

Classic Poetry Series

Edward William Thomson

- poems -

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Edward William Thomson(12 February 1849 – 1924)

Edward William Thomson (February 12, 1849 – 1924) was a Canadian journalist and writer.

He was born in Peel County, Ontario, the grandson of Edward William Thomson, a member of the York militia who was a member of the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada. When Thompson was 14, he was sent to Philadelphia to work in a mercantile office; he enlisted in the Union Army in October 1864 (at 15), and saw action during the American Civil War as a trooper in the 3rd Pennsylvania on returned to Canada when discharged in August, 1865. He saw combat again the next year, at the Battle of Ridgeway during the Fenian Raids.

Thomson took up civil engineering in 1867, and worked as a Land Surveyor from 1872 to 1878. In 1878, at the invitation of publisher George Brown, he became an editorial writer for *The Toronto Globe*. In 1891 he joined the staff of *The Youth's Companion*, and worked there for the next 11 years. He wrote a book of short stories, *Old Man Savarin and Other Stories* (1895), and one of poetry, *The Many-Mansioned House and Other Poems* (1909).

A Canadian Reply

IF ancient England nobly sing,
 We hearken to the song.
Her words ten million echoes bring
 To urge the strain along;
It rallies farm and market-square,

 If so the note be true,—
But what if every verse declare
 But one inspired Yahoo?

Fifty thousand horse and foot
 Trail back from Table Bay

In shame to recollect the toot
 To which they sailed away;
Five times fifty thousand more
 The fight could barely save,
With aid from every British shore

 To quell the burgher brave.

Through forests dim, o'er myriad lakes,
 Where sea-wide prairies swell,
It seemed our hearts were like to break;
 What time the Shame befell

Of "I regret I must report
 Surrendering the Nek,"
And "Guns all captured," "No support,"
 Death dogging kop and trek.

From stroke of axe, from herded ranch,

 From league-long furrows black,
We sent our children stark and staunch
 To tread the battle track;
All bound by grace on England's part
 To help her hoe the row,

But never hatred in their heart
Against the hero foe.

Majuba Hill! Oh, yes, we grieve
Full sorely at the name,
But what hyena can conceive

We would revenge the blame?
Ye braves who stormed a mountain crest
To fight with five to one,
By God, praise thunders in the breast
To think such deed was done!

And is it England's voice declares
That yielded men whose souls
Confronted all that valor dares
Must lack the freeman's polls?
Must lack the balm that soothed away

Canadian memories sore,
And drew to England's battle day
As friends the foes of yore?

Now bear the strain to London town,
Oh, winds of England's main,

And tell the heirs of old renown
We lilt their old refrain:
"Full measure heaped and running o'er
Of every freeman's right
Subdues the heart of heroes more

Than all the storms of fight."

Edward William Thomson

A Veteran Cavalryman's Tale

LOW in the fertile vale by Tunstall's Run
A rainy rifle skirmish closed the day.

Beyond the April-swollen, narrow stream,
Lee's stubborn rearguard veteran raggedies
Lay prone amid last year's tobacco stalks,

Shooting hot Enfields straight from red-mud pools,
While from their rear four angry howitzers,
High set on Armistead's Plantation Hill,
Flamed shrieking shell o'erhead across the bridge
That Custer raged to seize before black night

Should close his daylong toil in mud and rain.

Thrice did we gallop vainly at the planks,
Then vainly strove on foot the pass to win,
Till through the drizzling dark but flashes showed
The points where sullen rifles opposite rang,

And back we straggled, stumbling up the slope
Where Union buglers shrilled the bivouac.

Ninety unanswering voices told our loss,
While silence ruled so deep we heard the rain's
Small rataplan on ponchos and on hats,

Until the crackling rail-fence Company fires
Lighted the piney length of Custer's Ridge.

That night John Woolston served as orderly,
The John who strokes to-day his white old beard
And sees himself, scarce downy of the lips,

Eyeing young long-haired Custer through the smoke
Across a flaming pyre, that steaming slaves
Of Tunstall fed afresh with Tunstall rails.

Down in the shrouded vale about the Run

Three score of boys John Woolston knew in life

Lay scattered round an old-hoed, red-mud field,
Peaceful with scores of veteran boys in gray,
Whose bodily particles were resurrect
As corn for bread, and leaf for smokers' pipes,
Before the Americans of now were born

To share, through common-soldier sacrifice,
The comrade Union of the States to-day.

A rail-heap seated Custer with his aide,
Their drowsing bugler opposite leaned on John,
While overhead the swaying boughs of pine

Creaked in an upward-rushing draught of warmth,
And from our solitary surgeons' tent
Came smothered ecstasies of mortal pain,
And in the outer darkness horses stamped
And bit and squealed and enviously eyed

The huddling regiments about the fires,
Pipes lit, hats slouched to fend the rain and glare.

As Woolston watched lean Custer's martial face,
It seemed the hero heard not flame nor bough,
Nor marked the groans, nor knew at what he stared,

So deep intent his mind ranged o'er the Run
And up the opposite-sloping Arm'stead hill,
As questioning if the murderous howitzers
Would hold the bridge at dawn, or march by night,
And so, perchance, next eve, afar repeat

The dusky fight, and cost him ninety more
He would fain range about the field of fields
Where lion Lee, enringed, must stand at bay,
Choosing to greatly die, or greatlier yield.

At last he shook his aide. "Get up! Go bring

A prisoner here." And when the head-hurt man

In butternut stood boldly to his eyes,
He asked one word alone: "Your general's name?"

"My general's name!" stared Butternut, then proud,
As 't were a cubit added to his height,

He spoke,— "My general's name is R. E. Lee!"

"I mean who fights Lee's rearguard?" Custer said,
"Who held the bridge to-night? His name alone."

And then the bitter man in butternut
Smiled ghastly grim, and smacked as tasting blood;

"It's General Henry Tunstall, his own self,
And if you find our 'Fighting Tunce' alive
When daylight comes, there'll be red hell to pay
For every plank that spans that trifling bridge."

"Good man!" said Custer. "Spoke right soldierly!

Here—take this cloak—to save your wound from rain":
And gave the brave the poncho that he wore.

Then up flamed Butternut: "Say, General,
You're Yank, and yet, by God, you're white clean through.
And so I kind of feel to tell you why

Them planks will cost you so almighty dear.
You're camped to-night on 'Fighting Tunce's' land;
Cross yonder, on the hill his guns defend,
Is where his lady lives, his promised wife,—
God bless her heart!—Miss Mary Armistead.

She's there herself to-night—she'd never run.
Her widowed father fell at Fredericksburg,
Three brothers died in arms, one limps with Lee.
Herself has worked their darkies right along
Four years, to raise our army pork and pone,

And she herself not twenty-four to-day!

Will Tunstall fight for her? Say, General,
Your heart can guess what hell you'll face at day."

"You're right, my man," said Custer. "That will do."
And off they marched the ponchoed prisoner.

"By heaven!" spoke Custer then, and faced his aide,
"I know why Tunstall's gunners spared the bridge.
It's ten to one he means to swarm across,
After his hungry Johnnies get some rest,
To strike us here and hard before the dawn.

His heart was forged in fire and enterprise!
His bully-boys will back his wildest dare!
Lieutenant—pick me out two first-rate men—
Morton for one, if 'Praying Mort' 's alive—
Tell them I go myself to post vedettes.

Now—mind—I want a pair of wideawakes.—
You, Orderly, go saddle up my bay."

"I want to go with Morton," blurted John.

"You! Call yourself a wideawake, my lad?"

"Yes, sir," said Woolston.—

"But you're just a boy."

"Well, General, Uncle Sam enlisted me
For man, all right." Then Custer smiled, and mused.
"Farm boy?" he asked.—

"Exactly what I am."

"All right," he said. "If once I see he's keen,
A likely farm boy's just the man for me.

When back his aide returned the General spoke:
"It's barely possible we march to-night.
You'll see that every man about the fires
Splits torch stuff plenty from the pitchy rails."
And with the words he reined toward Arm'stead's Hill.

Down hill, beyond the flares, beyond the pines,

Beyond his foothill pickets, through the rain,
He led as if his eyes beheld the way;
Yet they, who followed close his bay's fast walk
By sound alone, saw not their horses' heads,

Saw not the hand held up to blotch the gloom.
No breath of wind. The ear heard only hoofs
Splashing and squattering in the puddle field,
Or heard the saddle-leathers scarcely creak,
Or little clanks of curbing bit and chain.

Scattered about whatever way they trod
Must be the clay that marched but yesterday,
And nervously John listened, lest some soul
Faint lingering in the dark immensity
Might call its longing not to die alone.

Sudden a crash, a plunge, a kicking horse,
Then "Praying Morton" whispering cautiously:
"A post-hole, General! My horse is done.
His off fore-leg is broke, as sure as faith!
Oh, what a dispensation of the Lord—"

"Hish-sh. Save the rest!" said Custer. "Broke is broke!
Get back to camp whatever way you can."

"Me, General! What use to post the boy?
You, Woolston, you get back. I'll take your horse."

"Not much, you won't," said Woolston angrily.

And Custer chuckled crisply in the dark.
"Enough," he ordered. "Morton, get you back!
Be cautious when you near my picket post,
Or else they'll whang to hit your pious voice,
And I may lose a first-rate soldier man."

Then Morton, prayerful, mild, and mollified:
"The merciful man would end a beast in pain—
One shot."

"No, too much noise. You get right back!
Horses, like men, must bear the luck of war."

III

Again the plashing hoofs through endless drip,

Until the solid footing of their beasts
Bespoke them trampling in a turnpike road,
And Custer reined with: "Hish-sh, my man—come here.
Now listen." Then John's ears became aware
Of small articulations in the dark,

Queer laughters, as of countless impish glee,
And one pervasive, low, incessant hum,
All strange till Custer spoke: "You hear the Run?
All right! Now, mind exactly what I say.
But no. First hold my horse. I'll feel the bridge.

Maybe I'll draw their fire; but stay right here."

On foot he went, and came, so stealthily
John could not hear the steps ten feet away.
"All right!" He mounted. "Not one plank removed."
Then, communing rather with himself than John:

"No picket there! It's strange! But surely Tunce
Would smash the bridge unless he meant to cross
And rip right back at me in dark or dawn.
Now, private—mind exactly what I say;
You'll listen here for trampers on the bridge,

And if you hear them reach the mud this side,
With others following on the planks behind,
You'll get right back—stick to the turnpike, mind—
And tell my challenging road-guard picket post
They're coming strong. That's all you've got to do

Unless—" he paused—"unless some negro comes
Bringing the news they're falling back on Lee;
Then—if he's sure—you'll fire four carbine shots

Right quick—and stay until you see me come.
You understand?”

“I do. I’m not to shoot

In case they’re coming on. But if they’re off,
I’ll fire four shots as fast as I can pull.”

“That’s right. Be sure you keep your wits awake.
Listen for prowlers—both your ears well skinned.”

John heard the spattering bay’s fast-walking hoofs

Fainter and fainter through the steady pour,
And then no sound, except the beating rain’s
Small pit-a-pat on poncho, and the Run
Drifting its babbling through the blinding mirk.

How long he sat, no guessing in the slow

Monotony of night, that never changed
Save when the burdened horse replaced his hoofs,
Or seemed to raise or droop his weary head,
Or when some shiver shook the weary boy,
Though sheltered dry from aching neck to spurs:

A shiver at the dream of dead men nigh,
Beaten with rain, and merging with the mud,
And staring up with open, sightless eyes
That served as little cups for tiny pools
That trickled in and out incessantly;

A shiver at the thought of home and bed,
And mother tucking in her boy at night,
And how she’d shiver could she see him there—
Longing more sore than John to wrap him warm;

A shiver from the tense expectancy

Of warning sounds, while yet no sound he heard

Save springtime water lapping on the pier,
Or tumbling often from the clayey banks
Lumps that splashed lifelike in the turbid flood.

His aching ears were strained for other sounds,

And still toward Arm'stead's Hill they ached and strained,
While, in the evening fight of memory,
Again he saw the broad Plantation House
Whene'er a brassy howitzer spouted flame,
Suddenly lighting up its firing men,

Who vanished dim again in streaking rain;
And then, once more, the Enfields in the vale
Thrust cores of fire, until some lightning piece
Again lit all the Arm'stead buildings clear.

From visioning swift that wide Plantation House

John's mind went peering through its fancied rooms.
And who were there? And did they sleep, or wake?
Until he found Miss Mary Armistead
And General Henry Tunstall in the dream.

It seemed those lovers could not, could not part,

But murmured low of parting in the dawn,
Since he must march and fight, and she must stay
To hold the home, whatever war might send—
And they might never, never meet again.

