

Classic Poetry Series

Frances Ellen Watkins

- poems -

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A Little Child Shall Lead Them

Only a little scrap of blue
Preserved with loving care,
But earth has not a brilliant hue
To me more bright and fair.

Strong drink, like a raging demon,
Laid on my heart his hand,
When my darling joined with others
The Loyal Legion band.

But mystic angels called away
My loved and precious child,
And o'er life's dark and stormy way
Swept waves of anguish wild.

This badge of the Loyal Legion
We placed upon her breast,
As she lay in her little coffin
Taking her last sweet rest.

To wear that badge as a token
She earnestly did crave,
So we laid it on her bosom
To wear it in the grave.

Where sorrow would never reach her
Nor harsh words smite her ear;
Nor her eyes in death dimmed slumber
Would ever shed a tear.

"What means this badge?" said her father,
Whom we had tried to save;
Who said, when we told her story,
"Don't put it in the grave."

We took the badge from her bosom
And laid it on a chair;
And men by drink deluded
Knelt by that badge in prayer.

And vowed in that hour of sorrow
From drink they would abstain;
And this little badge became the wedge
Which broke their galling chain.

And lifted the gloomy shadows
That overspread my life,
And flooding my home with gladness,
Made me a happy wife.

And this is why this scrap of blue
Is precious in my sight;

It changed my sad and gloomy home
From darkness into light.

Frances Ellen Watkins

A Story of the Rebellion

The treacherous sands had caught our boat,
And held it with a strong embrace
And death at our imprisoned crew
Was sternly looking face to face.

With anxious hearts, but failing strength,
We strove to push the boat from shore;
But all in vain, for there we lay
With bated breath and useless oar.

Around us in a fearful storm
The fiery hail fell thick and fast;
And we engirded by the sand,
Could not return the dreadful blast.

When one arose upon whose brow
The ardent sun had left his trace,
A noble purpose strong and high
Uplighting all his dusky face.

Perchance within that fateful hour
The wrongs of ages thronged apace;
But with it came the glorious hope
Of swift deliverance to his race.

Of galling chains asunder rent,
Of severed hearts again made one,
Of freedom crowning all the land
Through battles gained and victories won.

"Some one," our hero firmly said,
"Must die to get us out of this;"
Then leaped upon the strand and bared
His bosom to the bullets' hiss.

"But ye are soldiers, and can fight,
May win in battles yet unfought;
I have no offering but my life,
And if they kill me it is nought."

With steady hands he grasped the boat,
And boldly pushed it from the shore;
Then fell by rebel bullets pierced,
His life work grandly, nobly o'er.

Our boat was rescued from the sands
And launched in safety on the tide;
But he our comrade good and grand,
In our defence had bravely died.

Frances Ellen Watkins

An Appeal to My Countywomen

You can sigh o'er the sad-eyed Armenian
Who weeps in her desolate home.
You can mourn o'er the exile of Russia
From kindred and friends doomed to roam.

You can pity the men who have woven
From passion and appetite chains
To coil with a terrible tension
Around their heartstrings and brains.

You can sorrow o'er little children
Disinherited from their birth,
The wee waifs and toddlers neglected,
Robbed of sunshine, music and mirth.

For beasts you have gentle compassion;
Your mercy and pity they share.
For the wretched, outcast and fallen
You have tenderness, love and care.

But hark! from our Southland are floating
Sobs of anguish, murmurs of pain,
And women heart-stricken are weeping
Over their tortured and their slain.

On their brows the sun has left traces;
Shrink not from their sorrow in scorn.
When they entered the threshold of being
The children of a King were born.

Each comes as a guest to the table
The hand of our God has outspread,
To fountains that ever leap upward,
To share in the soil we all tread.

When ye plead for the wrecked and fallen,
The exile from far-distant shores,
Remember that men are still wasting
Life's crimson around your own doors.

Have ye not, oh, my favored sisters,
Just a plea, a prayer or a tear,
For mothers who dwell 'neath the shadows
Of agony, hatred and fear?

Men may tread down the poor and lowly,
May crush them in anger and hate,
But surely the mills of God's justice
Will grind out the grist of their fate.

Oh, people sin-laden and guilty,
So lusty and proud in your prime,

The sharp sickles of God's retribution
Will gather your harvest of crime.

Weep not, oh my well-sheltered sisters,
Weep not for the Negro alone,
But weep for your sons who must gather
The crops which their fathers have sown.

Go read on the tombstones of nations
Of chieftains who masterful trod,
The sentence which time has engraven,
That they had forgotten their God.

'Tis the judgment of God that men reap
The tares which in madness they sow,
Sorrow follows the footsteps of crime,
And Sin is the consort of Woe.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Aunt Chloe

.
I remember, well remember,
. That dark and dreadful day,
. When they whispered to me, "Chloe,
. Your children's sold away!" 1.
It seemed as if a bullet
. Had shot me through and through,
. And I felt as if my heart-strings
. Was breaking right in two. 1.
And I says to cousin Milly,
. "There must be some mistake;
. Where's Mistus?" "In the great house crying --
. Crying like her heart would break. 1.
"And the lawyer's there with Mistus;
. Says he's come to 'ministrate,
. 'Cause when master died he just left
. Heap of debt on the estate. 1.
"And I thought 'twould do you good
. To bid your boys good-bye --
. To kiss them both and shake their hands,
. And have a hearty cry. 1.
"Oh! Chloe, I knows how you feel,
. 'Cause I'se been through it all;

.
I thought my poor old heart would break,

.
When master sold my Saul." 1.

Just then I heard the footsteps

.
Of my children at the door,

.
And then I rose right up to meet them,

.
But I fell upon the floor. 1.

And I heard poor Jakey saying,

.
"Oh, mammy, don't you cry!"

.
And I felt my children kiss me

.
And bid me, both, good-bye. 1.

Then I had a mighty sorrow,

.
Though I nursed it all alone;

.
But I wasted to a shadow,

.
And turned to skin and bone. 1.

But one day dear uncle Jacob

.
(In heaven he's now a saint)

.
Said, "Your poor heart is in the fire,

.
But child you must not faint." 1.

Then I said to uncle Jacob,

·
If I was good like you,
·
When the heavy trouble dashed me
·
I'd know just what to do. 1.
Then he said to me, "Poor Chloe,
·
The way is open wide:"
·
And he told me of the Saviour,
·
And the fountain in His side. 1.
Then he said "Just take your burden
·
To the blessed Master's feet;
·
I takes all my troubles, Chloe,
·
Right unto the mercy-seat." 1.
His words waked up my courage,
·
And I began to pray,
·
And I felt my heavy burden
·
Rolling like a stone away. 1.
And a something seemed to tell me,
·
You will see your boys again --
·
And that hope was like a poultice
·

Spread upon a dreadful pain. 1.
And it often seemed to whisper,
.
Chloe, trust and never fear;
.
You'll get justice in the kingdom,
.
If you do not get it here. [2] The Deliverance 2.
Master only left old Mistus
.
One bright and handsome boy;
.
But she fairly doted on him,
.
He was her pride and joy. 2.
We all liked Mister Thomas,
.
He was so kind at heart;
.
And when the young folkes got in scrapes,
.
He always took their part. 2.
He kept right on that very way
.
Till he got big and tall,
.
And old Mistus used to chide him
.
And say he'd spile us all. 2.
But somehow the farm did prosper
.
When he took things in hand;
.
And though all the servants liked him,
.
He made them understand. 2.
One evening Mister Thomas said,
.
"Just bring my easy shoes;

.
I am going to sit by mother,

.
And read her up the news." 2.

Soon I heard him tell old Mistus

.
We're bound to have a fight;

.
But we'll whip the Yankees, mother,

.
We'll whip them sure as night!" 2.

Then I saw old Mistus tremble;

.
She gasped and held her breath;

.
And she looked on Mister Thomas

.
With a face as pale as death. 2.

"They are firing on Fort Sumpter;

.
Oh! I wish that I was there! --

.
Why, dear mother! what's the matter?

.
You're the picture of despair." 2.

"I was thinking, dearest Thomas,

.
'Twould break my very heart

.
If a fierce and dreadful battle

.
Should tear our lives apart." 2.

"None but cowards, dearest mother,

·
Would skulk unto the rear,
·
When the tyrant's hand is shaking
·
All the heart is holding dear." 2.
I felt sorry for old Mistus;
·
She got too full to speak;
·
But I saw the great big tear-drops
·
A running down her cheek. 2.
Mister Thomas too was troubled
·
With choosing on that night,
·
Betwixt staying with his mother
·
And joining in the fight. 2.
Soon down into the village came
·
A call for volunteers;
·
Mistus gave up Mister Thomas,
·
With many sighs and tears. 2.
His uniform was real handsome;
·
He looked so brave and strong;
·
But somehow I could'nt help thinking
·

His fighting must be wrong. 2.
Though the house was very lonesome,
.
I thought 'twould all come right,
.
For I felt somehow or other
.
We was mixed up in that fight. 2.
And I said to Uncle Jacob,
.
"How old Mistus feels the sting,
.
For this parting with your children
.
Is a mighty dreadful thing." 2.
"Never mind," said Uncle Jacob,
.
"Just wait and watch and pray,
.
For I feel right sure and certain,
.
Slavery's bound to pass away; 2.
"Because I asked the Spirit,
.
If God is good and just,
.
How it happened that the masters
.
Did grind us to the dust. 2.
"And something reasoned right inside,
.
Such should not always be;
.

