaring Phoenix birth from sleep
Among the ashes of an ended Past.
In its own strength, and singly from the last,
Each age's long To-day begins to creep
In baby paces whitherward it goes.
And from too far with too unsure a close,
Like void sonorous echoes in the hill,
Yesterday's voice rings out,
So gives the questioning turmoil of our cries
Answer such as we will.
Has Past writ Present in its histories?

Our fathers saw, we see not with their eyes,
Knew, and we learned in vain:
We seek old wisdoms in a novel wise;
We toil beginners of the things that are;
Like lessons which we early get by rote,
Heedless of meaning in the words we quote,
And by and by, the schoolroom left afar,
Discern at last their sense or find a new,
The just, the unjust, the counterfeit, the true,
We said from books upon our fathers' shelves,
All must be learned again:
We, children-like, still wondering as we grow,
Change, and become ourselves,
And only as ourselves can henceforth know.

How shall we know? what must we do? what be?
Answer us, Life, instead:
Past speaks us a dead tongue, we look to thee
And know thee teacher—yet a tardy one;
For now we labour, fearing to what end;
We journey, dimly seeing where we tend;
We do, and question was it rightly done;

Doubt and distrust of self beside us stand;
And who will find us Truth? where is her hand
To guide us on or back by the round path,
Leading but whence it led,
She travels on from God to reach him by?
What is the name she hath
To find her by to-day? Life, make reply.

Augusta Davies Webster

Too soon so fair, fair lilies

TOO soon so fair, fair lilies;
To bloom is then to wane;
The folded bud has still
To-morrow at its will;
Blown flowers can never blow again.

Too soon so bright, bright noontide;
The sun that now is high
Will henceforth only sink
Towards the western brink;
Day that's at prime begins to die.

Too soon so rich, ripe summer,
For autumn tracks thee fast;
Lo, death-marks on the leaf!
Sweet summer, and my grief;
For summer come is summer past.

Too soon, too soon, lost summer;
Some hours and thou art o'er.
Ah! death is part of birth:
Summer leaves not the earth,
But last year's summer lives no more.

Augusta Davies Webster

Waiting

A YOUNG fair girl among her flowers,
And, as to blossoms born in May,
Her morrows still brought sunnier hours
Than made up sunny yesterday.
She did but wait: 'Hope is so sweet;
We love so well, my love and I;
The hours that come, the hours that fleet,
End all in one glad by and by.'

A pale worn woman, scarcely sad,
But tired, like those who, too long pent,
Forget the joy they have not had
Of the free winds, and droop content.
She did but wait: 'Ah, no, to me
The silent hope is never dead;
What are the days that are to be
But part of the dear days long fled?'

He came: 'The wealth we need is mine;
And now?' 'Alas!' she said, 'in vain.
The love I love is noway thine,
I wait who never comes again.
Oh, for my lover of old days,
We two from all the world apart!
I must go lone on earth's bleak ways,
He is not now save in my heart.'

He wed another. She, alone,
Patient and weary, toiled for bread.
And bygone still was never gone,
The silent hope was never dead.
She did but wait: 'I have the past;
The new days live the old days o'er,
And there abides until the last
The by and by that was before.'

Augusta Davies Webster

WAITING, waiting

WAITING, waiting. 'Tis so far
To the day that is to come:
One by one the days that are
All to tell their countless sum;
Each to dawn and each to die—
What so far as by and by?

Waiting, waiting. 'Tis not ours,
This to-day that flies so fast:
Let them go, the shadowy hours,
Floating, floated, into Past.
Our day wears to-morrow's sky—
What so near as by and by?

Augusta Davies Webster

Where found Love his yesterday?

WHERE found Love his yesterday?
When is Love's to-morrow? say.
Love has only now.
We can swear it, we who stand
In Love's present, hand in hand,
Thou and I, dear, I and thou.

By and by and Long ago;
Last month's buds, next winter's snow;
Love has only now.
Do we wot of rathe or sere
In Love's boundless summer year,
Thou and I, dear, I and thou?

Suns that rose and suns to set;
Gone for ever and Not yet;
Love has always now.
Do we count by dawn and night,
Dwelling in Love's perfect light,
Thou and I, dear, I and thou?