So good she looked, described by Butternut's

"God bless her heart," and he so soldier bold
In "fire and enterprise," by Custer's words,—
So true and sorrowful they talked in dream,
Of Love and Life that walk the ways of Death,—
The dreamer's under lip went quivering.

Until the startled horse put up his head
And stood, John knew, stark stiff with listening

To that kalatta-klank beyond the Run,
As if some cowbell clattered far away
Once, twice, and thrice, to cease as suddenly.

Then John, once more keen Yankee soldier boy,
Gathered his rein, half threw his carbine breech,
Made sure again of cartridge ready there,
Felt for the flap of holster at his thigh,
Listened alert for that most dubious bell,—

Thinking of bushwhackers in campfire tales
Impressively related to recruits;

How, in deep night, some lone vedette might hear
An innocent-seeming klatta-klatta-klank,
And never dream but that some roaming cow

Ranged through the covering woodland nigh his post,—
Till—suddenly—a bullet laid him low!
Or, perhaps, guerillas crept before the bell,
Their footsteps deadened by its klatta-klank,
Till, rushing in, they clubbed the youngster down,

So “gobbling” him unheard, a prisoner,
Then, sneaking through the gap, on sleeping posts,
They killed, and killed, and killed—so horridly
That green recruities’ hairs would stand on end.

John, shrewdly discounting the veteran yarns,

Yet knew full well that klatta-klatta-klank,
Which came again, might mean the enemy
Intent on stratagem to search the dark,
Tempting some shot or challenge to reveal
If any Union picket held the bridge.

Or else the steady-coming, clanging knell
Might signify some party far advanced,
Creeping all noiselessly, and listening keen
For any sound of Custer, horse or man.

Even it might be that the ridgy road

Ten yards, or five, or three from where he sat,
Concealed some foeman hungry for a move
That might betray precisely where their rush
Should be, to seize his tightened bridle-rein,
Or grasp the poncho's skirt to pull him down.

John half inclined to lift the neck-yoke off
And lay the armless cloak on saddle-bow,
Lest it encumber him in sudden fight,
Or give the foremost foe a strangling hold.
Yet sat he motionless, since such a sound

As slicking glaze might guide an enemy.
And still the klatta-klatta-klank came on.

It surely neared the bridge! Yet John sat still,
With Custer's orders clearly in his brain,
Waiting to learn the meaning of the thing.

It trod the planks. It moved with solid hoofs,
Hoofs that declared to farm-bred Woolston's ear
Most unmistakably an actual cow!
But then! Oh, mystery! For rolling wheels
Rumbled upon the planking of the Run!

As up went Woolston's horse's head asnort,
Upon the bridge the other beast stood still.
The clanking ceased. Again no mortal sound
Blent with the tittering tumult of the stream.
Until a clear young voice of lady tone

Inquired in startled accents,—“Who goes there?”
Yet John, in utter wonder, spoke no word.
“If there's a Yankee cavalry picket there,”
The voice proclaimed, “I wish to pass the line.”
And still the Yankee knew not what to say,

Since Custer's orders covered not the case,

And since, alas, the wondrous lady voice
Might possibly denote some stratagem.
And yet—suppose 't was only just a girl!
John sickened with a sense of foolishness.

“Go on,” she cried, and seemed to slap her beast,
Which moved some doubtful steps, and stopped again.
Then calmly scornful came the lady tones:—
“Oh, Mister Yankee picket, have no fear
To speak right up. No dangerous man am I.

Only a woman. And she's got no gun,
No pistol, bayonet, knife, or anything.
And all she asks is just to pass your line,
A prisoner if you like.” But there she broke,
Or choked, and wailed, “O God, it's life or death!

Oh, soldier, soldier, let me pass the line.”

So John, half desperate, called, “Young lady, come.
I don't care what the orders are. Come on.”

“Get up,” she slapped again. But then she called:—
“My cow won't move! She sees you, I suppose,

All armed and threatening in the middle road.
Please go away. Or ride a bit aside;
Perhaps then she'll come. Yes, now she moves along.
You'll pass me through?—But are there surgeons there
Where, hours ago, I saw your campfires glow?

If not, I may as well turn back again.”

“No need,” said John. “We've got a surgeon there.
But what's the trouble, Miss? Yourself been hurt?”

“The trouble is I've got a soldier here
With desperate wounds—if still alive he be.

Oh, help me save him.” And she broke again.

"Why, Miss," said Woolston, melting at the heart,
"Was there no surgeon on the Arm'stead Hill
To help your wounded live?"

"No, none," she said,
"No man remained. At eve the negroes fled,

Or followed close behind the wagon train
He urged, with every soldier, back toward Lee.
We two were left alone. I thought you'd come.
For hours and hours I waited, all in vain.
His life was flowing fast. One chance remained.

We women placed him in our best barouche,
The only vehicle our rearguard spared.
Alone I hitched this cow, the only beast
I kept from rations for our starving men.
I led her here. Oh, soldier, help me soon

To pass your lines, and reach a surgeon's care."

Then Custer's orders flashed again to John;—
"Hold hard one moment, Miss, I've got to shoot."
The carbine rang. "Thank God, that's done," said John.
"We'll wait right here. A surgeon's sure to come

With Custer's march, for march I guess he will.
He'll turn you round, I think, and see you home.
I s'pose your name's Miss Mary Armistead?
I hope that's not your General wounded there."
She could but choke, or weep, and spoke no word.

It seemed long hours they waited silently,
Save once John heard the hidden carriage creak,
And guessed she rose beside the dying man
Beneath the drumlike pattering, sheltering hood.

At last, the bugles blared on Custer's Ridge.

Then, far away, a lengthening stream of flare
Came round the distant, curtaining screen of pines,
And down the hill the torches, borne on high

By fifteen hundred horsemen, formed a slope
Of flame that moved behind the bugles' call,

Till on the level road a fiery front
Tossing, yet solid-seeming, walked along.
And in the van rode Custer, beardless, tall,
His long hair dabbled in the streaming rain.

John rode to meet him. There he called the halt,

And came, with twenty torches, round the chaise.

Then first they saw Miss Mary Armistead,
Her honorable, fearless, lifted eyes
Gazing on Custer's bare and bended head,
While General Henry Tunstall's countenance,

Supported close within her sheltering arm,
Leaned unto hers in pallid soldier death.
"Madam," said Custer, "would that I had known
The bravest of the brave lay needing aid.
Lady, the great heroic name he won

Held me from marching onward to your hill,
Held me expecting from him night attack,
Till now in vain we bring a surgeon's help,—
And words are useless. Yet again I say—
Because a soldier's heart compels the due—

He lived the bravest of the bravest brave
That ever faced the odds of mighty war.
May God sustain yourself for years and years
The living shrine of Tunstall's memory."

She bowed her noble head, but answered naught.

Then past the chariot streamed our wondering men
Behind tall Custer in the foremost front,
Trampling as thunder on the bridging planks,
Their torches gleaming on the swirling Run;

A tossing, swaying column o'er the flat,

A fiery slope of fours abreast the hill,
And on, unresting on, through night and rain,
Remorseless, urgent, yet most merciful,
Because the Nation's life demanded war,
Relentless, hurrying swift to force an end,

And banish night, and bring a peaceful dawn.

But old John Woolston sees across the years,
Beneath the black, cavernous carriage hood,
Flaring in torchlight, Tunstall's face of death
Beside a lovely, living, haloed face,

Heroic, calm, ineffably composed
With pride unconquerable in valiant deeds,
With trust in God our Lord unspeakable—
The sainted Woman of the Perished Cause,
The chastened soul of that Confederacy

Which marches on, no less than John Brown's soul,
Inspiring, calling on the Nation's heart,
Urging it dauntlessly to front stark death
For what ideals the Nation's heart holds true.

Straight rain streaks downward through the torches' flare,

And solemn through the ancient darkness sound
The small, bewildered, lingering, million tones
Of atoms streaming to the eternal sea.

Edward William Thomson

Aspiration

MY friend conceived the soul hereafter dwells
In any heaven the inmost heart desires,
The heart, which craves delight, at pain rebels,
And balks, or obeys the soul till life expires.

He deemed that all the eternal Force contrives

Is wrought to revigorate its own control,
And that its alchemy some strength derives
From every tested and unflagging soul.

He deemed a spirit which avails to guide
A human heart, gives proof of energy

To be received in That which never bides,
But ever toils for what can never be—

A perfect All—toward which the Eternal strives
To urge forever every atom's range,
The Ideal, which never unto Form arrives,

Because new concept emanates from change.

He deemed the inmost heart is what aligns
Man's aspiration, noble or impure,
And that immortal Tolerance assigns
Each soul what Aspiration would secure.

And if it choose what highest souls would rue—
Some endless round of mortal joys inane—
Such fate befits what souls could not subdue
The heart's poor shrinking from the chasm of pain.

My friend reviewed, nigh death, how staunch the soul

Had waged in him a conflict, never done,
To rule the dual self that fought control,
Spirit and flesh inextricably one.

His passionless judgment pondered well the past,
Patient, relentless, ere he spoke sincere,—

“Through all the strife my soul prevailed at last,
It rules my inmost heart’s desire here;

“My Will craves not some paradise of zest
Where mortal joys eternally renew,
Nor blank nirvana, nor elysian rest,

Nor palaced pomp to bombast fancy true;

“It yearns no whit to swell some choiring strain
In endless amplitudes of useless praise;
It dares to aspire to share the immortal pain
Of toil in mouldering Form from phase to phase.

“To me, of old, such fate some terror bore,
But now great gladness in my spirit glows,
While death clings round me friendlier than before,
To loose the soul that mounts beyond repose.”

Yet, at the end, from seeming death he stirred

As one whose sleep is broke by sudden shine,
And whispered Christ, as if the soul had heard
Tidings of some exceeding sweet design.

Edward William Thomson

Brethren Of The Boat

WHEN some of the ancient lineage prate
We brothers listen with a smile,
We do not boast ancestral state,
It really is n't worth our while,
Since all must know that we can trace

Our line to ages so remote
As when Pa Noah gave a place
To none but brethren of his boat.

In that old world where sin was rife,
How natural that the only man

Found worthy of continuing life
Was one who'd lived on such a plan
That when the earth was all submerged
He knew the way to go afloat
And save—the point is once more urged—

Our line, the Brethren of the Boat.

Since then our long immortal scroll
Has blazed with names of Men of Might,
Jason, Ulysses, on the roll
With Cæsar, and with Wallace wight;

From age to age, on every shore,
Who raised the strong triumphant note
If not the Vikings of the Oar,
We, tuggers, Brethren of the Boat?

Who holds the keys of Heaven and Hell

And Purgatory in his hand?
A boating man—and does it well—
St. Peter, so we understand!
Where were the first Apostles found?—
Sure, every child knows this by rote—

Amongst the men whose hearts be sound,
The virtuous Brethren of the Boat.

It may be false, yet some contend
That when to other spheres men go,
The judgment of their final end

Hangs on the question, Did he row?
But this is sure,—on us at last
Old Father Charon's eyes will doat,
As o'er the Styx he ferries fast
His comrade Brethren of the Boat.

Edward William Thomson

Consolation

A TENDER miracle so blends
The separate life which is our fate
With gentle joys, that it transcends

The bridals of the fortunate.

With beams too delicate for name—
So sunny warm, so frosty pure,
I tell her that our business-flame
Of love unfailing, glows secure.

“We have the Best,” she says. We smile,
We sigh as if it were not so;
Yet deep in either heart the while
We know The Best is what we know.

Edward William Thomson

Cul-De Sac

"DEAR Dove, both Love and Life command we wed,"
Spoke I. She smiled and shook her sage young head,
And mused, and gravely said: "Before we met,
Life had ruled straight our page, and rules it yet.
Though Love be come to light that even Way,

What else has changed? The filial tasks of day,
Your day and mine, cannot be put aside
That selfish Love alone be glorified.
Did daily duty done not keep us blest
Our infinite love were infinite unrest.

Our separate earnings still our Aged need—
Spare me, dear love, you shake me when you plead."

Edward William Thomson

Day Dream

WHEN high above the busy street
Some hidden voice poured Mary's song,
Oh, then my soul forgot the beat
And tumult of the city's throng,
And bells and voices murmured low,

Blent to a dreamy monotone
That chimed and changed in mystic flow,
And wove a spell for me alone.

The towering blocks no more were there,
No longer pressed the crowd around,

All freely roamed a magic air
Within a vast horizon's bound;
Beneath a sky of lucent gray
Far stretched the circled northern plain,
Wild sunflowers decked a prairie gay,

And one dear autumn came again.

Before me went a winsome maid,
And oh the mien with which she stept
Her long brown hair without a braid
Concealed the shoulders that it swept;

And, glancing backward, me she gave
The smile so angel kind, so wise—
That look of love, those eyes so grave,
Once made my earthly Paradise.