And you could not beat it out my head,
.
The Spirit spoke to me." 2.
And his dear old eyes would brighten,
.
And his lips put on a smile,
.
Saying, "Pick up faith and courage,
.
And just wait a little while." 2.
Mistus prayed up in the parlor,
.
That the Secesh all might win;
.
We were praying in the cabins,
.
Wanting freedom to begin. 2.
Mister Thomas wrote to Mistus,
.
Telling 'bout the Bull's Run fight,
.
That his troops had whipped the Yankees
.
And put them all to flight. 2.
Mistus' eyes did fairly glisten;
.
She laughed and praised the South,
.
But I thought some day she'd laugh
.
On tother side her mouth. 2.
I used to watch old Mistus' face,
.

And when it looked quite long
.
I would say to Cousin Milly,
.
The battle's going wrong; 2.
Not for us, but for the Rebels. --
.
My heart would fairly skip,
.
When Uncle Jacob used to say,
.
"The North is bound to whip." 2.
And let the fight go as it would --
.
Let North or South prevail --
.
He always kept his courage up,
.
And never let it fail. 2.
And he often used to tell us,
.
"Children, don't forget to pray;
.
For the darkest time of morning
.
Is just 'fore the break of day." 2.
Well, one morning bright and early

.

We heard the fife and drum,

.

And the booming of the cannon --

.

The Yankee troops had come. 2.

When the word ran through the village,

.

The colored folks are free --

.

In the kitchens and the cabins

.

We held a jubilee. 2.

When they told us Mister Lincoln

.

Said that slavery was dead,

.

We just poured our prayers and blessings

.

Upon his precious head. 2.

We just laughed, and danced, and shouted

.

And prayed, and sang, and cried,

.

And we thought dear Uncle Jacob

Would fairly crack his side. 2.

But when old Mistus heard it,

She groaned and hardly spoke;

When she had to lose her servants,

Her heart was almost broke. 2.

'Twas a sight to see our people

Going out, the troops to meet,

Almost dancing to the music,

And marching down the street. 2.

After years of pain and parting,

Our chains was broke in two,

And we was so mighty happy,

We didn't know what to do. 2.

But we soon got used to freedom,

.

Though the way at first was rough;

.

But we weathered through the tempest,

.

For slavery made us tough. 2.

But we had one awful sorrow,

.

It almost turned my head,

.

When a mean and wicked cretur

.

Shot Mister Lincoln dead. 2.

'Twas a dreadful solemn morning,

.

I just staggered on my feet;

.

And the women they were crying

.

And screaming in the street. 2.

But if many prayers and blessings

.

Could bear him to the throne,

.

I should think when Mister Lincoln died,

That heaven just got its own. 2.

Then we had another President, --

What do you call his name?

Well, if the colored folks forget him

They would'nt be much to blame. 2.

We thought he'd be the Moses

Of all the colored race;

But when the Rebels pressed us hard

He never showed his face. 2.

But something must have happened him,

Right curi's I'll be bound,

'Cause I heard 'em talking 'bout a circle

That he was swinging round. 2.

But everything will pass away --

.

He went like time and tide --

.

And when the next election came

.

They let poor Andy slide. 2.

But now we have a President,

.

And if I was a man

.

I'd vote for him for breaking up

.

The wicked Ku-Klux Klan. 2.

And if any man should ask me

.

If I would sell my vote,

.

I'd tell him I was not the one

.

To change and turn my coat; 2.

If freedom seem'd a little rough

.

I'd weather through the gale;

.

And as to buying up my vote,

I hadn't it for sale. 2.

I do not think I'd ever be

As slack as Jonas Handy;

Because I heard he sold his vote

For just three sticks of candy. 2.

But when John Thomas Reeder brought

His wife some flour and meat,

And told he had sold his vote

For something good to eat, 2.

You ought to seen Aunt Kitty raise,

And heard her blaze away;

She gave the meat and flour a toss,

And said they should not stay. 2.

And I should think he felt quite cheap

For voting the wrong side;

And when Aunt Kitty scolded him,

He just stood up and cried. 2.

But the worst fooled man I ever saw,

Was when poor David Rand

Sold out for flour and sugar;

The sugar was mixed with sand. 2.

I'll tell you how the thing got out;

His wife had company,

And she thought the sand was sugar,

And served it up for tea. 2.

When David sipped and sipped the tea,

Somehow it didn't taste right;

.

I guess when he found he was sipping sand

.

He was mad enough to fight. 2.

The sugar looked so nice and white --

.

It was spread some inches deep --

.

But underneath was a lot of sand;

.

Such sugar is mighty cheap. 2.

You'd laughed to seen Lucinda Grange

.

Upon her husband's track;

.

When he sold his vote for rations

.

She made him take 'em back. 2.

Day after day did Milly Green

.

Just follow after Joe,

.

And told him if he voted wrong

.

To take his rags and go. 2.

I think that Samuel Johnson said

.

His side had won the day,

.

Had not we women radicals

.

Just got right in the way. 2.

And yet I would not have you think

.

That all our men are shabby;

.

But 'tis said in every flock of sheep

.

There will be one that's scabby. 2.

I've heard, before election came

.

They tried to buy John Slade;

.

But he gave them all to understand

.

That he wasn't in that trade. 2.

And we've got lots of other men

.

Who rally round the cause,

And go for holding up the hands

That gave us equal laws, 2.

Who know their freedom cost too much

Of blood and pain and treasure,

For them to fool away their votes

For profit or for pleasure. [3] Aunt Chloe's Politics 3.
Of course, I don't know very much

About these politics,

But I think that some who run 'em,

Do mighty ugly tricks. 3.
I've seen 'em honey-fugle round,

And talk so awful sweet,

That you'd think them full of kindness

As an egg is full of meat. 3.
Now I don't believe in looking

Honest people in the face,

And saying when you're doing wrong,

That 'I haven't sold my race.' 3.

When we want to school our children,

If the money isn't there,
.
Whether black or white have took it,
.
The loss we all must share. 3.
And this buying up each other
.
Is something worse than mean,
.
Though I think a heap of voting,
.
I go for voting clean. [4] Learning to Read 4.
Very soon the Yankee teachers
.
Came down and set up school;
.
But, oh! how the Rebs did hate it, --
.
It was agin' their rule. 4.
Our masters always tried to hide
.
Book learning from our eyes;
.
Knowledge didn't agree with slavery --
.
'Twould make us all too wise. 4.
But some of us would try to steal
.
A little from the book,
.
And put the words together,
.
And learn by hook or crook. 4.
I remember Uncle Caldwell,
.
Who took pot liquor fat
.
And greased the pages of his book,
.

And hid it in his hat. 4.
And had his master ever seen
·
The leaves upon his head,
·
He'd have thought them greasy papers,
·
But nothing to be read. 4.
And there was Mr. Turner's Ben,
·
Who heard the children spell,
·
And picked the words right up by heart,
·
And learned to read 'em well. 4.
Well, the Northern folks kept sending
·
The Yankee teachers down;
·
And they stood right up and helped us,
·
Though Rebs did sneer and frown. 4.
And I longed to read my Bible,
·
For precious words it said;
·
But when I begun to learn it,
·
Folks just shook their heads, 4.
And said there is no use trying,
·
Oh! Chloe, you're too late;
·

But as I was rising sixty,

.

I had no time to wait. 4.

So I got a pair of glasses,

.

And straight to work I went,

.

And never stopped till I could read

.

The hymns and Testament. 4.

Then I got a little cabin

.

A place to call my own --

.

And I felt as independent

.

As the queen upon her throne. [5] Church Building 5.
Uncle Jacob often told us,

.

Since freedom blessed our race

.

We ought all to come together

.

And build a meeting place. 5.
So we pinched, and scraped, and spared,

.

A little here and there:

.

Though our wages was but scanty,

.

The church did get a share. 5.
And, when the house was finished,

.

Uncle Jacob came to pray;

.

He was looking mighty feeble,

.

And his head was awful gray. 5.

But his voice rang like a trumpet;

·
His eyes looked bright and young;
·
And it seemed a mighty power
·
Was resting on his tongue. 5.
And he gave us all his blessing --
·
'Twas parting words he said,
·
For soon we got the message
·
The dear old man was dead. 5.
But I believe he's in the kingdom,
·
For when we shook his hand
·
He said, "Children, you must meet me
·
Right in the promised land; 5.
"For when I done a moiling
·
And toiling here below,
·
Through the gate into the city
·
Straightway I hope to go." [6] The Reunion 6.
Well, one morning real early
·
I was going down the street,
·
And I heard a stranger asking
·
For Missis Chloe Fleet. 6.
There was something in his voice
·
That made me feel quite shaky.