Augusta Davies Webster

Where Home Was

'TWAS yesterday; 'twas long ago:
And for this flaunting grimy street,
And for this crowding to and fro,
And thud and roar of wheels and feet,
Were elm-trees and the linnet's trill,
The little gurgles of the rill,
And breath of meadow-flowers that blow
Ere roses make the summer sweet.

'Twas long ago; 'twas yesterday:
Our peach would just be new with leaves,
The swallow pair that used to lay
Their glimmering eggs beneath our eaves
Would flutter busy with their brood,
And, haply, in our hazel-wood,
Small village urchins hide at play,
And girls sit binding blue-bell sheaves.

Was the house here, or there, or there?
No landmark tells. All changed; all lost;
As when the waves that fret and tear
The fore-shores of some level coast
Roll smoothly where the sea-pinks grew.
All changed, and all grown old anew;
And I pass over, unaware,
The memories I am seeking most.

But where these huddled house-rows spread,
And where this thickened air hangs murk
And the dim sun peers round and red
On stir and haste and cares and work,
For me were baby's daisy-chains
,For me the meetings in the lanes,
The shy good-morrows softly said
That paid my morning's lying lurk.

Oh lingering days of long ago,
Not until now you passed away.
Years wane between and we unknow;
Our youth is always yesterday
.But, like a traveller home who craves
For friends and finds forgotten graves,
I seek you where you dwelt, and, lo,
Even farewells not left to say.

Augusta Davies Webster

While the woods were green

WHILE the woods were green,
'Oh I' she sang, 'my heart is new,
Leaping, longing, in my breast:
Let him come that loves me true,
Let him come that I love best,
I will tell him what I mean,
Now the wood-birds tell it too,
Now the woods are green.'

While the woods were bare,
'Oh I' she sighed, 'my heart is grey,
Shrinking, shivering, in my breast:
Love me, hate me, as they may,
None of them do I love best:
Let me be alone with care,
Now the wood-birds hide away,
Now the woods are bare.'

Augusta Davies Webster

White Rose And Red

WHITE rose sighed in the morn,
Red rose laughed in the noon,
And 'Sweetest sweetness is ended soon,'
And 'Never heed for the thorn.'

'Love's hour passes away,'
White rose breathed in my ear;
Red rose whispered 'No need to fear;
The day is enough for day.'

Shall I heed white or red?
Shall I heed both aright?
Sighing and laughing, red and white,
'Tis 'Love her' they both have said.

Augusta Davies Webster

Young May sat fainting and chill

YOUNG May sat fainting and chill,
And neither could live nor die;
She looked and hated the sky,
Yet knew not what was her ill.
Ah well-a-day!
For the lonely May.

She tired of weeping, and slept;
Who woke her up but the Sun?
And joy and love had begun
To teach her why she had wept
Oh bright new day
For the startled May!

Augusta Davies Webster

Young Laughters, and My Music!

Young laughters, and my music! Aye till now
The voice can reach no blending minors near;
'Tis the bird's trill because the spring is here
And spring means trilling on a blossomy bough;
'Tis the spring joy that has no why or how,
But sees the sun and hopes not nor can fear--
Spring is so sweet and spring seems all the year.
Dear voice, the first-come birds but trill as thou.

Oh music of my heart, be thus for long:
Too soon the spring bird learns the later song;
Too soon a sadder sweetness slays content
Too soon! There comes new light on onward day,
There comes new perfume o'er a rosier way:
Comes not again the young spring joy that went.

Augusta Davies Webster

Yu-Pe-Ya’s Dirge For Tse-Ky

DEAD, my beloved! This small purple weed
That grows upon thy grave shall have its time
To ripen and to wane, to bloom and seed;
But thou, strong doer, mightst not wait thy deed,
But thou, oh noblest, mightst not wait thy meed:
Dead in thy prime!

Gone, my beloved! I that held thine hand
Left sudden in a joyless waste alone!
I tossing on life's sea, and thou to stand
Hidden in the shadows of the silent strand.
Thou seeing me from where I may not land!
Gone from me, gone!

Sleep well: but what for me who still must wake?
Dream joys: but what for me who can but weep?
Oh darkened days where never dawn shall break!
Oh weary troth-plight I with sorrow make!
But thou, rest peaceful; care not for my sake.
Dear, sleep thy sleep.

Augusta Davies Webster