Divinely on my darling went,

The wild flowers leaning from her tread,
Enrapt I followed on intent,
Till, ah, the gracious vision fled;
The plain gave place to blocks of gray,
The sunlit Heaven to murky cloud,

Staring I stood in common day,
And never knew the street so loud.

Edward William Thomson

Elegy For The Doctor

LANDLORD, take a double fee, and let the banquet slide,
Send the viands, send the wine to cheer the poor outside,
Turn the glasses upside down, leave the room alight,
Let the flower-strown tables stand glittering all the night.

Everybody's friend is gone, hushed his gentle mirth,

Sweeter-hearted comrade soul none shall know on earth,
Burly body, manly mind, upright lifted head,
Viking eyes and smiling lips—Dr. Drummond's dead!

For the Club, for the feast, and for the busy street
Primal natural airs he brought, oh, so fresh and sweet,

Brattling rivers, gleaming lakes, wild-flower forest floors,
To heal the City's weary heart with balms of out-of-doors.

But where the campfire-litten boughs swing swaying overhead,
And wondering wolf and lynx shrill wild the boding of their dread,
And strangely through the moony night the hooting owlets roam,

His tones would yearn in gladsome talk about the doors of Home.

In sympathy with every pain of all who bear the yoke,
There was a natural piety in all he wrote and spoke,
He warmed with Irish pride in deeds defying Might's strong host,
Yet ever shared the Saxon sense for ruling at the roast.

He bore the poet's shifting heart that puts itself in place
Of every humble kindly soul it knows of every race,

He felt their sorrow as their joy, but chose the strain to cheer
And help the differing breeds to share one patriot feeling here.

There was no better loyalist than this whose humors played

In pleasant human wise to serve the State two races made—
O Landlord, turn the glasses down, and leave the room alight,

And let the flower-sweet silence tell his shade our grief to-night.

Edward William Thomson

Enshrined

SINCE Lois died the tyrant Sun
Drags haggard in his orbit bound
This puppet Earth, whose seasons run
For me an aimless, wasted round.

Incessantly I think to die,

Nor ever doubt that Death is Peace,
And many an hour I ponder why
My soul desists from her release.

I do not dread the crash of pain
For one loud moment at the close,

Nor shrink to taste the slow, inane,
Pervasive opiate's repose.

But in my saddest trances still
Her steadfast soul upholdeth mine
To endure till it be Nature's will

My heart shall cease to be her shrine.

Edward William Thomson

Environment

OUR prison house extends so wide
It walls the farthest Oceans' tide,
Enarches every Tropics bloom,
And gives the opposing Arctics room.

Its vistas do all stars include

In one abysm of solitude,
Whose hollow antres swoon where Thought
In vain imagines Aught or Naught.

At time, to ease the jail, we deem
Ourselves companioned in the dream,

Conceiving kindred Spirits share
The doom each soul alone must bear.

They seem to move and smile and moan
With sense of all the heart hath known,
Which helps the pent-up soul beguile

The tension of its domicile;

Till, doubtful of the fancied zest
It made to soothe its deep unrest,
Once more the solitary thrall
Ponders the illimitable Wall.

"Perchance another Thought supreme
Includes the Dreamer and the Dream?
Or doth the soundless Prison zone
Confine One absolutely lone?"

'T is only when Love's angel eyes

Gaze steadfast from a mortal guise,
Tranquil, sincere, divine, devout,
They still the tumult of the Doubt.

Then, prisoning Power, we do accept
The Mystery that Thou hast kept,

And cheerful in Thy bondage dwell,
Blest creatures of Thy miracle.

Edward William Thomson

Father Abraham Lincoln

My private shrine. The Gettysburg Address
Framed in with all authentic photographs
Of him from whom the New Religion flows.

Homely? That's it. A perfect homeliness.
Homely as Home itself that countenance

Benign, immortal sweet, his very soul,
The steadfast, common, great American.

It is a gladness in my aging heart
These eyes three times beheld himself alive,
Ungainly, jointed loose, rail-fence-like, queer

In garb that hung with scarecrow shapelessness—
Absolute figure of The States half-made,
Turning from toil and joke to sacred war.

MY heart has smiles and tears, remembering how
The boy, fourteen, round-cheeked and downy-lipped,

With Philadelphia cheese-cake freshly bit,
Halted to stare on marbled Chestnut Street;
He could not gulp the richness in his maw,
Because that black-frock-coated countryman
Of bulged umbrella, rusty stovepipe hat,

Five yards ahead, and coming rapidly,
Could be none other than the President,
From caricatures familiar as the day.

A sudden twinkle lit his downcast eyes,
Marking the cheese-cake and the staring boy;

Tickled to note the checked gastronomy,

Passing, he asked, "Good, sonny?" in a tone
Applausive more than questioning, full of fun,
Yet half-embracive, as your mother's voice,
And smiled so comrade-like the wondering lad

Glowed with a sense of being chosen chum
To Father Abraham Lincoln, President.

Such was the miracle his spirit wrought
In millions while he lived. And still it lives.

He stalked along, unguarded, all alone,

That central soul of unremitting war,
A common man level with common Man.
The heart-warmed, wondering boy stared after him,
And wonders yet to-day on how it chanced
The mighty, well-loved, martyr President

Went rambling on unknown in broadest day
On crowded street, as if by nimbus hid
From all except the cheese-caked worshipper
He sonnied, smiled on, joked at fatherly.

That night the streets of Philadelphia thronged;□

No end of faces; one great human cross,
As far each way as lamp-post boys could see,
Packed Ninth and Chestnut, waiting Father Abe;
The Continental's balcony on high
Glowed Stars and Stripes, with crape for all the dead

"We cannot dedicate, nor consecrate."

On chime of eight precise, gaunt, bare of head,
They saw his tallness in the balcony-flare,
And straightway all the murmurous street grew still,
Till silence absolute as death befell.

And in that perfect silence one clear voice
Inspired began, from out the multitude, [Page 40]
The song of all the songs of all the war,
Simple, ecstatic, sacrificial, strong—
“We’re coming, Father Abraham, three hundred thousand

more”—□

And neighboring voices took the long refrain
While some more distant raised the opening words,
Till to and fro and far and near at once,
Never in chorus, chanting as by groups,
Here ending, there beginning, some halfway,

All sang at once, and all renewing all
In pledge and passion of the mighty song,
Their different words and clashing cadences
Wondrously merging in a sound supreme,
As if the inmost meaning of the hymn

Harmonious rolled in one unending vow
While all the singers gazed on Lincoln’s face.

Hands gripping balcony-rail, he stooped and saw
And listened motionless, with such a look
The boy upon the lamp-post clearly knew

“The heavens were opened unto him,”
“The spirit of God descending like a dove”—
Until the mystery of the general soul
Wrought to unwonted sense of unison
Moved all to silence for the homely words

Of Father Abraham Lincoln to his kind—
Words clear as Light itself, so plain—so plain
None deemed him other than their fellow man.

Once more. A boy in blue at sixteen years,
Mid groups of blue along the crazy road

Of corduroy a stretch from City Point,
Toward yonder spire in fatal Petersburg,
Beyond what trenches, rifle-pits, and forts,
What woeful far-front grave-mounds sunken down
To puddles over pickets shot on post—

What cemeteries shingle-marked with names
Of companies and regiments and corps
Of mouldering bones and rags of blue and gray,
And belts and buttons, rain and wind exposed—
Mired army wagons—forms of swollen mules—

Springfields and Enfields, broken-stocked, stuck up
Or strown, all rusting—parked artillery—
Brush shelter stables—lines and lines of huts,
Tent-covered winter quarters, sticks and mud
For chimneys to the many thousand smokes

Whose dropping cinders black-rimmed million holes
Through veteran canvas ludicrously patched—
Squares of parade all mud—and mud, and mud,
With mingled grass and chips and refuse cans
Strown myriad far about the plain of war,

Whose scrub-oak roots for scanty fires were grubbed,
And one sole house, and never fence remained
Where fifty leagues of corn-land smiled before.

Belated March—a lowering, rainless day
With glints of shine; the veteran tents of Meade

Gave forth their veteran boys in crowds of blue,
Infantry, cavalry, gunners, engineers,
Easterner, Westerner, Yankee, Irish, "Dutch,"
Canuck, all sorts and sizes, frownsed, unkempt,
Unwashed, half-smoked, profane exceedingly,

Moody or jokeful, formidable, free
From fear of colonels as of corporals,
Each volunteer the child of his own whim,
And every man heart-sworn American
Trudging the mud to view the cavalcade

Of Father Abraham Lincoln to The Front.

He, Chief Commander of all Union hosts,
Of more than thrice three hundred thousand more,
Rode half a horseneck first, since Grant on right
And Meade on left kept reining back their bays;

Full uniformed were they and all their train,
Sheridan, Humphreys, Warren, Hazen, Kautz,
Barlow, McLaughlen, Ord, and thirty more,
Blazing for once in feathers and in gold.
Old Abe, all black, bestrode the famous steed,

Grant's pacing black—and sure since war began
No host of war had such Commander seen!

Loose-reined he let the steady pacer walk;
Those rail-like legs, that forked the saddle, thrust
Prodigious spattered boots anear the mud,

Preposterous his parted coat-tails hung,
In negligence his lounging body stooped,
Tipping the antic-solemn stovepipe hat;
It seemed some old-time circuit preacher turned
From Grant to Meade and back again to Grant,

Attentive, questioning, pondering, deep concerned—
The common Civil Power directing War.

He, travesty of every point of horsemanship,
They, so bedizened, riding soldier stern—
The contrast past all telling comical—

And Father Abraham wholly unaware!

Too much by far for soldier gravity—
A breeze of laughter travelling as he passed,
Rose sudden to a gale that stormed his ear.

The President turned and gazed and understood

All in one moment, slightly shook his head,
Not warningly, but with a cheerful glee,
And sympathy and love, as if he spoke:
"You scalawags, you scamps, but have your fun!"
Pushed up the stovepipe hat, and all around

Bestowed his warming, right paternal smile,
As if his soul embraced us all at once.

Then strangely fell all laughter. Some men choked,
And some grew inarticulate with tears;
A thousand veteran children thrilled as one,

And not a man of all the throng knew why;
Some called his name, some blessed his holy heart
And then, inspired with pentecostal tongues,
We cheered so wildly for Old Father Abe
That all the bearded generals flamed in joy!

What was the miracle? His miracle.
Was Father Abraham just a son of Man,
As Jesus seemed to common Nazarenes?

Shall Father Abraham Lincoln yet prevail,
And his Republic come to stay at last?

Kind Age, unenvious Youth, democracy,
None lower than the first in comradeship,
However differing in mental force,
The higher intellect set free to Serve,
All undistracted by the woeful need

To grab or pander lest its children want;
Old trivial gewgaws of the peacock past
Smiled to the nothingness of desuetude,
With strutful Rank, with pinchbeck Pageantry,
With apish separative-cant of Class,

With inhumane conventions, all designed
To sanctify the immemorial robbery

Of Man by men; with mockful mummeries,
Called Law, to save the one perennial Wrong—
That fundamental social crime which fate

All babes alike to Inequality,
And so condemns the many million minds
(That might, with happier nurture, finely serve)
To share, through life, the harmful hates or scorns
The accursed System breeds, which still most hurts

The few who fancy it their benefit,
Shutting them lifelong from the happiness
Of such close sympathy with all their kind
As feels the universal God, or Soul,
Alive to love in every human heart.

Was it for this our Mother's sons were slain?
Shall Father Abraham not prevail again?

We who are marching to the small-flagged graves
We earned by fight to free our fathers' slaves,
We who by Lincoln's hero soul were sworn,

We go more sadly toward our earthly bourne
To join our comrade host of long ago,
Since, oh so clearly, do our old hearts know
We shall not witness what we longed to see—
Our own dear children minded to be free.

Why let democracy be flouted down?
Why let your money-mongers more renown
Their golden idol than the Common Weal,
Flaunting the gains of liberty-to-steal,
Fouling the promise of the heights we trod

With Freedom's sacrifice to Lincoln's God?

Was it for this he wept his children slain?
Or shall our Father's spirit rise again?

Edward William Thomson

Flown

TO-DAY our Office friends declare,—
“Fate gave to her a hopeless part,
And wondrous was her pluck to bear

So long that knowledge at her heart.
Stretched straining on the rack of pain
She dwelt, it seemed, as one in bliss,
Yet who that knew her lot is fain
To weep that she has peace like this?”

But they, whose faithful hearts believed
They knew her lot, were never told
How strong her valorous soul conceived
That happy was her fate controlled.