·
· And when I looked right in his face,
· Who should it be but Jakey! 6.
· I grasped him tight, and took him home --
·
· What gladness filled my cup!
·
· And I laughed, and just rolled over,
·
· And laughed, and just give up. 6.
· "Where have you been? O Jakey, dear!
·
· Why didn't you come before?
·
· Oh! when you children went away
·
· My heart was awful sore." 6.
· "Why, mammy, I've been on your hunt
·
· Since ever I've been free,
·
· And I have heard from brother Ben, --
·
· He's down in Tennessee. 6.
· "He wrote me that he had a wife,"
·
· "And children?" "Yes, he's three."
·
· "You married, too?" "Oh, no, indeed,
·
· I thought I'd first get free." 6.
· "Then, Jakey, you will stay with me,
·
· And comfort my poor heart;

·
Old Mistus got no power now
·
To tear us both apart. 6.
"I'm richer now than Mistus,
·
Because I have got my son;
·
And Mister Thomas he is dead,
·
And she's nary one. 6.
"You must write to brother Benny
·
That he must come this fall,
·
And we'll make the cabin bigger,
·
And that will hold us all. 6.
"Tell him I want to see 'em all
·
Before my life do cease:
·
And then, like good old Simeon,
·
I hope to die in peace."

Frances Ellen Watkins

Burial of Sarah

He stood before the sons of Heth,
And bowed his sorrowing head;
"I've come," he said, "to buy a place
Where I may lay my dead.

"I am a stranger in your land,
My home has lost its light;
Grant me a place where I may lay
My dead away from sight."

Then tenderly the sons of Heth
Gazed on the mourner's face,
And said, "Oh, Prince, amid our dead,
Choose thou her resting-place.

"The sepulchres of those we love,
We place at thy command;
Against the plea thy grief hath made
We close not heart nor hand."

The patriarch rose and bowed his head,
And said, "One place I crave;
'Tis at the end of Ephron's field,
And called Machpelah's cave.

"Entreat him that he sell to me
For her last sleep that cave;
I do not ask for her I loved
The freedom of a grave."

The son of Zohar answered him,
"Hearken, my lord, to me;
Before our sons, the field and cave
I freely give to thee."

"I will not take it as a gift,"
The grand old man then said;
"I pray thee let me buy the place
Where I may lay my dead."

And with the promise in his heart,
His seed should own that land,
He gave the shekels for the field
He took from Ephron's hand.

And saw afar the glorious day
His chosen seed should tread,
The soil where he in sorrow lay
His loved and cherished dead.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Bury Me in a Free Land

Make me a grave where'er you will,
In a lowly plain, or a lofty hill;
Make it among earth's humblest graves,
But not in a land where men are slaves.

I could not rest if around my grave
I heard the steps of a trembling slave;
His shadow above my silent tomb
Would make it a place of fearful gloom.

I could not rest if I heard the tread
Of a coffle gang to the shambles led,
And the mother's shriek of wild despair
Rise like a curse on the trembling air.

I could not sleep if I saw the lash
Drinking her blood at each fearful gash,
And I saw her babes torn from her breast,
Like trembling doves from their parent nest.

I'd shudder and start if I heard the bay
Of bloodhounds seizing their human prey,
And I heard the captive plead in vain
As they bound afresh his galling chain.

If I saw young girls from their mother's arms
Bartered and sold for their youthful charms,
My eye would flash with a mournful flame,
My death-paled cheek grow red with shame.

I would sleep, dear friends, where bloated might
Can rob no man of his dearest right;
My rest shall be calm in any grave
Where none can call his brother a slave.

I ask no monument, proud and high,
To arrest the gaze of the passers-by;
All that my yearning spirit craves,
Is bury me not in a land of slaves.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Dandelions

Welcome children of the Spring,
In your garbs of green and gold,
Lifting up your sun-crowned heads
On the verdant plain and wold.

As a bright and joyous troop
From the breast of earth ye came
Fair and lovely are your cheeks,
With sun-kisses all aflame.

In the dusty streets and lanes,
Where the lowly children play,
There as gentle friends ye smile,
Making brighter life's highway

Dewdrops and the morning sun,
Weave your garments fair and bright,
And we welcome you to-day
As the children of the light.

Children of the earth and sun.
We are slow to understand
All the richness of the gifts
Flowing from our Father's hand.

Were our vision clearer far,
In this sin-dimmed world of ours,
Would we not more thankful be
For the love that sends us flowers?

Welcome, early visitants,
With your sun-crowned golden hair,
With your message to our hearts
Of our Father's loving care.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Death of the Old Sea King

'Twas a fearful night -- the tempest raved
With loud and wrathful pride,
The storm-king harnessed his lightning steeds,
And rode on the raging tide.

The sea-king lay on his bed of death,
Pale mourners around him bent;
They knew the wild and fitful life
Of their chief was almost spent.

His ear was growing dull in death
When the angry storm he heard,
The sluggish blood in the old man's veins
With sudden vigor stirred.

"I hear them call," cried the dying man,
His eyes grew full of light;
"Now bring me here my warrior robes,
My sword and armor bright.

"In the tempest's lull I heard a voice,
I knew 'twas Odin's call.
The Valkyrs are gathering round my bed
To lead me unto his hall.

"Bear me unto my noblest ship,
Light up a funeral pyre;
I'll walk to the palace of the braves
Through a path of flame and fire."

Oh! wild and bright was the stormy light
That flashed from the old man's eye,
As they bore him from the couch of death
To his battle-ship to die,

And lit with many a mournful torch
The sea-king's dying bed,
And like a banner fair and bright
The flames around him spread.

But they heard no cry of anguish
Break through that fiery wall,
With rigid brow and silent lips
He was seeking Odin's hall.

Through a path of fearful splendor,
While strong men held their breath,
The brave old man went boldly forth
And calmly talked with death.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Do Not Cheer, Men Are Dying, Said Capt. Phillips

Do not cheer, for men are dying
From their distant homes in pain;
And the restless sea is darkened
By a flood of crimson rain.

Do not cheer, for anxious mothers
Wait and watch in lonely dread;
Vainly waiting for the footsteps
Never more their paths to tread.

Do not cheer, while little children
Gather round the widowed wife,
Wondering why an unknown people
Sought their own dear father's life.

Do not cheer, for aged fathers
Bend above their staves and weep,
While the ocean sings the requiem
Where their fallen children sleep.

Do not cheer, for lips are paling
On which lay the mother's kiss;
'Mid the dreadful roar of battle
How that mother's hand they miss!

Do not cheer: once joyous maidens,
Who the mazy dance did tread,
Bow their heads in bitter anguish,
Mourning o'er their cherished dead.

Do not cheer while maid and matron
In this strife must bear a part;
While the blow that strikes a soldier
Reaches to some woman's heart.

Do not cheer till arbitration
O'er the nations holds its sway,
And the century now closing
Ushers in a brighter day.

Do not cheer until the nation
Shall more wise and thoughtful grow
Than to staunch a stream of sorrow
By an avalanche of woe.

Do not cheer until each nation
Sheathes the sword and blunts the spear,
And we sing aloud for gladness:
Lo, the reign of Christ is here,

And the banners of destruction
From the battlefield are furled,

And the peace of God descending
Rests upon a restless world.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Fishers of Men

I had a dream, a varied dream:
Before my ravished sight
The city of my Lord arose,
With all its love and light.

The music of a myriad harps
Flowed out with sweet accord;
And saints were casting down their crowns
In homage to our Lord.

My heart leaped up with untold joy;
Life's toil and pain were o'er;
My weary feet at last had found
The bright and restful shore.

Just as I reached the gates of light,
Ready to enter in,
From earth arose a fearful cry
Of sorrow and of sin.

I turned, and saw behind me surge
A wild and stormy sea;
And drowning men were reaching out
Imploring hands to me.

And ev'ry lip was blanched with dread
And moaning for relief;
The music of the golden harps
Grew fainter for their grief.

Let me return, I quickly said,
Close to the pearly gate;
My work is with these wretched ones,
So wrecked and desolate.

An angel smiled and gently said:
This is the gate of life,
Wilt thou return to earth's sad scenes,
Its weariness and strife,

To comfort hearts that sigh and break,
To dry the falling tear,
Wilt thou forego the music sweet
Entrancing now thy ear?

I must return, I firmly said,
The strugglers in that sea
Shall not reach out beseeching hands
In vain for help to me.

I turned to go; but as I turned
The gloomy sea grew bright,

And from my heart there seemed to flow
Ten thousand cords of light.

And sin-wrecked men, with eager hands,
Did grasp each golden cord;
And with my heart I drew them on
To see my gracious Lord.

Again I stood beside the gate.
My heart was glad and free;
For with me stood a rescued throng
The Lord had given me.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Go Work in My Vineyard

Go work in my vineyard, said the Lord,
And gather the bruised grain;
But the reapers had left the stubble bare,
And I trod the soil in pain.

The fields of my Lord are wide and broad,
He has pastures fair and green,
And vineyards that drink the golden light
Which flows from the sun's bright sheen.

I heard the joy of the reapers' song,
As they gathered golden grain;
Then wearily turned unto my task,
With a lonely sense of pain.

Sadly I turned from the sun's fierce glare,
And sought the quiet shade,
And over my dim and weary eyes
Sleep's peaceful fingers strayed.

I dreamed I joined with a restless throng,
Eager for pleasure and gain;
But ever and anon a stumbler fell,
And uttered a cry of pain.

But the eager crowd still hurried on,
Too busy to pause or heed,
When a voice rang sadly through my soul,
You must staunch these wounds that bleed.

My hands were weak, but I reached them out
To feebler ones than mine,
And over the shadows of my life
Stole the light of a peace divine.