Last night she told me,—“Though I lay

Withdrawn by bodily pangs from mirth,
There could not be a lovelier way
To live than you made mine on earth.
Your love was summer’s bloom and leaf,
It tranced my narrow strip of blue,

It touched my cheeks in zephyrs brief
That purely strengthened me anew;
It haloed City cloud and hill,
From clanging streets it fashioned song,
And when Night’s pealing chimes fell still

Its murmuring music trembled long.
Oh, love, you were my halcyon calm,
You were my mystic chrism that blest,
And your dear arms the lulling balm
That soothes me now to thankful rest.”

Edward William Thomson

From Peter Ottawa

COUNT up the dead by fever, shot and shell,
Count up the cripples, count all tears that fell,
Count up the orphan children of the strife,
Count the long-yearning heart of parent, wife,
Count the vast treasure, count the labour's waste
Count all the cost of passion's headlong haste,
And then you'll know what solid nations pay
When common impulse sweeps good sense away,
Flushing the millions madly all at once
With Wisdom down, and up the truculent dunce.

Edward William Thomson

Hail To The Chief

AGAIN we greet the patient heart,
The conference-guiding master-hand,
Who put illusive dreams apart,
And wrought as careful wisdom planned.
With welcoming hearts we strive in vain

To voice the unutterable cheers
That yearn for him whose works attain
For us the longing hopes of years.

For spirits twain possess the hearts
That hold our North from sea to sea;

The one a vigorous love imparts
Of self-dependent liberty,
The other, sweet with kinship's thought,
Forever strives to bridge the main;
And all our country's years were fraught

With hope to serve the spirits twain.

While cynics scorned the dual dream,
Proclaiming one must surely die,
Our lifted eyes beheld the gleam
Afar, of days now looming nigh;

The Voluntary Empire's form
Of comrade commonwealths allied,
Stands fit, at last, to front the storm,
And thrust Time's hurricane aside.

With countries Old and countries New,

All willing champions round the Throne,
With each to separate freedom true,
Yet shaped in league to hold their own;
We bless the Chief whose patriot soul
Held both our spirits reconciled,

And grasped the hour in firm control
When on our dreams Occasion smiled.

Edward William Thomson

Happyheart

AMID a waste of worn-out apple trees,
In doorless ruin, nigh a grass-grown road
Set far from every tumult of to-day,
Stands yet the house where Happyheart was born.

That day, his mother told him once, she wept,

Boding what gusty fates must threat the babe
Who lay as musing all delightedly
To hear the strangest storm she ever knew.

For while a norther hammered on the walls,
Tore crusted snow, whirled orchard branches off,

Pelted the shuttered windows, wailed dismay,
Clear blue and sunshine held the winter sky.

And, happy in the southward lee, she saw
The earliest singing sparrow of the spring
Hop on her sill, chanting melodiously,

Full glad of shelter in the warming beams.

"The bird is his,"—declared the Irish nurse,
"Great luck indeed! See, will he notice it?"

Speaking, she turned the new-born man-child's face
In such a wise his wondering mother saw

Within the steady eyes a tiny scene,—
The panes, the singing bird, the whirling world,
Trees madly thrashing, wracks of hurrying drift
Crossing the clear, eternal, sunlit sky.

"What? Crying? Troth, but this will never do!

Sure he takes notice of the bird, I'll swear!

Cheer up! 'T is happy fortune will be his!
There's not a child in all the land so blest
As him the winter songbird hastens to!"
And still the mother wept, she knew not why.

Within the portals of his house of birth
Has Happyheart beheld the snow wraiths reel,
While in the azure height of clear divine
The sun swung loudly o'er no loneliness
More chill than stared about the scene forlorn;

And yet the eyes his mother wept to see
Pictured fine gleams through every clouding wrack,
Infinite calm, and singers wonderful.

Edward William Thomson

Hepaticas

LOIS, alone I've walked the way
By Talking Brook to Fairy Falls
We trod a year ago to-day.

And did you hear such bluebird calls?
And is the April green as fresh?

And sings our Brook its cheery tune?
Yes, Darling, and the frogs enmesh
Again such magic in their croon
That you seemed listening with me there.
And where the farmstead buildings stand

Dwell still the Man and Dog who were
So angry first, and then so bland?
Dear Dove, the Dog came barking wild,
The greybeard roared him on in rage
Just as when you their wrath beguiled.

How fond you dream I did assuage
That angry pair, who perhaps advanced
Half joking at our trespassing.
To-day a thing more touching chanced;—
For when I cried, "This day last Spring

You bade Miss Lois 'come again'"—
Oh, did that man remember still,
And for my sake was once more fain
To let you search for flowers his hill?
Lois—he left his plough awhile

To pluck for you this bunch of bloom.—
"Tell her," he said, "I loved her smile."
The dear old man! How rare my room
With fair hepaticas! Dear you!
You went so far to bring me these!

That gladsome voice I never knew
To flinch in all her agonies.

Judgment Hour

"SPIRIT," said God, "come up for Judgment now."
The words seemed spoke in such familiar tone
As if the accents of a natural voice
Close to the heart as its own beating pulse.

"Come up," it said, "for final judgment now

Before the absolute court of Me in Thee,
The court which hears no plea, allows no charge,
Abates no jot in estimating wrong,
Awards no punishment and grants no boon,
But weighs precise the actual quality

Of Spirit proven by the appointed tests,
And true decides if it recruit in Me
The Immortal Strength, or if the tempted one,
Too weak for toils eternal, sanely pass
To that which I am not, Oblivion."

Then Thee reviewed with Me, O God, the course,—
What bodily appetites indulged or quelled;
What hates and harms repaid with hurts and scorns,
Or with forgetfulness or benefits;
The proper rest that merged to slothful ease,

Or was in pain enduringly ignored;
That laughing, wholesome impulse which, unchecked,
Became derision's cruelty of glee;
The righteous anger rushing headlong on,
What did, when calmly visioned, piteous seem;

That pity for the Weak, which blamed alike
The unjust heedless and the heedful Strong;
The passionate heart's excess in everything,
Its wild unsteadiness unto the Soul
Which yet persisted, sternly right, to chide

The insensate rebel part averse from Thee.

The Thee and Me, O God, revised it all
Clearly, relentlessly, and grave declared,—
“Thou didst not ever fail the Heart, O Soul,
Nor doth it fail thee now. Nay, We elect

No Lethe, no Oblivion, but the strife
Eternal, toward we know not what, save Good.”

Then some calm happiness known not before
Came to the Life whose Judgement hour was o’er.

Edward William Thomson

King Volsung And The Skald

HE sang on the Heath of the Volsungs,
Mid Volsung common men,
Shepherds, chafferers, delvers,
And the fowlers of the fen,
The beaters of the anvil,

Wights who mined the ore,
Tamers of the horsekind,
And fishers from the shore.

Tall through the press strode Sigmund,
Lord-warden of the Peace,

While, shrilling fierce, the blood song
Rang to the throng's increase,
And some lips smiled the pleasure
Of Lynxes scenting prey,
And some brows frowned the anger

That holds the wolf at bay.

"Be dumb, O Skald!" spoke Sigmund,
"Thou singst a troublous song,—
The King of the kindly Volsungs
Shall judge thee right or wrong."

Then slow to the Hall of The Mighty,
And silently under its roof,
Flowed the host of the mid-world people
To hear the thing at proof.

On the High-seat shone King Volsung,

His Champions gleamed anear,
And the voice of lordly Sigmund
Came welcome to his ear:—

"Father, King and Judger,
Now tell me what to do.

This Skald divides thy people—
Is praise or death his due?"

"Son Sigmund, tell thy story,
And whence the stranger came".—
"I found him chanting on the Heath,

And no man knows his name.
Some think him even as Baldur
Come back to bless the Earth,
And some hear in his blood song
The Dwarf-kind's cruel mirth."

Then softly laughed King Volsung,
Yet pierced so keen his eyes
Men deemed he saw the stranger
As naked from disguise.
"O Skald!" he spoke, "fear nothing;

Though thou be Dwarf or Elf
Come back to trouble mankind,
Sing up, and be thyself."

The stranger eyed the Father
As one who works a spell,

And from the board his fingers
Seized a sounding shell;
His touches thrilled its edges,
He sang, to words all changed,
A strain the brown seafarers

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Oft chanted where they ranged.

Then round about the High-seat,
And through the huge-built Hall,
Did all men deem they listened
To waves whelm up and fall;

They heard the clash and clatter
Of shield-hung longships' sides,
Straining sails gale-bellied,
The snarl of racing tides,

While, foul in seamen's nostrils

Wallowing bilges stank
Of ale and meal long sea-borne,
Musty, wormy, rank;
Yet, half a-rot with scurvy,
They toppled up once more

To hail the enchanted looming
Of some unheard-of shore.

Out spoke the gracious Volsung,—
"The chant is good to me
That draws my shoremen closer

To their brothers of the sea.
And now, O Skald, I charge thee
To voice what song most brings
Joy to the hearts of heroes,
And men of worth and Kings."

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The stranger pondered, staring
So long on Volsung's Pride
That soft-hand chafferers clamored:—
"Sing what thou sangst outside—
The song that stirred our pulses

As if through war-horn blown,
Thy chant of swords and corpses,
And blood on grass bestrown.
Hearing, we felt as Champions,
Our foes seemed beaten sore,

And fierce in exultation
We saw them free no more."

Then, nearing close to Volsung,
The singer whispered, "King,
Thou knowst how wild the feeble

Relish a deathful thing;
Here came I hungry, seeking
The means for rest and meat—
They love to dream them heroes,
And praise to Skalds is sweet.

But now, O Volsung Father,
I read thy kingly heart,
And I know the battle-mighty
From war-lust dwell apart."

Frowned dark the lordly Volsung,—

"Shame drowneth as a flood
The fame of every singer
Who urgeth men to blood.
The scorn of sworded heroes
Is on the swordless wight

Who stirs the weak to clamor
That sends the strong to fight;
Behold, all blades of battle
Around my shield-hung wall
Are hid in sheath, lest baleful

Their deadly gleams should fall;
And yet thy plea shall save thee
If now thou singst what brings
Most joy to hearts of heroes,
And men of worth, and Kings."

Then beamed so kind the stranger,
It seemed that Baldur there
Had rose from Niflheim's torpor
To bless the shining air;
He grasped an iron hammer,

He tinkled on the steel,
And he sang the ancient stithy
Laboring mankind's weal.

Spike and chain and crowbar,
Axes, bolts, and ploughs,

Mallet, wedge, and hammer,
Bonds to stiffen prows,
Every shape of iron
Listeners saw anew,
For the splendor of the labor

Rang the song-craft through.

So changed the tinkled measure
That looms rocked in the Hall,
Spindles twirled, and shuttles
Flew 'twixt wall and wall,—

Cloth for street and temple,
Cloth for sea and wold,
And the weavers' patient pleasure
Wove in every fold.

Through all Man's craft and labor

The runic rhythm changed,
As Valorous Endeavor
All useful works it ranged;
And the Idler was the Dastard,
And the Pleasure-seeker's joy

More weak, and far more witless
Than the pastime of a boy.

"O Skald," spoke gladdened Volsung,
"Thou sangst the truest song!
It endeth and amendeth

Labor's ancient wrong;
Its glory none had chanted,
Its pride no ear had heard,
For the toiling held the toiler
From the finding of the Word.

Yet none, save to that throbbing
My harp hath in its strings,
Can sing what most joys heroes,
And men of worth, and Kings."

He took the harp of Volsung,

His fingers lingered slow,
He sang of Love commingled
With Work, and Joy, and Woe,—
The lover's love for lover,
The bridegroom and the bride,

The father love for children,
The wifely true-heart's pride,

Brother's love for brother,
Love of friend for friend,
The yearning, patient mother love

That hath no stint nor end;
And, even as all World-things
Forth from the World-tree start,
He sang all love forever flows
Back to All-father's heart.

King Volsung and his heroes,
All people round the Hall,
Yearned and flushed and joyed and wept
As if one soul swayed all.
None saw the singer vanish,

So blinding was his spell;—
And was he of the Gods, or Dwarfs,
King Volsung would not tell.

Edward William Thomson

Kismet

QUIET, my heart! My brain must be
Untroubled by your anxious pain.

I must be laboring patiently
To-day, to-morrow, oft again.
Quiet, my heart, by day, for night
Shakes me with all your wild affright.

Let Lois live, though crippled sore

For life. O God, incline, I pray,
Thy will to this which I implore!
And let me earn our bread each day!
Quiet, my heart,—thy terror lies!
It cannot be that Lois dies!

Edward William Thomson

Our Kindergartner

WHEN April's tinge was on the fringe
Of willows near the pool,
She clipt their shoots to fashion flutes
For children of her school;
She sloped the tips to suit the lips

Of rosiness around,
Drew forth the pith and shaped it with
The chambers of the sound.

His fancy said: "That way was made
The magic pipe of Pan,

Which crept so rare upon the air
It crazed a listening man."

She took a flute and shrilled salute
Of Arcady so clear,
He felt the ring and chime of spring

Thrilling through his ear;
A mystic sense of rapt suspense
Mingled strange with all
The bubbling frogs, the echoing dogs,
The bluebirds' mating call.

So sweet the charm, he felt no harm,
Yet there his craze began,
With every note her pulsing throat
Blew on the pipe of Pan.

Edward William Thomson

Our Town's Comforter

IT touches the heart of "Our Mother"
with happiness queerly regretful
To muse on all they who instinctively
bring her their innermost grief,
For reasons she never can fathom

they come, as if wholly forgetful
Of fear to repose their confessions
with Our Town's fount of relief.

What crucified faces of maidens
despairing in love's desolation

Have streamed with the weeping they've hidden
from all, except Mother alone!

What stormy-heart fighters came wildly
lamenting their souls' tribulation
At hearing the weaklings they'd vanquished

from terrible silences groan!

What saints who had failed of the halo,
because their stiff features retarded
The flow of affection from children
they loved, though with signals confused,

Would open, for Mother's eyes only,
mysterious portals that guarded
Their yearning for all the caresses
their hickory manners refused.

When parents, grown aged, and basking

long years in the Town's veneration,
Shrank bitter and dumb, at the blow of
an archangel son in disgrace,
How he knelt in despair with Our Mother,
and rose with the transfiguration

Of that which is God, or just mother,
that shines in her triumphant face.

Yet Mother is given to blaming
her nature for cold-hearted dealing;—
“Dear souls, how they pour out their troubles

to me, whose responses are wood!
Though I strive to console them, my sayings
seem void, to myself, of all feeling,
For I never can find an expression
to make my heart half understood.”

“And I never can love them enough
in their sadness, however I’m trying
To soften the life in my heart
till it break with their anguishing tears,
For it’s flooded with gladness to feel them

so helped by the balm of the crying,—
And, oh, what a shame I’m made happy
through sorrows they’ll carry for years.”

Edward William Thomson

Parables

AND did you think the war was past
When the long cannonade was done,
And all we homebound soldiers cast
Hope's glances on the blessing sun?
I tell you that the war shall last

Till every citadel be won.

And did you think was Lincoln dead
Because his mouldering length of clay
Lifts nevermore the brooding head
To eye the slowly brightening day?

I tell you that his blood was shed
That he might, living, lead the way.

And did you think he does not lead
Because the chains he broke of yore
Maddened scarce less than those that Need

Clanks terribly nigh Dives' door?
I tell you Dives shall be freed
From dread when Lincoln leads no more.

And did you think that this is Peace,
When every rose in Pleasure's hair

Shakes direful as some blood-red piece
Torn from the heart of hot despair?
I tell you Pleasure's just release
Comes when her roses all shall share.

And did you think Columbians see

As nothing but a sounding phrase

The "All men were created free
And equal" of the Fathers' days?
I tell you their sincerest glee
Laughs over all whom that dismays.

And did you think you could desist
From service in the changeful fight,
Or that your weapons need assist
Neither the arms of Wrong nor Right?
I tell you All must here enlist,

There is no neutral and no flight.

Edward William Thomson

Parliament Of The Ages

OF all who'd thronged the Commons' galleries
For early April evening's main debate,
One student visionary sole remained.

Down on the floor the members argued yet,
Though midnight long had passed, and rosy dawn

Came streaming in through eastward glory-panes
To tint the lofty ashlaed westward wall
With shining jewel-colored phantasies.

The Dreamer watched the brilliancies of morn
Descending on that opposite westward wall

From panelled ceiling down to pointed arch,
From arch to shadowy alcoves' ruby panes,
Where luminous beamed the storied English Kings,
The Crown, the ramping Pard, the Unicorn,
With ancient mottoes of the Ancient Realm,

And new-made Arms of modern provinces
Emblazoned on the young Dominion's shield.

Now in the watcher's dream the sunrise merged
The Fish, the Maple Leaves, the Buffalo
With Rose and Thistle, Shamrock, Fleur-de-lys,

The Crown, the Kings, the emblem Viking-ships,
With some great banner, glorious, indistinct,
The Flag of mighty, English-speaking kin,
All beaming benison ineffable,
Such promise as no mortal ever saw

On Land or Sea, save o'er the mystic shores
And waters of a halcyon Future dreamed.

The desks, the Speaker's Chair seemed rapt away,
No stony walls inclosed the Commons' House,
But in the wonder-light a woodland spread

About one venerable northland Oak
Silent, except for distant-droning bees,
And one tall, blue-eyed, sworded, yellow-haired,
Hard-panting Viking, kirtled gray, who stood
Beneath the trysting-oak, and strove to quell

His gasps, deep-laboring from a lengthy run,
While, listening keen, he heard the bees in drone,
And watched to hail his second to the tryst
Of freemen signalled for a moot of War.

Then, far around, the forest sounded live

With crackling twigs and scores of emulous feet
From every quarter of the glooming shade,
And wonder-shouts, half vexed and half of praise,
Roared at the Champion who to tree of Moot
Had speeded foremost of the valorous band.

Hard-breathing all, they ranged about the Oak
Equal alike, save one they lifted high
On shield, and named him for their Council Earl.
Then there they fell to talk of march and plan,
Of meat and meal and beer and dragon-ships,

And Ways and Means,—contentious, passionate,
Yet one man only speaking up at once,
Heard silently, approved, or laughed to scorn,
Yet hearkened closely, since th' elected Earl
Full briskly stopt each interrupting voice

By one clear word, quite mystic, quite unknown
Unto the Dreamer in the gallery,
For whom no more the banners of the morn
In wholly visionary colors flared,
Because imperious from the Speaker's Chair

A voice called "Order" stoutly, in a tone
So like the ancient Viking Earl's, the two
Seemed blent as one within the Dreamer's brain.

Scarcely awake, the Student's roaming thought—
Oblivious to the actual place, the dawn,

The visioned tryst of Father Odin's men—
Pondered a Deity who shaped His world
In such a wise that they must most prevail
Who choose one Will to rule by Order's call,
That every Manliness may freely tell

Its thought upon the public thing in hand,
And so the general common sense have sway,
Instead of Policy conceived alone
By any one hereditary Will,
Or, worse, take course tumultuous, scarce resolved

By gabblers chattering unamenable,
In whose Assemblages prehensile tails,
Inscrutable to eyesight, swing the Ape
In futile men through dizzy fooleries.

And still the talkers on the Commons' floor

Contended voluble; while he who heard
Their drone, forgot once more, and dreamed a scene
More wondrous than the primal Viking moot.

For one came frowning in, with sword in hand
And blazoned armor, and an eye more stern

Than gleamed beneath the brow of England's king:—
"I call," he spoke, "The Realms to Parliament!
Present and Past, by mine, the Founder's right,
Simon de Montfort, I, proclaim the call!"

It clanged as sounding through The Ages' tombs

So loud that lofty-opening doors of Time
Revealed in earthly garb a Statesman throng
From every Parliament since Montfort breathed,
Majestic, turbulent, guileful, eloquent,
Profound, laborious, witty, whimsical,

Reverend in age, or beardless chinned as boys;
Knight, Admiral, Merchant, Lawyer, Pedagogue,
Yeoman, Adventurer, Soldier, Minister,
Poet, Philosopher, Roundhead, Cavalier,
Mechanic, Theologue, Philanthropist;

Exploring wights whose bones the jackals pawed
On Lybian arid sands, and they whose forms
Lie, white as marble, stiff nigh either Pole;
Spirits whose mortal vestures braved all fates
That daring hearts or martyr hopes conceived.

It seemed not strange to view the Shapes of Eld
In formal-friendly conference of talk
With some who perished as of yesterday,
With some who founded New World congresses,
With some who wielded outland Parliaments

Which strove so English-like for Liberty
That England reeled to win against their few,
With some whose mien and accents now control
The rising younger Nations of The Race;
It seemed not strange, so clear they all alike,

Musing the ordered methods of their rule,
Blessed dear the Mother of all Parliaments,
The Many-mansioned Mother of The Free.

There prudent Cecil leaned to Laurier
While John Macdonald held them both in talk,

His "brother," Cartier, nodding to the tale;
There Richard Seddon's burly honest ghost
With Wilberforce and Hampden close conferred;
There Edmund Burke warned Deakin cautiously
Of tempting Innovation's bright mirage;

There Pitt, the younger, spoke with Cecil Rhodes
And stout Oom Paul, of Empire building themes,
While Grattan unto icy Parnell sighed

Of angry Ireland's immemorial wrong;
There Chatham, eagle-faced, with Washington

And Franklin nigh, declared,—“I praise again
Your English-minded fight for Liberty—
America's victory secured it firm
For all the outland broods of England's swarm.”

There Strafford gloomed to Russell's lofty gaze,

The Stuart circle round each stately neck;
There honest-meaning, muddle-headed Cade,
Who lingered nigh the portal as of right,
Because he called a shirtless Parliament,
Received a courteous nod of compliment

From mighty Gladstone's comprehensive love;
There Peel, considerate still, eyed D'Israeli
As if in wonder that the Great Jew's heart
Should yet be counted one of England's pride;
There Canning, of the soul-revealing face,

And bull-dog Cobbett, passionately wroth,
And Palmerston and Bright and thousands more
All moved at home within the visioned space
Until, it seemed, a Puritan Statesman stern,
With Puritan Troopers ringed, eyed Harry Vane

With “Take away that bauble.” Then the Mace
Seemed borne afar incredibly, by force,
From that great Chamber of the freeman Race,
Old English, New English, Canadian,
Newfoundlandish, Australian, African,

Who hold, or held, the emblem sacrosanct.

With that great sacrilege the dream dissolved,
And clear again the radiancies high
Shone o'er the Ottawa floor of Parliament,
While, down below, a high-pitched Loyalist

Declared, convinced, with querulous energy,—

"The Empire's tottering down! It can't be saved
Unless we get the Preference all around."

Touched sudden by the Sun's imperial beams,
A gargoyle grinned upon the western wall

As if it heard the Preferentialist,
While gales of laughter echoed far below.
Whereat the dreamer, wide awake with glee,
Gazed on the golden, crown-surmounted Mace
Pillowed serene before the Speaker's Chair;

Then marked in high-built panes, the Kings gleam clear
The Lion-shield, the mystic Unicorn,
The scrolls, the mottoes, "For my God and Right,"
And "Evil be to him who evil thinks,"
All seemed the racial Soul transfigured there,

Ages and Ages old, yet scarcely born,
So future-glorious, past all dreaming, looms
The Voluntary Empire of The Blood,
Monarchical, Republican, all's one,
With Vikings rushing to the beacon's flare

As long as winds shall blow and waters run.

Edward William Thomson

Prelude

We buried in Mount Auburn last July
The gentle, clerkly, wan old bookkeeper,
Who left to me his sheaf of casual verse.

"You'll smile," he wrote, "to learn I poetized,
However little. Here are all my rhymes;

Too intime, surely, to be put in print
While we two lived, with whom the verses deal.
How curious that it really comforts me
To dream you'll give them vogue, and so prolong
In mortal memory a faint, fair wraith

Of her who, while I live, is clearly shrined,
Smiling, within my unforgetting heart."

They give the poignancy of Commonplace;
Accents of fondness, no more like the feigned
Which forms the stock of many a polished strain,

Than fields and woods enwreathed with moving mists
And changeful to the phase of hour and year
Are like a painted canvas of the scene.

Edward William Thomson

Resurrection

WHEN iron taskwork levelled low
My youthful dreams of pride,
'T was "Oh to reach the end and go
Beyond all seas," I sighed;
"For freedom's songbirds pierce me sore,

I wince when lovers greet,
All blessed lives mock mine the more
In this long World's strange street."

Time wrought that envy to an end,
I could endure the day,

The looming sea I took for friend,
Its patient, solemn sway
Taught me acceptance of control,
Contempt for woe and joy,
And Life a dream wherein what soul

Scorns Fate, escapes annoy.

With this stern wisdom once acquaint
My spirit coldly braved,
It gave no thanks, it made no plaint,
Suffered, and nowise craved;

Thy life, O heart, seemed calmly dead,
Thy dirge the friendly Main,
Thy tomb and empty blueness spread
To dome a senseless plain.

At last, with one transfiguring sign

(Love wrought this wonder rare),
Lord God, what anthems intertwine
To thrill Thy shining air!
Our choral gladness wings above
The far resurging sea,

Whose diapason chants the Love
That wakes my soul to Thee.