Oh! then my task was a sacred thing,
How precious it grew in my eyes!
'Twas mine to gather the bruised grain
For the "Lord of Paradise."

And when the reapers shall lay their grain
On the floors of golden light,
I feel that mine with its broken sheaves
Shall be precious in His sight.

Though thorns may often pierce my feet,
And the shadows still abide,
The mists will vanish before His smile,
There will be light at eventide.

Frances Ellen Watkins

God Bless Our Native Land

God bless our native land,
Land of the newly free,
Oh may she ever stand
For truth and liberty.

God bless our native land,
Where sleep our kindred dead,
Let peace at thy command
Above their graves be shed.

God help our native land,
Bring surcease to her strife,
And shower from thy hand
A more abundant life.

God bless our native land,
Her homes and children bless,
Oh may she ever stand
For truth and righteousness.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Going East

She came from the East a fair, young bride,
With a light and a bounding heart,
To find in the distant West a home
With her husband to make a start.

He builded his cabin far away,
Where the prairie flower bloomed wild;
Her love made lighter all his toil,
And joy and hope around him smiled.

She plied her hands to life's homely tasks,
And helped to build his fortunes up;
While joy and grief, like bitter and sweet,
Were mingled and mixed in her cup.

He sowed in his fields of golden grain,
All the strength of his manly prime;
Nor music of birds, nor brooks, nor bees,
Was as sweet as the dollar's chime.

She toiled and waited through weary years
For the fortune that came at length;
But toil and care and hope deferred,
Had stolen and wasted her strength.

The cabin changed to a stately home,
Rich carpets were hushing her tread;
But light was fading from her eye,
And the bloom from her cheek had fled.

Slower and heavier grew her step,
While his gold and his gains increased;
But his proud domain had not the charm
Of her humble home in the East.

Within her eye was a restless light,
And a yearning that never ceased,
A longing to see the dear old home
She had left in the distant East.

A longing to clasp her mother's hand,
And nestle close to her heart,
And to feel the heavy cares of life
Like the sun-kissed shadows depart.

Her husband was adding field to field,
And new wealth to his golden store;
And little thought the shadow of death
Was entering in at his door.

He had no line to sound the depths
Of her tears repressed and unshed;

Nor dreamed 'mid plenty a human heart
Could be starving, but not for bread.

The hungry heart was stilled at last;
Its restless, baffled yearning ceased.
A lonely man sat by the bier
Of a corpse that was going East.

Frances Ellen Watkins

He Had Not Where to Lay His Head

The conies had their hiding-place,
The wily fox with stealthy tread
A covert found, but Christ, the Lord,
Had not a place to lay his head.

The eagle had an eyrie home,
The blithesome bird its quiet rest,
But not the humblest spot on earth
Was by the Son of God possessed.

Princes and kings had palaces,
With grandeur could adorn each tomb,
For Him who came with love and life,
They had no home, they gave no room.

The hands whose touch sent thrills of joy
Through nerves unstrung and palsied frame,
The feet that travelled for our need,
Were nailed unto the cross of shame.

How dare I murmur at my lot,
Or talk of sorrow, pain and loss,
When Christ was in a manger laid,
And died in anguish on the cross.

That homeless one beheld beyond
His lonely agonizing pain,
A love outflowing from His heart,
That all the wandering world would gain.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Home, Sweet Home

Sharers of a common country,
They had met in deadly strife;
Men who should have been as brothers
Madly sought each other's life.

In the silence of the even,
When the cannon's lips were dumb,
Thoughts of home and all its loved ones
To the soldier's heart would come.

On the margin of a river,
'Mid the evening's dews and damps,
Could be heard the sounds of music
Rising from two hostile camps.

One was singing of its section
Down in Dixie, Dixie's land,
And the other of the banner
Waved so long from strand to strand.

In the land where Dixie's ensign
Floated o'er the hopeful slave,
Rose the song that freedom's banner,
Starry-lighted, long might wave.

From the fields of strife and carnage,
Gentle thoughts began to roam,
And a tender strain of music
Rose with words of "Home, Sweet Home."

Then the hearts of strong men melted,
For amid our grief and sin
Still remains that "touch of nature,"
Telling us we all are kin.

In one grand but gentle chorus,
Floating to the starry dome,
Came the words that brought them nearer,
Words that told of "Home, Sweet Home."

For awhile, all strife forgotten,
They were only brothers then,
Joining in the sweet old chorus,
Not as soldiers, but as men.

Men whose hearts would flow together,
Though apart their feet might roam,
Found a tie they could not sever,
In the mem'ry of each home.

Never may the steps of carnage
Shake our land from shore to shore,

But may mother, home and Heaven,
Be our watchwords evermore.

Frances Ellen Watkins

I Thirst

FIRST VOICE.

I thirst, but earth cannot allay
The fever coursing through my veins,
The healing stream is far away---
It flows through Salem's lovely plains.

The murmurs of its crystal flow
Break ever o'er this world of strife;
My heart is weary, let me go,
To bathe it in the stream of life;

For many worn and weary hearts
Have bathed in this pure healing stream,
And felt their griefs and cares depart,
E'en like some sad forgotten dream.

SECOND VOICE.

"The Word is nigh thee, even in thy heart."

Say not, within thy weary heart,
Who shall ascend above,
To bring unto thy fever'd lips
The fount of joy and love.

Nor do thou seek to vainly delve
Where death's pale angels tread,
To hear the murmur of its flow
Around the silent dead.

Within, in thee is one living fount,
Fed from the springs above;
There quench thy thirst till thou shalt bathe
In God's own sea of love.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Jamie's Puzzle

There was grief within our household
Because of a vacant chair.
Our mother, so loved and precious,
No longer was sitting there.

Our hearts grew heavy with sorrow,
Our eyes with tears were blind,
And little Jamie was wondering,
Why we were left behind.

We had told our little darling,
Of the land of love and light,
Of the saints all crowned with glory,
And enrobed in spotless white.

We said that our precious mother,
Had gone to that land so fair,
To dwell with beautiful angels,
And to be forever there.

But the child was sorely puzzled,
Why dear grandmamma should go
To dwell in a stranger city,
When her children loved her so.

But again the mystic angel
Came with swift and silent tread,
And our sister, Jamie's mother,
Was enrolled among the dead.

To us the mystery deepened,
To Jamie it seemed more clear;
Grandma, he said, must be lonesome,
And mamma has gone to her.

But the question lies unanswered
In our little Jamie's mind,
Why she should go to our mother,
And leave her children behind;

To dwell in that lovely city,
From all that was dear to part,
From children who loved to nestle
So closely around her heart.

Dear child, like you, we are puzzled,
With problems that still remain;
But think in the great hereafter
Their meaning will all be plain.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Let the Light Enter

"The dying words of Goethe."

"Light! more light! the shadows deepen,
And my life is ebbing low,
Throw the windows widely open:
Light! more light! before I go.

"Softly let the balmy sunshine
Play around my dying bed,
E'er the dimly lighted valley
I with lonely feet must tread.

"Light! more light! for Death is weaving
Shadows 'round my waning sight,
And I fain would gaze upon him
Through a stream of earthly light."

Not for greater gifts of genius;
Not for thoughts more grandly bright,
All the dying poet whispers
Is a prayer for light, more light.

Heeds he not the gathered laurels,
Fading slowly from his sight;
All the poet's aspirations
Centre in that prayer for light.

Gracious Saviour, when life's day-dreams
Melt and vanish from the sight,
May our dim and longing vision
Then be blessed with light, more light.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Maceo

Maceo dead! a thrill of sorrow
Through our hearts in sadness ran
When we felt in one sad hour
That the world had lost a man.

He had clasped unto his bosom
The sad fortunes of his land --
Held the cause for which he perished
With a firm, unfaltering hand.

On his lips the name of freedom
Fainted with his latest breath.
Cuba Libre was his watchword
Passing through the gates of death.

With the light of God around us,
Why this agony and strife?
With the cross of Christ before us,
Why this fearful waste of life?

Must the pathway unto freedom
Ever mark a crimson line,
And the eyes of wayward mortals
Always close to light divine?

Must the hearts of fearless valor
Fail 'mid crime and cruel wrong,
When the world has read of heroes
Brave and earnest, true and strong?

Men to stay the floods of sorrow
Sweeping round each war-crushed heart;
Men to say to strife and carnage --
From our world henceforth depart.

God of peace and God of nations,
Haste! oh, haste the glorious day

When the reign of our Redeemer
O'er the world shall have its sway.

When the swords now blood encrusted,
Spears that reap the battle field,
Shall be changed to higher service,
Helping earth rich harvests yield.

Where the widow weeps in anguish,
And the orphan bows his head,
Grant that peace and joy and gladness
May like holy angels tread.

Pity, oh, our God the sorrow

Of thy world from thee astray,
Lead us from the paths of madness
Unto Christ the living way.

Year by year the world grows weary
'Neath its weight of sin and strife,
Though the hands once pierced and bleeding
Offer more abundant life.

May the choral song of angels
Heard upon Judea's plain
Sound throughout the earth the tidings
Of that old and sweet refrain.

Till our world, so sad and weary,
Finds the balmy rest of peace --
Peace to silence all her discords --
Peace till war and crime shall cease.