Edward William Thomson

Reverie

DOVE-TINTED, urban-bred, secure,
Nowise self-centred, quite self-sure,

Priestess of Business, Office-nun,
And yet her girlhood scarcely done!

That balanced poise of confidence
Is yet young maiden Innocence,
Whose deep, gray eyes undreaming wait

The woman's dearest boon from Fate.

My reverie, though it vision plain
Her lucency, can scarce retain
The radiant smile, with humor fraught,
But quick repressed, as if she thought

It wrong to let her seniors guess
That Mirth may visit business;
Yet flits it back in utter charm,
As if to smile were n't really harm.

It is that smile which brings surprise

Jumping to my delighted eyes,
And makes my heart so yearn she were
Absorbed in Woman's natural care.

Cupid, though growing gray I be,
Incline her heart, that I may free

Her life from office drudgery.

Edward William Thomson

Sweetest Whistle Ever Blew

A DAY when April willows fringed the pool
Of fifty years ago with freshening gold,
Myself came trudging from the country school
With my tall grandsire of the wars of old;
His peaceful jack-knife trimmed a ravished shoot,

Nicked deep the green and hollowed out the white,
To fashion for the child a willow flute,
His age exulting in the shrill delight;
"For so," he said, "my grandsire made
The sweetest whistles ever blew,

When I and he were you and me,
And all the world was new."

To-day in mine a grandchild's balmy hand
Eagerly thrills as toward the pool we go,
He confident that never sea nor land

Wotted of wonders more than grandsires know;
They sail all seas, explore all giants' caves,
Play wolves and bears, and panthers worse by far,
Are scalped complacently as Indian braves,
And little boys their favored comrades are;

By grandpa's lore, well learned of yore,
I hold the rank I most esteem
Of dear and wise in Billy's eyes,
And boast the pomp supreme.

Now, blade unclasped, I skirt the marge to choose

One withe from all the willow's greening throng,
The imperfect branches tacitly refuse,
To clip at last the wand without a prong;
Its knots I scan, the smoothest reach to find,
Cut true around the tender bark a ring,

Bevel the end, and artful tip the rind,

Draw out the pith, and shape the chambered thing
Exactly so as long ago,
In April weather sweet as this,
My grandsire did when he would bid

A whistle for a kiss.

Now Billy snuggles palm again in mine,
"Over the hills," he blows, "and far away."
O pipe of Arcady, how clear and fine
Thy single note salutes the yearning day!

The breeze in branches bare, the whistling wing,
The subtle-bubbling frogs, the bluebird's call,
The quivering sounds of ever-piercing spring,
That one thin willow note attunes them all;
And, far and near at once, I hear

The sweetest whistle ever blew,
Lilting again the olden strain,
And all the world is new.

Edward William Thomson

The Bad Year

MAY, blighted by keen frosts, passed on to June
No blooms, but many a stalk with drooping leaves,
And arid Summer wilted these full soon,
And Autumn gathered up no wealthy sheaves;
Plaintive October saddened for the year,

But wild November raged that hope was past,
Shrieking, "All days of life are made how drear—
Wild whirls of snow! and Death comes driving fast."
Yet sane December when the winds fell low,
And cold calm light with sunshine tinkled clear,

Harkened to bells more sweet than long ago,
And meditated in a mind sincere:—

"Beneath these snows shining from yon red west
How sleep the blooms of some delighted May,
And June shall riot, lovely as the best

That flung their odors forth on all their way;
Yes, violet Spring, the balms of her soft breath,
Her birdlike voice, the child-joy in her air,

Her gentle colors"—sane December saith
"They come, they come—O heart, sigh not 'They were.'"

Edward William Thomson

The Canadian Rossignol (In June)

PRONE where maples widely spread
I watch the far blue overhead,
Where little pillowy clouds arise
From naught to die before my eyes;
Within the shade a pleasant rout
Of dallying zephyrs steal about;
Lazily as moves the day
Odours float and faint away
From roses yellow, red, and white,
That prank yon garden with delight;
Round which the locust blossoms swing,
And some late lilacs droop for spring.
Anon swells up a dubious breeze,
Stirring the half-reluctant trees,

Then, rising to a mimic gale,
Ruffles the massy oaks to pale,
Till spent its sudden force, once more
The zephyrs come that went before;
Now silvery poplars shivering stand,
And languid lindens waver bland,
Hemlock tracteries scarcely stir,
All the pines of summer purr.
Hovering butterflies I see,
Full of business shoots the bee,
Straight from the valley is his flight
Where crowding marbles solemn white
Show through the trees and mutely tell
How there the low-laid loved rest well.
Half hid in the grasses there
Red breast thrushes jump and stare,
Sparrows flutter up like leaves
Tossed upon the wind in sheaves,
Curve-winged swallows slant and slide
O'er the graves that stretch so wide,
Steady crows go labouring by—
Ha! the Rossignol is nigh!

Rossignol, why will you sing,
Though lost the lovely world of spring?
'T was well that then your roulades rang
Of joy, despite of every pang;
But now the sweet, the bliss is gone—
Nay, now the summer joy is on,
And lo, the foliage and the bloom,
The fuller life, the bluer room,
'T was this the sweet spring promised me.
Oh, bird, and can you sing so free,
Though never yet the roaming wind
Could leave earth's countless graves behind?
And will you sing when summer goes
And leaves turn brown and dies the rose?
Oh, then how brave shall Autumn dress
The maple out with gorgeousness!
And red-cheeked apples deck the green,

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And corn wave tall its yellow sheen.
But, bird, bethink you well, I pray,
Then marches winter on his way.
Ah, winter—yes, ah yes—but still,
Hark! sweetly chimes the summer rill,
And joy is here and life is strong,
And love still calls upon my song.
No, Rossignol, sing not that strain,
Triumphant 'spite of all the pain,—
She cannot hear you, Rossignol,
She does not pause and flush, your thrall,
She does not raise that slender hand
And, poised, lips parted, understand
What you are telling of the years,
Her brown eyes soft with happy tears,
She does not hear a note of all,
Ah, Rossignol! ah, Rossignol!
But skies are blue, and flowers bloom,
And roses breathe the old perfume,
And here the murmuring of the trees
In all of lovelier mysteries—
And maybe now she hears thy song

Pouring the summer rills along,
Listens with joy that still to me
Remain the summer time and thee.

Edward William Thomson

The Canadian Rossignol (In May)

WHEN furrowed fields of shaded brown,
And emerald meadows spread between,
And belfries towering from the town,
All blent in wavering mists are seen;

When quickening woods with freshening hue
Along Mount Royal rolling swell,
When winds caress and May is new,
Oh, then my shy bird sings so well!

Because the bloodroots flock so white,
And blossoms scent the wooing air,
And mounds with trillium flags are dight,
And dells with violets frail and rare;
Because such velvet leaves uncloze,
And new-born rills all chiming ring,
And blue the sun-kissed river flows,
My timid bird is forced to sing.

A joyful flourish lifted clear,
Four notes, then fails the frolic song,
And memories of a sweeter year
The wistful cadences prolong;-
'A sweeter year-Oh, heart too sore!-
I cannot sing!'-So ends the lay.
Long silence. Then awakes once more
His song, ecstatic with the May.

Edward William Thomson

The Christmas Walk

How brisk in frost we stept together west!
The sky, as pearly as her lucent face,
Wore, too, the faint austere which gives her grace,
The sacredness that calms my heart to rest.

Up toward the Roxbury hill, whose builded crest
Outlined a rim serrate of flamelike sky,
Her virginal beauty flushed,—and oh, the shy
Gleam of her pleasure as her glove caressed,
Upon her heart abloom, my glowing rose!

And yet, before our Christmas walk was done,
Its scarlet loveliness of petals froze,
Whereby upon the stalk it drooped and died;
So cruel shone the nightward slanting sun
This day of our first marching side by side.

Edward William Thomson

The Mandan Priest

THEY call me now the Indian Priest,
Their fathers' fathers did not so,
The very Mandan name hath ceased
From speech since fifty years ago;
I am so old my fingers fail
My trembling rosary beads to tell,
Yet all my years do not avail
My Mandan memories to quell.

The whole flat world I've seen how changed
Within my lifetime's hundred years;
O'er plains where herding buffalo ranged
Came strange new grass with white men's steers,
The lowing cattle passed as dreams,
Their pastures reared a farmer race,
Now city windows flash their gleams
Nigh our old Monastery's place.

The Prior gives to me no more
Even a task of inward praise,
The Brethren bear me through our door
To bask me here on summer days;
I am so old I cannot kneel,
I cannot hear, I cannot see,
Often I wonder if I feel
The very sunbeams warming me.

Yet do I watch the Mandan dogs
And Mandan ponies slain for meat
That year the squaws chewed snakes and frogs
That babes might tug a living teat,
And Mandan braves, in daylight dance,

Gashed side and arm and painted breast
Praying The Manitou might trance
No more the buffalo from their quest.

A circled plain all horse-high grassed

Our mounting scouts beheld at dawn,
They saw naught else though far they passed
Apart before the sun was gone;
Each night's ride back through starlit lanes
They saw the tepee sparks ascend,
And hoped, and sniffed, and knew their pains
Of famine had not yet an end.

Alone within his magic tent
The new-made Midi wrought the spell
That soothed Life's Master to relent
In years the Old remembered well.
He cried, - 'The Mission Priests have wreaked
Some curse that balks the Ancient Art!
'Thou useless Fool,' the war-chief shrieked,
And sped the knife-thrust to his heart.

With that, 'What comes?' my mother screamed -
How quick the squatted braves arose!
Far in the south the tallest deemed
He saw the flight of up-scared crows;
Above the horse-high grass came slow
A lifted Cross, a tonsured head, -
And what the meaning none could know
Until the black-robed rider said: -

'Mandans, I bear our Mission's word, -
Your children, brought to us, shall eat.'
Scarce had the fierce young War-chief heard
Ere fell the Blackrobe from his seat;
The Chief held high the reeking knife,
He frowned about the Woman's Ring,
And yet my mother's face took life
Anew in pondering the thing.

She stole at night the dead Priest's scrip,
His meagre wallet's hard-baked food,

His crucifix, his waist-rope strip
All blackened with his martyr blood;
Through dark, day-hidden, hand in hand,

We traced his trail for ninety mile,
She starved herself that I might stand,
She spoke me comfort all the while:—

'So shalt thou live, my little son,
The white men's magic shalt thou learn,
And when the hungry moons are run,
Be sure thy mother shall return;
Oh, sweet my joy when, come again,
I find thy Mandan heart untamed,
As fits a warrior of the plain,
That I, thy mother, be not shamed.'

She left me while the black-robed men
Blest and beseeched her sore to stay;
No voice hath told my heart since then
How fared my mother's backward way.
Years, years within the Mission School,
By love, by prayer they gained my heart;
It held me to Our Order's rule,
From all the Mandan life apart.

From tribe to tribe, through sixty years,
The Mandan Priest for Christ he wrought,
And many an Indian heart to tears,
And many a soul to God he brought;
Yet do I hear my mother's voice
Soft lingering round her little son,
And, O dear Lord, dost Thou rejoice
In all my mother's child hath done?

Edward William Thomson

The Many Mansioned House

THERE looms, upon the enormous round
Where nations come and nations go,
A many-mansioned house, whose bound
Ranges so wide that none may know
Its temperate lands of corn and vine,

Its solitudes of Arctic gloom,
Its wealth of forest, plain, and mine,
Its jungle world of tropic bloom.
Yet so its architects devise
That still its boundary walls extend,

And still its guardian forts arise,
And still its builders see no end
Of plan, or labor, or the call
By which the Master of their Fate
Urges to lay the advancing wall

Of Law beyond the farthest gate.

The mortar oft is red with blood
Of men within and men without,
For hate's incessant storm and flood
Rage round each uttermost redoubt,

And bullets sing, and shrieks are loud,
And bordering voices curse the hour
That sees the builders onward crowd,
True to the Master Mind, whose power
Impels them build by plumb and line

To give the blood-stained wall increase
And forward push the huge design
Within whose mansions dwelleth peace.

The Master Mind is in no place,

It hath no settled rank nor name,

Its mood, as moulded by the race,
Shifts often, yet remains the same
To meditate what millions think,
And shape the deed to fit their thought,
Now raising high who seemed to sink,

Now flinging down their choice as naught.
It lauds what sons obey its calls
When time has come for hands to smite,
And when the hour to cease befalls
It chastens them it did requite;

Yet still so chooses that the change
From war to peace and peace to war
Confirms the mansions in their range,
And builds the far-built wall more far.

Within the many mansions dwell

Nations diverse of tongue and blood,—
Races whose primal anthems tell
How Ganges grew a sacred flood,
Tribes long fore-fathered when the birds
Of Egypt saw Osiris pass,

They that were ancient when the herds
Of Abraham cropped Chaldean grass,
People whose shepherd-priesthoods saw
The might of Nineveh begin,
And folk whose slaves baked mud and straw

Mid Babylon's revelling fume of sin;
Blacks that have served in every age
Since first the yoke of Ham they wore,
Yellows who set the printed page
Ere Homer sang from shore to shore,

Swart Browns whose glittering kreeses held
In dread the far-isled Asian seas,
Fierce Reds who waged from primal eld
Their stealthy warfare of the trees;
Men of the jaguar-haunted swamp

Whose mountain masters dwelt in pride
Of golden-cited Aztec pomp
Ages ere Montezuma died;
Builders whose blood was in the hands
That propped the circled Druid stones,

And Odin-fathered men, whose bands
Storming all winds, laid warrior bones
Round all the Roman mid-world sea,
And held the Cæsars' might in scorn,
And kept the Viking liberty

That fairer freedom might be born.

The wall defendeth all alike,
The Master Mind on all ordains:—
Within my bound no sword shall strike,
Nor fetter bind, save law arraigns;

No prisoner here shall feel the rack,
No infant be to slavery born,
The wage shall labor's sweat not lack,
Nor skill of just reward be shorn.
The king and hind alike shall stand

Within the peril of my law,
And though it change at time's demand
Shall every change be held in awe.
Here every voice may freely speak
Wisdom or folly as it choose,

And though the strong must lead the weak,
The weak may yet the strong refuse;
Thus shall no change be wrought before
The wise who seek a better way

Can win, to share their vision, more

Than praise the wise who wish delay,—
That so the Master Mind be strong
Through every drift of time and change,
To fashion either right or wrong
At will, within the mansions' range.

Of what is wrong and what is right
The Master Mind doth ceaseless hear,
Listens intent to counselling might,
Pity or fury, hope or fear,
Sways to the evil, yet repents,

Sways to the good, yet half denies,
Follows revenge, but quick relents,
And makes its wondering foes allies;
In memory sees its frenzied hours,
And holds those fury-fits in scorn;

In gentlest aspiration towers,
Or grovels as of faith forlorn,
Yet never, never loses quite
The thought, the hope, the glory-dream,
That beacon of supernal light,

The shining, holy Grail-like beam,
The Ideal—in which alone it dares
Advance the circuit of the wall—
The faith that yet shall happy shares
Of circumstance be won for all,—

This is the vision of its law,
This is the Asgard of its dream—
That what the world yet never saw
Of justice shall arise supreme.

The Master Mind proclaims as free

Alike, all creeds that men may name,
All worships they devise to be
Their help in hope, or ease in shame;
In Buddha, Mahmood, Moses, Christ,
Outspokenly may any trust,

Or he whom no belief enticed
May hold the soul a dream of dust,
Yet all alike be free to teach,
And all alike be free to shun,
Because the law of freeman's speech

Impartial guardeth every one;
If but all rites of blood be banned,
Then may each life select its God,
And every congregation stand
Past dread of persecution's rod,—

Lo now! Is thus not Jesus set
Transcendent o'er the broad domain—
The gentle Christ whose anguished sweat
Bled for a world-wide mercy's reign?

Yet in many Mansions flaunt,

As if they deem their place secure,
Legion, whose Christ-defying vaunt
How long, O Lord, dost Thou endure!
Belshazzar's Feast is multiplied,
Mammon holds fabulous parade,

Thousands of Minotaurs divide
The procurers' tribute of the maid,
Circe enchants her votary swine,
Moloch, though veiled his fire, consumes,

And all the man-made Gods assign

 Their victims self-elected dooms.

In large, the suffering and the sin
 (Full well the Master Mind doth know),
From luxury and want begin,
 And through unequal portions flow.

This ancient wrong doth worst defeat
 The immortal yearning of His plea
To save the little, wandering feet,—
 “Suffer the children come to me”;

Wherefore, on streets that Mammon makes

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 The Master Mind bends ruthless eye,
Yet calm withholds the blow that breaks,
 And leaves that stroke to by and by,
Since faithful memory, backward cast,
 Beholds how much hath freedom won,

And lest a pomp-destroying blast
 Might shrivel many a guiltless one,
And since it knows that freedom's plan
 To build secure alone is skilled,
And that firm-grounded gain for man

 Is only by what man hath willed.—
Hence waits the Master Mind, in trust
 That yet the hour shall Mammon rue,
Since, as the mansions grow, so must
 Freedom upraise The Christ anew.

But whether He prevail at last,

Or whether all shall pass away,
Even as Rome's great Empire passed
When wrought the purpose of its day,
Still must the builders heed the call

By which the Master of all Fate
Ordains they lay the advancing wall
Of peace beyond the farthest gate.

And, oh! the Master Mind may well
In pride of gentleness rejoice

That in the Mansions none may quell
The lilt of any nation's voice;
But every race may sing their joy,
May hymn their pride, their glories boast
To listeners glad without alloy—

The primal, wall-extending host,
The founding, freedom-loving race
Whose generous-visioning mind doth see
No worth in holding foremost place,
Save in an Empire of the Free.

Edward William Thomson

The Puritan

"I SHUN the theatre. It's not the place,"

She said, "that I dislike—no—all the sights
Of Orchestra and Audience and the space
Of brilliancy and life are my delights
When people talk at ease between the Acts.
But, oh, the Stage, the piteous puppets there

Posturing, ranting, and without a share
In the quick farce and tragedy of Facts!—
Unless the essential horror of a Play
Is that bright beings in God's image made
Should fume their little spans of strength away

In simulating fancied joy and grief
While really desperate that the mummers' trade
Holds them from useful Work, the soul's relief."

Edward William Thomson

The Vision At Shiloh

SHROUDED on Shiloh field in night and rain,
This body rested from the first's day's fight;
Fallen face down, both hands on rifle clutched,
A Shape of sprawling members, blank of thought
As was the April mud in which it lay.

Comrade, you deem that I shall surely lie
Torpid, forgetful, nevermore to march
After the flush of morning pales in day;
But I remember how I rose again
From Shiloh field to march three mighty years,

Until mine eyes beheld in Richmond streets
Our Father Abraham, homely conqueror,
So Son-of-Manlike, fashioned mild and meek,
Averse from triumph, close to common men,
Chief of a Nation mercifully strong.

In boyhood many a time I'd seen his face,
Knew well the accents of his voice serene,
Loved the kind twinkle of his sad-eyed smile,
Yet never once beheld him save with awe,
For that mysterious sense of unity

With the External Fortitude, which flowed
As from his gaze into my yearning heart.

The peace our Father's four years' Calvary wrought
Has bustled through his huge two-oceaned land
How busily since Shiloh's blood-drenched field

Gave up from death this body men called me.—
Oh, paths of peace were, truly, pleasant ways!
The kindest Nation earth has ever known
Gave to their veterans grateful preference
In every labor, mart, and council hall,

Which nobleness shall a thousand fold be paid
By soldier hearts in every future Age.

Myself was one whom Fortune favored much,
Children and children's children, troops of friends
Have cheered this firelit chamber silken hung

Where now I rest me easy at the last,
In confidence that Shiloh's miracle
Of Vision and of Song did true forecast
Repose in bliss surpassing mortal dream.

The night outside is black as Shiloh's night,

Save for electric-litten streaks of rain;
My dripping eaves declare November's shower
Falling as fast as early April's did
When first this time-worn body grew aware
Of Death's reluctant yielding to the Soul.

Utter oblivion could not be from Sleep
While battle roared, and dreaded evening fell,
And sullen foemen kept the plain unsearched,
And rain tempestuous stormed to midnight's gloom.

Oh, let me talk! I've seldom told the tale,

And I care nothing if my strength be strained.
Our generation ever held that Strength
Was given only that it might be tried.
What matters it if so my term of hours
Ere second resurrection be forestalled?

First did this body dimly sense its form
As something vaguely unified in Space;
Powerless, motionless, unaware of aught
Save merely numbness, while a smothering nose
And mumbling lips and tongue mechanical

Strove for they knew not what, which was to breathe—
Strove as by instinct uncontrolled of Mind,
Which nowise ordered hands enormous-like
To fumble baffled till they slowly learned
The fast-clutched rifle which bewildered them

Was such a thing as fingers could let go.

Then, to restore the breath, the forearms come
Beneath the brow, and raised the face from mud;
Yet all was numbness, but for tiny blows
Patting behind the neck, and prankily

Creeping at random down the cheeks and hair.
I did not guess them pellets of cold rain
Until a stab came up as from the ground
Into my wounded breast. Then Mind awoke
To wetness, night, and all the agonies

That dogged resolution rose to bear.

Shocked Memory cried, That stroke one instant past
Was shrapnel shell! The reasoning power replied,
It laid the body dead on Shiloh field.
Then staunch the Soul, I live—and God is here.

Visions came lightning-quick, clear, unconfused,—
The City tumult in my childish ears,
Our tremulous Church at Sumter's bulletin,
Me naked in the cold recruiting room
Stripped to the hurrying Doctor's callous test;—

All the innumerable recollections flashed
On to that battle-moment when my chum
Charging beside me on red Shiloh field
Gasped out, "Oh, John," clutched horribly his throat,
Frowned on his bloodied hands, stared wild at me

Who, in that moment, felt the stroke, and fell.

Was Harry nigh? I groped in puddled grass
Seeking his comrade corpse, and sought in vain.

The wound might not have killed him! Could I turn,
And so gain ground to search a little more?

Yes—but the agony! Yet turn I did,
And, groping farther, felt a little bush.
It seemed more friendly to the finger hold
Than emptiness, or muddy earth, or grass;
So there I lay, face up, in absolute night

Whose stillness deepened with the lessening rain.

How long, O Lord, how long the darkness held!
Despite the feverish wound my body chilled,
And oft my desperate fingers strove to loose
The soaking blanket roll which trenched my back

As if it lay diagonal on a ridge.

It may be true that slight delirium touched
My brain that night, for when a little wind
Came rustling through the bushes of the plain,
And drizzling ceased, how clearly my closed eyes

Could see within the house where I was born!

There sister voices coned their lesson books,
And Mother's dress was trailing on the stair
As she were coming up to comfort me,
While in my heart an expectation flowed

Of some inexplicable joy anear,
Angelic, shining-robed, austerely fair.

With that I opened wondering eyes—and Lo
The heavenly host of stars o'er Shiloh field!

And oh the glory of them, and the peace,

The promise, the ethereal hope renewed!
Up rose my soul, supreme past bodily grief,

To rest enraptured as of Heaven assured.

In that blest trance my gaze became intent
On beams I deemed at first a rising moon,

Until mine eyes conceived the luminous space
Haloed a tall and human-seeming Form,
Of countenance uplifted unto God,
And palms breast-clasped as if entreating Him.

In vain my straining sight sought certainty

Whose was the sorrowing figure which I dreamed
To wear a visage as if Christ were come
In pity for the carnage of that plain.

It seemed that nigh that Presence rose a voice
Most heavenly pure of note, and manlike strong;

"When I can read my title clear," it sang
Triumphantly, "To mansions in the skies,"
Lifting the hymn in exultation high
Till other voices took it—wounded men
Lying, like me, in pain and close to death;

Myself chimed in, while all about me rang
The soldier chanting of that prostrate host,
Northern and Southern, one united choir
Solemnly glad in Man's supernal dream.*

Comrade, when that high service of great song

Died down, there was no semblance of a moon!
And if indeed one rode the April sky
That wonder-night, I never yet have learned.

But I do know most surely this strange thing,—
That when, in Richmond, Father Abraham,

After three years grassed newly Shiloh plain,

Beheld my veteran men relieve his guard,
I saw the triumph in my countenance
Did grieve afresh his sad and infinite eyes
Which gazed with gentle meaning into mine

The while his silent lips seemed fashioning
For me alone, "Remember Shiloh Choir."

Then clear I knew his brooding tenderness
Bewailed our vanquished brethren, waked from years
Of dreadful dream he was their enemy;

The exultation vanished from my heart,
A choking pity took me in the throat,
And forth I rushed to join the ranks of Blue
Fighting, as saviours, flames in Richmond Town,
The while his kindly look seemed blessing me.

Now in the contemplation of his eyes
I lie content as stretched on Shiloh field,
Dreaming triumphant, waiting for the dawn.

There it broke fair, till shattering musketry
And cheers of charging Blue right onward swept

So far, it seemed that utter silence fell,
And I lay waiting very peacefully,
As now, for friendly hands to bear me home.

Edward William Thomson

The Wheatfield At Gettysburg

THESE famous acres bear a mystic wheat
That waits the Reaper's scythe
Alike in Summer shine and Winter sleet
And when the May is blithe.