Peace to fall like gentle showers,
Or on parchéd flowers dew,
Till our hearts proclaim with gladness:
Lo, He maketh all things new.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Mother's Treasures

Two little children sit by my side,
I call them Lily and Daffodil;
I gaze on them with a mother's pride,
One is Edna, the other is Will.

Both have eyes of starry light,
And laughing lips o'er teeth of pearl.
I would not change for a diadem
My noble boy and darling girl.

To-night my heart o'erflows with joy;
I hold them as a sacred trust;
I fain would hide them in my heart,
Safe from tarnish of moth and rust.

What should I ask for my dear boy?
The richest gifts of wealth or fame?
What for my girl? A loving heart
And a fair and a spotless name?

What for my boy? That he should stand
A pillar of strength to the state?
What for my girl? That she should be
The friend of the poor and desolate?

I do not ask they shall never tread
With weary feet the paths of pain.
I ask that in the darkest hour
They may faithful and true remain.

I only ask their lives may be
Pure as gems in the gates of pearl,
Lives to brighten and bless the world --
This I ask for my boy and girl.

I ask to clasp their hands again
'Mid the holy hosts of heaven,
Enraptured say: "I am here, oh! God,
"And the children Thou hast given."

Frances Ellen Watkins

Nothing and Something

It is nothing to me, the beauty said,
With a careless toss of her pretty head;
The man is weak if he can't refrain
From the cup you say is fraught with pain.
It was something to her in after years;
When her eyes were drenched with burning tears,
And she watched in lonely grief and dread,
And startled to hear a staggering tread.

It is nothing to me, the mother said;
I have no fear that my boy will tread
In the downward path of sin and shame,
And crush my heart and darken his name.
It was something to her when that only son
From the path of right was early won,
And madly cast in the flowing bowl
A ruined body and sin-wrecked soul.

It is nothing to me, the young man cried:
In his eye was a flash of scorn and pride;
I heed not the dreadful things ye tell:
I can rule myself I know full well.
It was something to him when in prison he lay
The victim of drink, life ebbing away;
And thought of his wretched child and wife,
And the mournful wreck of his wasted life.

It is nothing to me, the merchant said,
As over his ledger he bent his head;
I'm busy to-day with tare and tret,
And I have no time to fume and fret.
It was something to him when over the wire
A message came from a funeral pyre- -
A drunken conductor had wrecked a train,
And his wife and child were among the slain.

It is nothing to me, the voter said,
The party's loss is my greatest dread;
Then gave his vote for the liquor trade,
Though hearts were crushed and drunkards made.
It was something to him in after life,
When his daughter became a drunkard's wife
And her hungry children cried for bread,
And trembled to hear their father's tread.

Is it nothing for us to idly sleep
While the cohorts of death their vigils keep?
To gather the young and thoughtless in
And grind in our midst a grist of sin?

It is something, yes, all, for us to stand
Clasping by faith our Saviour's hand;

To learn to labor, live and fight
On the side of God and changeless light.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Out in the Cold

Out in the cold mid the dreary night,
Under the eaves of homes so bright:
Snowflakes falling o'er mother's grave
Will no one rescue, no one save?

A child left out in the dark and cold,
A lamb not sheltered in any fold,
Hearing the wolves of hunger bark,
Out in the cold! and out in the dark

Missing to-night the charming bliss,
That lies in the mother's good-night kiss;
And hearing no loving father's prayer,
For blessings his children all may share.

Creeping away to some wretched den,
To sleep mid the curses of drunken men
And women, not as God has made,
Wrecked and ruined, wronged and betrayed.

Church of the Lord reach out thy arm,
And shield the hapless one from harm;
Where the waves of sin are dashing wild
Rescue and save the drifting child.

Wash from her life guilt's turbid foam,
In the fair haven of a home;
Tenderly lead the motherless girl
Up to the gates of purest pearl.

The wandering feet which else had strayed,
From thorny paths may yet be stayed;
And a crimson track through the cold dark night
May exchange to a line of loving light.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Renewal of Strength

The prison-house in which I live
Is falling to decay,
But God renews my spirit's strength,
Within these walls of clay.

For me a dimness slowly creeps
Around earth's fairest light,
But heaven grows clearer to my view,
And fairer to my sight.

It may be earth's sweet harmonies
Are duller to my ear,
But music from my Father's house
Begins to float more near.

Then let the pillars of my home
Crumble and fall away;
Lo, God's dear love within my soul
Renews it day by day.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Save the Boys

Like Dives in the deeps of Hell
I cannot break this fearful spell,
Nor quench the fires I've madly nursed,
Nor cool this dreadful raging thirst.
Take back your pledge--ye come too late!
Ye cannot save me from my fate,
Nor bring me back departed joys;
But ye can try to save the boys.

Ye bid me break my fiery chain,
Arise and be a man again,
When every street with snares is spread,
And nets of sin where'er I tread.
No; I must reap as I did sow.
The seeds of sin bring crops of woe;
But with my latest breath I'll crave
That ye will try the boys to save.

These bloodshot eyes were once so bright;
This sin-crushed heart was glad and light;
But by the wine-cup's ruddy glow
I traced a path to shame and woe.
A captive to my galling chain,
I've tried to rise, but tried in vain- -
The cup allures and then destroys.
Oh! from its thraldom save the boys.

Take from your streets those traps of hell
Into whose gilded snares I fell.
Oh! freemen, from these foul decoys
Arise, and vote to save the boys.
Oh ye who license men to trade
In draughts that charm and then degrade,
Before ye hear the cry, Too late,
Oh, save the boys from my sad fate.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Signing the Pledge

Do you see this cup-, this tempting cup-,
Its sparkle and its glow?
I tell you this cup has brought to me
A world of shame and woe.

Do you see that woman sad and wan?
One day with joy and pride,
With orange blossoms in her hair,
I claimed her as my bride.

And vowed that I would faithful prove
Till death our lives should part;
I've drenched her soul with floods of grief,
And almost crushed her heart.

Do you see that gray-p;haired mother bend
Beneath her weight of years?
I've filled that aged mother's eyes
With many bitter tears.

Year after year for me she prays,
And tries her child to save;
I've almost brought her gray hairs down
In sorrow to the grave.

Do you see that boy whose wistful eyes
Are gazing on my face?
I've overshadowed his young life
With sorrow and disgrace.

He used to greet me with a smile,
His heart was light and glad;
I've seen him tremble at my voice,
I've made that heart so sad.

Do you see this pledge I've signed to--night?
My mother, wife, and boy
Shall read my purpose on that pledge
And smile through tears of joy.

To know this night, this very night,
I cast the wine-p;cup down,
And from the dust of a sinful life
Lift up my manhood's crown.

The faded face of my young wife
With roses yet shall bloom,
And joy shall light my mother's eyes
On the margin of the tomb.

I have vowed to-p;night my only boy,
With brow so fair and mile,

Shall not be taunted on the streets,
And called a drunkard's child.

Never again shall that young face
Whiten with grief and dread,
Because I've madly staggered home
And sold for drink his bread.

This strong right arm unnerved by rum
Shall battle with my fate;
And peace and comfort crown the home
By drink made desolate.

Like a drowning man, tempest-p;ossed,
Clings to a rocky ledge,
With trembling hands I've learned to grasp
The gospel and the pledge.

A captive bounding from my chain,
I've rent each hateful band,
And by the help of grace divine
A victor hope to stand.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Songs for the People

Let me make the songs for the people,
Songs for the old and young;
Songs to stir like a battle-cry
Wherever they are sung.

Not for the clashing of sabres,
For carnage nor for strife;
But songs to thrill the hearts of men
With more abundant life.

Let me make the songs for the weary,
Amid life's fever and fret,
Till hearts shall relax their tension,
And careworn brows forget.

Let me sing for little children,
Before their footsteps stray,
Sweet anthems of love and duty,
To float o'er life's highway.

I would sing for the poor and aged,
When shadows dim their sight;
Of the bright and restful mansions,
Where there shall be no night.

Our world, so worn and weary,
Needs music, pure and strong,
To hush the jangle and discords
Of sorrow, pain, and wrong.

Music to soothe all its sorrow,
Till war and crime shall cease;
And the hearts of men grown tender
Girdle the world with peace.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Thank God for Little Children

Thank God for little children,
Bright flowers by earth's wayside,
The dancing, joyous lifeboats
Upon life's stormy tide.

Thank God for little children;
When our skies are cold and gray,
They come as sunshine to our hearts,
And charm our cares away.

I almost think the angels,
Who tend life's garden fair,
Drop down the sweet wild blossoms
That bloom around us here.

It seems a breath of heaven
Round many a cradle lies,
And every little baby
Brings a message from the skies.

Dear mothers, guard these jewels.
As sacred offerings meet,
A wealth of household treasures
To lay at Jesus' feet.

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Building

"Build me a house," said the Master,
"But not on the shifting sand,
Mid the wreck and roar of tempests,
A house that will firmly stand.

"I will bring thee windows of agates,
And gates of carbuncles bright,
And thy fairest courts and portals
Shall be filled with love and light.

"Thou shalt build with fadeless rubies,
All fashioned around the throne,
A house that shall last forever,
With Christ as the cornerstone.

"It shall be a royal mansion,
A fair and beautiful thing,
It will be the presence-chamber
Of thy Saviour, Lord and King.

"Thy house shall be bound with pinions
To mansions of rest above,
But grace shall forge all the fetters
With the links and cords of love.

"Thou shalt be free in this mansion
From sorrow and pain of heart,
For the peace of God shall enter,
And never again depart."

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Burdens of All

We may sigh o'er the heavy burdens
Of the black, the brown and white;
But if we all clasped hands together
The burdens would be more light.
How to solve life's saddest problems,
Its weariness, want and woe,
Was answered by One who suffered
In Palestine long ago.

He gave from his heart this precept,
To ease the burdens of men,
"As ye would that others do to you
Do ye even so to them."
Life's heavy, wearisome burdens
Will change to a gracious trust
When men shall learn in the light of God
To be merciful and just.

Where war has sharpened his weapons,
And slavery masterful had,
Let white and black and brown unite
To build the kingdom of God.
And never attempt in madness
To build a kingdom or state,
Through greed of gold or lust of power,
On the crumbling stones of hate.

The burdens will always be heavy,
The sunshine fade into night,
Till mercy and justice shall cement
The black, the brown and the white.
And earth shall answer with gladness,
The herald angel's refrain,
When "Peace on earth, good will to men"
Was the burden of their strain.

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Drunkard's Child

He stood beside his dying child,
With a dim and bloodshot eye;
They'd won him from the haunts of vice
To see his first-born die.
He came with a slow and staggering tread,
A vague, unmeaning stare,
And, reeling, clasped the clammy hand,
So deathly pale and fair.

In a dark and gloomy chamber,
Life ebbing fast away,
On a coarse and wretched pallet,
The dying sufferer lay:
A smile of recognition
Lit up the glazing eye;
"I'm very glad," it seemed to say,
"You've come to see me die."

That smile reached to his callous heart,
It sealed fountains stirred;
He tried to speak, but on his lips
Faltered and died each word.
And burning tears like rain
Poured down his bloated face,
Where guilt, remorse and shame
Had scathed, and left their trace.

"My father!" said the dying child,
(His voice was faint and low,)
"Oh! clasp me closely to your heart,
And kiss me ere I go.
Bright angels beckon me away,
To the holy city fair --
Oh! tell me, Father, ere I go,
Say, will you meet me there?"

He clasped him to his throbbing heart,
"I will! I will!" he said;
His pleading ceased -- the father held
His first-born and his dead!
The marble brow, with golden curls,
Lay lifeless on his breast;
Like sunbeams on the distant clouds
Which line the gorgeous west.

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Dying Bondman

Life was trembling, faintly trembling
On the bondman's latest breath,
And he felt the chilling pressure
Of the cold, hard hand of Death.

He had been an Afric chieftain,
Worn his manhood as a crown;
But upon the field of battle
Had been fiercely stricken down.

He had longed to gain his freedom,
Waited, watched and hoped in vain,
Till his life was slowly ebbing --
Almost broken was his chain.

By his bedside stood the master,
Gazing on the dying one,
Knowing by the dull grey shadows
That life's sands were almost run.

"Master," said the dying bondman,
"Home and friends I soon shall see;
But before I reach my country,
Master write that I am free;

"For the spirits of my fathers
Would shrink back from me in pride,
If I told them at our greeting
I a slave had lived and died;

"Give to me the precious token,
That my kindred dead may see --
Master! write it, write it quickly!
Master! write that I am free!"

At his earnest plea the master
Wrote for him the glad release,
O'er his wan and wasted features
Flitted one sweet smile of peace.

Eagerly he grasped the writing;
"I am free!" at last he said.
Backward fell upon the pillow,
He was free among the dead.

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Dying Queen

"I would meet death awake."

The strength that bore her on for years
Was ebbing fast away,
And o'er the pale and life-p;worn face,
Death's solemn shadows lay.

With tender love and gentle care,
Friends gathered round her bed,
And for her sake each footfall hushed
The echoes of its tread.

They knew the restlessness of death
Through every nerve did creep,
And carefully they tried to lull
The dying Queen to sleep.

In vain she felt Death's icy hand
Her failing heart-strings shake;
And, rousing up, she firmly said,
"I'd meet my God awake."

Awake, I've met the battle's shock,
And born the cares of state;
Nor shall I take your lethean cup,
And slumber at death's gate.

Did I not watch with eyes alert,
The path where foes did tend;
And shall I veil my eyes with sleep,
To meet my God and friend?

Nay, rather from my weary lids,
This heavy slumber shake,
That I may pass the mystic vale,
And meet my God awake.

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Hermit's Sacrifice

From Rome's palaces and villas
Gaily issued forth a throng;
From her humbler habitations
Moved a human tide along.

Haughty dames and blooming maidens,
Men who knew not mercy's sway,
Thronged into the Coliseum
On that Roman holiday.

From the lonely wilds of Asia,
From her jungles far away,
From the distant torrid regions,
Rome had gathered beasts of prey.

Lions restless, roaring, rampant,
Tigers with their stealthy tread,
Leopards bright, and fierce, and fiery,
Met in conflict wild and dread.

Fierce and fearful was the carnage
Of the maddened beasts of prey,
As they fought and rent each other
Urged by men more fierce than they.

Till like muffled thunders breaking
On a vast and distant shore,
Fainter grew the yells of tigers,
And the lions' dreadful roar.

On the crimson-stained arena
Lay the victims of the fight;
Eyes which once had glared with anguish,
Lost in death their baleful light.

Then uprose the gladiators
Armed for conflict unto death,
Waiting for the prefect's signal,
Cold and stern with bated breath.

"Ave Caesar, morituri,
Te, salutant," rose the cry
From the lips of men ill-fated,
Doomed to suffer and to die.

Then began the dreadful contest,
Lives like chaff were thrown away,
Rome with all her pride and power
Butchered for a holiday.

Eagerly the crowd were waiting,
Loud the clashing sabres rang;

When between the gladiators
All unarmed a hermit sprang.

"Cease your bloodshed," cried the hermit,
"On this carnage place your ban;"
But with flashing swords they answered,
"Back unto your place, old man."

From their path the gladiators
Thrust the strange intruder back,
Who between their hosts advancing
Calmly parried their attack.

All undaunted by their weapons,
Stood the old heroic man;
While a maddened cry of anger
Through the vast assembly ran.

"Down with him," cried out the people,
As with thumbs unbent they glared,
Till the prefect gave the signal
That his life should not be spared.

Men grew wild with wrathful passion,
When his fearless words were said
Cruelly they fiercely showered
Stones on his devoted head.

Bruised and bleeding fell the hermit,
Victor in that hour of strife;
Gaining in his death a triumph
That he could not win in life.

Had he uttered on the forum
Struggling thoughts within him born,
Men had jeered his words as madness,
But his deed they could not scorn.

Not in vain had been his courage,
Nor for naught his daring deed;
From his grave his mangled body
Did for wretched captives plead.

From that hour Rome, grown more thoughtful,
Ceased her sport in human gore;
And into her Coliseum
Gladiators came no more.

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Lost Bells

Year after year the artist wrought
With earnest, loving care,
The music flooding all his soul
To pour upon the air.

For this no metal was too rare,
He counted not the cost;
Nor deemed the years in which he toiled
As labor vainly lost.

When morning flushed with crimson light
The golden gates of day,
He longed to fill the air with chimes
Sweet as a matin's lay.

And when the sun was sinking low
Within the distant West,
He gladly heard the bells he wrought
Herald the hour of rest.

The music of a thousand harps
Could never be so dear
As when those solemn chants and thrills
Fell on his list'ning ear.

He poured his soul into their chimes,
And felt his toil repaid;
He called them children of his soul,
His home a'near them made.

But evil days came on apace,
War spread his banner wide,
And from his village snatched away
The artist's love and pride.

At dewy morn and stilly eve
The chimes no more he heard;
With dull and restless agony
His spirit's depths was stirred.

A weary longing filled his soul,
It bound him like a spell;
He left his home to seek the chimes --
The chimes he loved so well.

Where lofty fanes in grandeur rose,
Upon his ear there fell
No music like the long lost chimes
Of his beloved bell.

And thus he wandered year by year.
Touched by the hand of time,

Seeking to hear with anxious heart
Each well remembered chime.

And to that worn and weary heart
There came a glad surcease:
He heard again the dear old chimes,
And smiled and uttered peace.

"The chimes! the chimes!" the old man cried,
"I hear their tones at last;"
A sudden rapture filled his heart,
And all his cares were past.

Yes, peace had come with death's sweet calm,
His journeying was o'er,
The weary, restless wanderer
Had reached the restful shore.

It may be that he met again,
Enfolded in the air,
The dear old chimes beside the gates
Where all is bright and fair;

That he who crossed and bowed his head
When Angelus was sung
In clearer light touched golden harps
By angel fingers strung.

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Martyr of Alabama

"Tim Thompson, a little negro boy, was asked to dance for the amusement of some white toughs. He refused, saying he was a church member. One of the men knocked him down with a club and then danced upon his prostrate form. He then shot the boy in the hip. The boy is dead; his murderer is still at large." -- News Item.

He lifted up his pleading eyes,
And scanned each cruel face,
Where cold and brutal cowardice
Had left its evil trace.

It was when tender memories
Round Beth'lem's manger lay,
And mothers told their little ones
Of Jesu's natal day.

And of the Magi from the East
Who came their gifts to bring,
And bow in rev'rence at the feet
Of Salem's new-born King.

And how the herald angels sang
The choral song of peace,
That war should close his wrathful lips,
And strife and carnage cease.

At such an hour men well may hush
Their discord and their strife,
And o'er that manger clasp their hands
With gifts to brighten life.

Alas! that in our favored land,
That cruelty and crime
Should cast their shadows o'er a day.
The fairest pearl of time.

A dark-browed boy had drawn anear
A band of savage men,
Just as a hapless lamb might stray
Into a tiger's den.

Cruel and dull, they saw in him
For sport an evil chance,
And then demanded of the child
To give to them a dance.

"Come dance for us," the rough men said;
"I can't," the child replied,
"I cannot for the dear Lord's sake,
Who for my sins once died."

Tho' they were strong and he was weak,

He wouldn't his Lord deny.
His life lay in their cruel hands,
But he for Christ could die.

Heard they aright? Did that brave child
Their mandates dare resist?
Did he against their stern commands
Have courage to insist?

Then recklessly a man arose,
And dealt a fearful blow.
He crushed the portals of that life,
And laid the brave child low.

And trampled on his prostrate form,
As on a broken toy;
Then danced with careless, brutal feet,
Upon the murdered boy.

Christians! behold that martyred child!
His blood cries from the ground;
Before the sleepless eye of God,
He shows each gaping wound.

Oh! Church of Christ arise! arise!
Lest crimson stain thy hand,
When God shall inquisition make
For blood shed in the land.

Take sackcloth of the darkest hue,
And shroud the pulpits round;
Servants of him who cannot lie
Sit mourning on the ground.

Let holy horror blanch each brow,
Pale every cheek with fears,
And rocks and stones, if ye could speak,
Ye well might melt to tears.

Through every fane send forth a cry,
Of sorrow and regret,
Nor in an hour of careless ease
Thy brother's wrongs forget.

Veil not thine eyes, nor close thy lips,
Nor speak with bated breath;
This evil shall not always last,
The end of it is death.

Avert the doom that crime must bring
Upon a guilty land;
Strong in the strength that God supplies,

For truth and justice stand.

For Christless men, with reckless hands,
Are sowing round thy path
The tempests wild that yet shall break
In whirlwinds of God's wrath.

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Night of Death

Tw'as a night of dreadful horror, --
Death was sweeping through the land;
And the wings of dark destruction
Were outstretched from strand to strand

Strong men's hearts grew faint with terror,
As the tempest and the waves
Wrecked their homes and swept them downward,
Suddenly to yawning graves.

'Mid the wastes of ruined households,
And the tempest's wild alarms,
Stood a terror-stricken mother
With a child within her arms.

Other children huddled 'round her,
Each one nestling in her heart;
Swift in thought and swift in action,
She at least from one must part.

Then she said unto her daughter,
"Strive to save one child from death."
"Which one?" said the anxious daughter,
As she stood with bated breath.

Oh! the anguish of that mother;
What despair was in her eye!
All her little ones were precious;
Which one should she leave to die?

Then outspoke the brother Bennie:
"I will take the little one."
"No," exclaimed the anxious mother;
"No, my child, it can't be done."

"See! my boy, the waves are rising,
Save yourself and leave the child!"
"I will trust in Christ," he answered;
Grasped the little one and smiled.

Through the roar of wind and waters
Ever and anon she cried;
But throughout the night of terror
Never Bennie's voice replied.

But above the waves' wild surging
He had found a safe retreat,
As if God had sent an angel,
Just to guide his wandering feet.

When the storm had spent its fury,
And the sea gave up its dead

She was mourning for her loved ones,
Lost amid that night of dread.

While her head was bowed in anguish,
On her ear there fell a voice,
Bringing surcease to her sorrow,
Bidding all her heart rejoice.

"Didn't I tell you true?" said Bennie,
And his eyes were full of light,
"When I told you God would help me
Through the dark and dreadful night?"

And he placed the little darling
Safe within his mother's arms,
Feeling Christ had been his guardian,
'Mid the dangers and alarms.

Oh! for faith so firm and precious,
In the darkest, saddest night,
Till life's gloom-encircled shadows
Fade in everlasting light.

And upon the mount of vision
We our loved and lost shall greet,
With earth's wildest storms behind us,
And its cares beneath our feet.

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Pure in Heart Shall See God

They shall see Him in the crimson flush
Of morning's early light,
In the drapery of sunset,
Around the couch of night.

When the clouds drop down their fatness,
In late and early rain,
They shall see His glorious footprints
On valley, hill and plain.

They shall see Him when the cyclone
Breathes terror through the land;
They shall see Him 'mid the murmurs
Of zephyrs soft and bland.

They shall see Him when the lips of health,
Breath vigor through each nerve,
When pestilence clasps hands with death,
His purposes to serve.

They shall see Him when the trembling earth
Is rocking to and fro;
They shall see Him in the order
The seasons come and go.

They shall see Him when the storms of war
Sweep wildly through the land;
When peace descends like gentle dew
They still shall see His hand.

They shall see Him in the city
Of gems and pearls of light,
They shall see Him in his beauty,
And walk with Him in white.

To living founts their feet shall tend,
And Christ shall be their guide,
Beloved of God, their rest shall be
In safety by His side.

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Refiner's Gold

He stood before my heart's closed door,
And asked to enter in;
But I had barred the passage o'er
By unbelief and sin.

He came with nail-prints in his hands,
To set my spirit free;
With wounded feet he trod a path
To come and sup with me.

He found me poor and brought me gold,
The fire of love had tried,
And garments whitened by his blood,
My wretchedness to hide.

The glare of life had dimmed my eyes,
Its glamour was too bright.
He came with ointment in his hands
To heal my darkened sight.

He knew my heart was tempest-tossed,
By care and pain oppressed;
He whispered to my burdened heart,
Come unto me and rest.

He found me weary, faint and worn,
On barren mountains cold;
With love's constraint he drew me on,
To shelter in his fold.

Oh! foolish heart, how slow wert thou
To welcome thy dear guest,
To change thy weariness and care
For comfort, peace and rest.

Close to his side, oh! may I stay,
Just to behold his face,
Till I shall wear within my soul
The image of his grace.

The grace that changes hearts of stone
To tenderness and love,
And bids us run with willing feet
Unto his courts above.

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Slave Mother

Heard you that shriek? It rose
So wildly on the air,
It seemed as if a burden'd heart
Was breaking in despair.

Saw you those hands so sadly clasped --
The bowed and feeble hand --
The shuddering of that fragile form --
That look of grief and dread?

Saw you the sad, imploring eye?
Its every glance was pain,
As if a storm of agony
Were sweeping through the brain.

She is a mother, pale with fear,
Her boy clings to her side,
And in her kirtle vainly tries
His trembling form to hide.

He is not hers, although she bore
For him a mother's pains;
He is not hers, although her blood
Is coursing through his veins!

He is not hers, for cruel hands
May rudely tear apart
The only wreath of household love
That binds her breaking heart.

His love has been a joyous light
That o'er her pathway smiled,
A fountain gushing ever new,
Amid life's desert wild.

His lightest word has been a tone
Of music round her heart,
Their lives a streamlet blent in one --
Oh, Father! must they part?

They tear him from her circling arms,
Her last and fond embrace.
Oh! never more may her sad eyes
Gaze on his mournful face.

No marvel, then, these bitter shrieks
Disturb the listening air;
She is a mother, and her heart
Is breaking in despair.

Frances Ellen Watkins

The Sparrow's Fall

Too frail to soar -- a feeble thing --
It fell to earth with fluttering wing;
But God, who watches over all,
Beheld that little sparrow's fall.

'Twas not a bird with plumage gay,
Filling the air with its morning lay;
'Twas not an eagle bold and strong,
Borne on the tempest's wing along.

Only a brown and weesome thing,
With drooping head and listless wing;
It could not drift beyond His sight
Who marshals the splendid stars of night.

Its dying chirp fell on His ears,
Who tunes the music of the spheres,
Who hears the hungry lion's call,
And spreads a table for us all.

Its mission of song at last is done,
No more will it greet the rising sun;
That tiny bird has found a rest
More calm than its mother's downy breast

Oh, restless heart, learn thou to trust
In God, so tender, strong and just;
In whose love and mercy everywhere
His humblest children have a share.

If in love He numbers ev'ry hair,
Whether the strands be dark or fair,
Shall we not learn to calmly rest,
Like children, on our Father's breast?

Frances Ellen Watkins

Then and Now

"Build me a nation," said the Lord.
The distant nations heard the word,
Build me a nation true and strong,
Bar out the old world's hate and wrong;
For men had traced with blood and tears
The trail of weary wasting years,
And torn and bleeding martyrs trod
Through fire and torture up to God.

While in the hollow of his hand
God hid the secret of our land,
Men warred against their fiercest foes,
And kingdoms fell and empires rose,
Till, weary of the old world strife,
Men sought for broader, freer life,
And plunged into the ocean's foam
To find another, better home.

And, like a vision fair and bright
The new world broke upon their sight.
Men grasped the prize, grew proud and strong,
And cursed the land with crime and wrong.
The Indian stood despoiled of lands,
The Negro bound with servile bands,
Oppressed through weary years of toil,
His blood and tears bedewed the soil.

Then God arose in dreadful wrath,
And judgment streamed around his path;
His hand the captive's fetters broke,
His lightnings shattered every yoke.
As Israel through the Red sea trod,
Led by the mighty hand of God,
They passed to freedom through a flood,
Whose every wave and surge was blood.

And slavery, with its crime and shame,
Went down in wrath and blood and flame
The land was billowed-o'er with graves
Where men had lived and died as slaves.
Four and thirty years -- what change since
then!
Beings once chattles now are men;
Over the gloom of slavery's night,
Has flashed the dawn of freedom's light.

To-day no mother with anguish wild
Kneels and implores that her darling child
Shall not be torn from her bleeding heart,
With its quivering tendrils rent apart.
The father may soothe his child to sleep,
And watch his slumbers calm and deep.

No tyrant's tread will disturb his rest
Where freedom dwells as a welcome guest.

His walls may be bare of pictured grace,
His fireside the lowliest place;
But the wife and children sheltered there
Are his to defend and guard with care.
Where haughty tyrants once bore rule
Are ballot-box and public school.
The old slave-pen of former days
Gives place to fanes of prayer and praise.

To-night we would bring our meed of praise
To noble friends of darker days;
The men and women crowned with light,
The true and tried in our gloomy night.
To Lundy, whose heart was early stirred
To speak for freedom an earnest word;
To Garrison, valiant, true and strong,
Whose face was as flint against our wrong.

And Phillips, the peerless, grand and brave,
A tower of strength to the outcast slave.
Earth has no marble too pure and white
To enrol his name in golden light.
Our Douglass, too, with his massive brain,
Who plead our cause with his broken chain,
And helped to hurl from his bloody seat
The curse that writhed and died at his feet.

And Governor Andrew, who, looking back,
Saw none he despised, though poor and black;
And Harriet Beecher, whose glowing pen
Corroded the chains of fettered men.
To-night with greenest laurels we'll crown
North Elba's grave where sleeps John Brown,
Who made the gallows an altar high,
And showed how a brave old man could die.
And Lincoln, our martyred President,
Who returned to his God with chains he had rent.*
And Sumner, amid death's icy chill,
Leaving to Hoar his Civil Rights Bill.
And let us remember old underground,
With all her passengers northward bound,
The train that ran till it ceased to pay,
With all her dividends given away.
Nor let it be said that we have forgot
The women who stood with Lucretia Mott;
Nor her who to the world was known
By the simple name of Lucy stone.
A tribute unto a host of others
Who knew that men though black were brothers,

Who battled against our nation's sin,
Whose graves are thick whose ranks are thin.
Oh, people chastened in the fire,
To nobler, grander things aspire;

In the new era of your life,
Bring love for hate, and peace for strife;
Upon your hearts this vow record
That ye will build unto the Lord
A nobler future, true and grand,
To strengthen, crown and bless the land.
A higher freedom ye may gain
Than that which comes from a riven chain;
Freedom your native land to bless
With peace, and love and righteousness,
As dreams that are past, a tale all told,
Are the days when men were bought and sold;
Now God be praised from sea to sea,
Our flag floats o'er a country free.

Frances Ellen Watkins

To the Union Savers of Cleveland

Men of Cleveland, had a vulture
Sought a timid dove for prey
Would you not, with human pity,
Drive the gory bird away?

Had you seen a feeble lambkin,
Shrinking from a wolf so bold,
Would ye not to shield the trembler,
In your arms have made its fold?

But when she, a hunted sister,
Stretched her hands that ye might save,
Colder far than Zembla's regions,
Was the answer that ye gave.

On the Union's bloody altar,
Was your hapless victim laid;
Mercy, truth, and justice shuddered,
But your hands would give no aid.

And ye sent her back to the torture,
Robbed of freedom and of fright.
Thrust the wretched, captive stranger.
Back to slavery's gloomy night.

Back where brutal men may trample,
On her honor and her fame;
And unto her lips so dusky,
Press the cup of woe and shame.

There is blood upon our city,
Dark and dismal is the stain;
And your hands would fail to cleanse it,
Though Lake Erie ye should drain.

There's a curse upon your Union,
Fearful sounds are in the air;
As if thunderbolts were framing,
Answers to the bondsman's prayer.

Ye may offer human victims,
Like the heathen priests of old;
And may barter manly honor
For the Union and for gold.

But ye can not stay the whirlwind,
When the storm begins to break;
And our God doth rise in judgment,
For the poor and needy's sake.

And, your sin-cursed, guilty Union,
Shall be shaken to its base,

Till ye learn that simple justice,
Is the right of every race.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Truth

A rock, for ages, stern and high,
Stood frowning 'gainst the earth and sky,
And never bowed his haughty crest
When angry storms around him prest.
Morn, springing from the arms of night,
Had often bathed his brow with light.
And kissed the shadows from his face
With tender love and gentle grace.

Day, pausing at the gates of rest,
Smiled on him from the distant West,
And from her throne the dark-browed Night
Threw round his path her softest light.
And yet he stood unmoved and proud,
Nor love, nor wrath, his spirit bowed;
He bared his brow to every blast
And scorned the tempest as it passed.

One day a tiny, humble seed --
The keenest eye would hardly heed --
Fell trembling at that stern rock's base,
And found a lowly hiding-place.
A ray of light, and drop of dew,
Came with a message, kind and true;
They told her of the world so bright,
Its love, its joy, and rosy light,
And lured her from her hiding-place,
To gaze upon earth's glorious face.

So, peeping timid from the ground,
She clasped the ancient rock around,
And climbing up with childish grace,
She held him with a close embrace;
Her clinging was a thing of dread;
Where'er she touched a fissure spread,
And he who'd breasted many a storm
Stood frowning there, a mangled form;
A Truth, dropped in the silent earth,
May seem a thing of little worth,
Till, spreading round some mighty wrong,
It saps its pillars proud and strong,
And o'er the fallen ruin weaves
The brightest blooms and fairest leaves.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Vashti

She leaned her head upon her hand
And heard the King's decree --
"My lords are feasting in my halls;
Bid Vashti come to me.

"I've shown the treasures of my house,
My costly jewels rare,
But with the glory of her eyes
No rubies can compare.

"Adorn'd and crown'd I'd have her come,
With all her queenly grace,
And, 'mid my lords and mighty men,
Unveil her lovely face.

"Each gem that sparkles in my crown,
Or glitters on my throne,
Grows poor and pale when she appears,
My beautiful, my own!"

All waiting stood the chamberlains
To hear the Queen's reply.
They saw her cheek grow deathly pale,
But light flash'd to her eye:

"Go, tell the King," she proudly said,
"That I am Persia's Queen,
And by his crowds of merry men
I never will be seen.

"I'll take the crown from off my head
And tread it 'neath my feet,
Before their rude and careless gaze
My shrinking eyes shall meet.

"A queen unveil'd before the crowd! --
Upon each lip my name! --
Why, Persia's women all would blush
And weep for Vashti's shame!

"Go back!" she cried, and waved her hand,
And grief was in her eye:
"Go, tell the King," she sadly said,
"That I would rather die."

They brought her message to the King;
Dark flash'd his angry eye;
'Twas as the lightning ere the storm
Hath swept in fury by.

Then bitterly outspoke the King,
Through purple lips of wrath --

"What shall be done to her who dares
To cross your monarch's path?"

Then spake his wily counsellors --
"O King of this fair land!
From distant Ind to Ethiop,
All bow to thy command.

"But if, before thy servants' eyes,
This thing they plainly see,
That Vashti doth not heed thy will
Nor yield herself to thee,

"The women, restive 'neath our rule,
Would learn to scorn our name,
And from her deed to us would come
Reproach and burning shame.

"Then, gracious King, sign with thy hand
This stern but just decree,
That Vashti lay aside her crown,
Thy Queen no more to be."

She heard again the King's command,
And left her high estate;
Strong in her earnest womanhood,
She calmly met her fate,

And left the palace of the King,
Proud of her spotless name --
A woman who could bend to grief,
But would not bow to shame.

Frances Ellen Watkins

Wanderer's Return

My home is so glad, my heart is so light,
My wandering boy has returned to-p;night.
He is blighted and bruised, I know, by sin,
But I am so glad to welcome him in.

The child of my tenderest love and care
Has broken away from the tempter's snare;
tonight my heart is o'erflowing with joy,
I have found again my wandering boy.

My heart has been wrung with a thousand fears,
Mine eyes have been drenched with the bitterest tears;
Like shadows that fade are my past alarms,
My boy is enclasped in his mother's arms.

The streets were not safe for my darling child;
Where sin with its evil attractions smiled.
But his wandering feet have ceased to roam,
And tonight my wayward boy is at home-.

At home with the mother that loves him best,
With the hearts that have ached with sad unrest,
With the hearts that are thrilling with untold joy
Because we have found our wandering boy.

In that wretched man so haggard and wild
I only behold my returning child,
And the blissful tears from my eyes that start
Are the overflow of a happy heart.

I have trodden the streets in lonely grief,
I have sought in prayer for my sole relief;
But the depths of my heart tonight are stirred,
I know that the mother's prayer has been heard.

If the mother-love be so strong and great
For her child, sin-weary and desolate,
Oh what must the love of the Father be
For souls who have wandered like you and me!

Frances Ellen Watkins