Here phantom squirrels fenceward haste with grains

Of gleeful-taken toll
From waist-high stalks that hide meandering lanes
Of phantom mouse and mole.

Forever twittering wheat to nesting mate
A spirit oriole cries,

And ghostly bands of plundering crows elate
Caw beneath long-past skies.

In vain did Valor's fiery onset tread
The actual straw to dust,
And steep the living grain in pulsing red

From bullet and from thrust.

The Field stands wealthy with immortal wheat
Man never reaped for bread,
Touched by funereal zephyrs passing sweet
Where lay The Nameless Dead.

Imperishably set as Round Top's stones
The wheat forever waves
Peaceful as Gettysburg's white steeple drones
Over the host of graves.

Edward William Thomson

Thunderchild's Lament

WHEN the years grew worse, and the tribe longed sore
For a kinsman bred to the white man's lore,
To the Mission School they sent forth me
From the hunting life and the skin tepee.

In the Mission School eight years I wrought
Till my heart grew strange to its boyhood's thought,
Then the white men sent me forth from their ways
To the Blackfoot lodge and the roving days.

'He tells of their God,' said the Chiefs when I spake,
'But naught of the magic our foemen make,
'T is a Blackfoot heart with a white man's fear,
And all skill forgot that could help him here.'

For the Mission Priest had bent my will
From the art to steal and the mind to kill,
Then out from the life I had learned sent me
To the hungry plain and the dim tepee.

When the moon of March was great and round,
No meat for my father's teeth I found;
When the moon of March was curved and thin,
No meat for his life could my hunting win.

Wide went the tracks of my snowshoe mesh,
Deep was the white, and it still fell fresh
Far in the foothills, far on the plain,
Where I searched for the elk and the grouse in vain.

In the Lodge lay my father, grim in the smoke,
His eyes pierced mine as the gray dawn broke,
He gnawed on the edge of the buffalo hide,
And I must be accurst if my father died.

He spoke with wail: 'In the famine year
When my father starved as I starve here,
Was my heart like the squaw's who has fear to slay
'Mongst the herds of the white man far away?'

From the Mission School they sent forth me
To the gaunt, wild life of the dark tepee;

With the fear to steal, and the dread to kill,
And the love of Christ they had bent my will.

But my father gnawed on the buffalo hide,-
Toward the sunrise trod my snowshoe stride,
Straight to the white man's herd it led,
Till the sun sank down at my back in red.

Next dawn was bleak when I slew the steer,
I ate of the raw, and it gave me cheer;
So I set my feet in the track once more,
With my father's life in the meat I bore.

Far strode the herder, fast on my trail;
Noon was high when I heard his hail;
I fled in fear, but my feet moved slow,
For the load I shouldered sank them low.

Then I heard no sound but the creak and clack
Of his snowshoes treading my snowshoe track,
And I saw never help in plain or sky
Save that he should die or my father die.

The Mission Priest had broke my will
With the curse on him who blood would spill,
But my father starved in the black tepee,
And the cry of his starving shrieked to me.

The white world reeled to its cloudy rim,
The plain reeled red as I knelt by him,-
Oh, the spot in the snow, how it pulsed and grew,
How it cried from the mid-white up to the blue!

For the Mission Priest had sent forth me
To the wants and deeds of the wild tepee,
Yet the fear of God's strong curse fulfilled,
Cried with the blood that would not be stilled.

They found me not while the year was green
And the rose blew sweet where the stain had been,
They found me not when the fall-flowers flare,
But the red in the snow was ever there.

To the Jail I fled from the safe tepee,
And the Mission Priest will send forth me,

A Blackfoot soul cleansed white from stain-
Yet never the red spot fades from the plain.

It glares in my eyes when sunbeams fall
Through the iron grate of my stone-gray wall,
And I see, through starlight, foxes go
To track and to taste of the ruddy snow.

Edward William Thomson

To The Princess Louise

PRINCESS but yesterday, to-day
You are to us so very near
By human sorrow, that away
All forms and titles disappear;
Your mourning glooms the winter day,

Sunshiny clear although it show,
And all its glittering white array
Seems for our grief a shroud of woe.

Our bells ring out, and in the air
So long vibrate with mournful tone

That English bells seem answering there,
The sound from far-off belfries blown;
They toll together here as there,
For yours and you and theirs and ours,
And what if now her spirit were

Rejoiced by all the swooning towers?

Edward William Thomson

To Theodore Roosevelt

SHALL we to great Deliverers be blind
If they within our sight have daily wrought?
Must we forever cast our gaze behind,
Praising the past immortals of our kind,
And to our present heroes grudging aught?

Shall we lament that now no Hercules
Clubs down oppressors, and the people frees?
We, who have seen one valiant soul alone
Fronting the banded pirates of the State,
Renewing millions in a hope long flown,

Rousing his Nation to a heart elate.

There was no man bent faithful to his work
In all the Land but deemed this man his friend;
No woman did her natural duties shirk
But felt his scorn within her conscience irk;

No losel knave but longed to see an end
Of him who, Samson strong, smote every foe
That, guileful, gathered gain from public woe.
This man gave such example in high seat
That nevermore a President dares gaze

Gently on those who shivered while his feet
Trod in the righteous ruthlessness which slays.

Sought ye the Lord's anointed mid the Kings
Enthroned in pomp barbaric and outworn,
Entinselled, millinered, bedizened things

Pranked out as butterflies of peacocked wings,
Or gaudy poppies in the useful corn?
Go seek mid them who do, like him, oppose
Their strength in equal fight with equal foes
Where Worth can summon Friendship to its side,

Can help the piteous Weak, can smite the Base,
Can spurn the flauntings of a gewgaw pride,
Effeminate Pleasure's cunning lures deride,
And, Godlike laboring, animate the Race.

Let cynic drollards fling the easy jeer

At him who by mysterious Fate's uplift
Received anointment true, when chose to steer,
Watchful, enduring, staunch from year to year,
The Ship of Freedom's Hope from anxious drift.

He is no paragon of virtues mild,

No meek Academy's precisian child;
Hot indignation gives him tones that ring
As steely mallet battering iron thing,—
But, oh, his strokes befit a Man of men!
And long may we desire his like again.

Go to the lions—safe thou shalt return—
No martyr soul in thee confronts their frown—
'T is for thy homebound ship that we shall yearn;
Ephesian beasts may then again discern
God's hammer smashing their defences down.

Edward William Thomson

We Talked Of Lincoln

WE talked of Abraham Lincoln in the night,
Ten fur-coat men on North Saskatchewan's plain—
Pure zero cold, and all the prairie white—
Englishman, Scotchman, Scandinavian, Dane,
Two Irish, four Canadians—all for gain

Of food and raiment, children, parents, wives,
Living the hardest life that Man survives,
And secret proud because it was so hard
Exploring, camping, axeing, faring lean.—
Month in and out no creature had we seen

Except our burdened dogs, gaunt foxes gray,
Hard-feathered grouse that shot would seldom slay,
Slinking coyotés, plummy-trailing owls,
Stark Indians warm in rabbit-blanket cowls,
And, still as shadows in their deep-tracked yard,

The dun vague moose we startled from our way.

We talked of Abraham Lincoln in the night
Around our fire of tamarac crackling fierce,
Yet dim, like moon and stars, in that vast light
Boreal, bannery, shifting quick to pierce

Ethereal blanks of Space with falchion streams
Transfigured wondrous into quivering beams
From Forms enormous-marching through the sky
To dissolution and new majesty.
And speech was low around our bivouac fire,

Since in our inmost heart of hearts there grew
The sense of mortal feebleness, to see
Those silent miracles of Might on high
Seemingly done for only such as we
In sign how nearer Death and Doom we drew,

While in the ancient tribal-soul we knew

Our old, hardfaring father-Vikings' dreams
Of Odin at Valhalla's open door,
Where they might see the Battle-father's face
Glowing at last, when Life and Toil were o'er,

Were they but staunch-enduring in their place.

We talked of Abraham Lincoln in the night.—
Oh sweet and strange to hear the hard-hand men
Old-Abeing him, like half the world of yore
In years when Grant's and Lee's young soldiers bore

Rifle and steel, and proved that heroes live
Where folk their lives to Labor mostly give.
And strange and sweet to hear their voices call
Him "Father Abraham," though no man of all
Was born within the Nation of his birth.

It was as if they felt that all on Earth
Possess of right Earth's greatest Common Man,
Her sanest, wisest, simplest, steadiest son,
To whom The Father's children all were one,
And Poms and Vanities as motes that danced

In the clear sunshine where his humor glanced.

We talked of Abraham Lincoln in the night
Until one spoke, "We yet may see his face,"
Whereon the fire crackled loud through space
Of human silence, while eyes reverent

Toward the auroral miracle were bent
Till from that trancing Glory spirits came
Within our semi-circle round the flame,
And drew us closer-ringed, until we could
Feel the kind touch of vital brotherhood

Which Father Abraham Lincoln thought so good.

When Lincoln Died

ALREADY Appomattox day
Seemed to our hearts an age away,
Although the April-blossomed trees
Were droning with the very bees
That bumbled round the conference

Where Lee resigned his long defence,
And Grant's new gentleness subdued
The iron Southern fortitude.

From smouldering leaves the smoky smell
Wreathed round Virginian fields a spell

Of homely aromatic haze,
So like New Hampshire springtime days
About the slopes of Moosilauke
It numbed my homesick heart to talk,
And when the bobolinks trilled "Rejoice!"

My comrade could not trust his voice.

We were two cavalrymen assigned
To safeguard Pinckney womankind,
Whose darkies rambled Lord knows where
In some persuasion that they were

Thenceforth, in ease, at public charge
To live as gentlemen at large—
A purpose which, they'd heard, the war
Was made by "Massa Linkum" for.

The pillared mansion, battle-wrecked,

Yet stood with ivied front erect,
Its mossy gables, shell-fire-torn,
Were still in lordliness upborne
Above the neighboring barns, well stored
With war-time's rich tobacco hoard;

But on the place, for food, was naught
Save what our commissary brought
To keep the planter's folk alive
Till Colonel Pinckney might arrive
Paroled from northward, if his head

Lay not among the prisoner dead.

We'd captured him ten days before,
When Richard Ewell's veteran corps,
Half-naked, starving, fought amain
To save their dwindling wagon-train.

Since they were weak and we were strong,
The battle was not overlong.
Again I see the prisoners stare
Exultant at the orange glare
Of sunlit flame they saw aspire

Up from the train they gave to fire.
They'd shred apart their hero flags
To share the silk as heart-worn rags.
The trampled field was strewn about
With wreckage of the closing rout—

Their dead, their wounded, rifles broke,
Their mules and horses slain in yoke;
Their torn-up records, widely spread,
Fluttered around the muddy dead—
So bitter did their hearts condemn

To ruin all we took with them.

Ten days before! The war was past,
The Union saved, Peace come at last,
And Father Abraham's words of balm
Gentling the war-worn States to calm.

Of all the miracles he wrought
That was the sweetest. Men who'd fought
So long they'd learned to think in hate,
And savor blood when bread they ate,

And hear their buried comrades wail,

How long, O Lord, doth wrong prevail?
List'ning alike, in blue or gray,
Felt war's wild passions soothed away.

By homely touches in the air
That morning was so sweet and rare

That Father Abraham's soul serene
Seemed brooding over all the scene;
And when we found the plough, I guess
We were so tired of idleness
Our farmer fingers yearned to hold

The handles, and to sense the mould
Turning the earth behind the knife.

Jim gladdened as with freshened life;—
"Say, John," said he, "I'm feeling beat
To know what these good folks will eat

When you and I are gone. Next fall
They're sure to have no crop at all.
All their tobacco's confiscate
By Washington—and what a state
Of poverty they're bound to see!

Say, buddy, what if you and me
Just hitch our cavalry horses now
Up to this blamed Virginia plough,
And run some furrows through the field?
With commissary seed they'd yield

A reasonable crop of corn."
"They will," said I, "as sure's you're born!"

Quickly we rigged, with rope and straps
And saddle leathers—well, perhaps
The Yankiest harness ever planned

To haul a plough through farming land.
It made us kind of happy, too,
Feeling like Father Abraham knew.

The Pinckney place stood on a rise,
And when we'd turned an end, our eyes

Would see the mansion war had wrecked,—
Such desolation! I suspect
The women's hearts were mourning sore;
But not one tear we saw—they bore
Composed the fortune fate had sent—

But, O dear Lord, how still they went!
I've seen such quiet in a shroud,
Inscrutably resigned and proud.

Yet, when we'd worked an hour or two,
And plain was what we meant to do,

Mother and daughters came kind-eyed,—
"Soldiers—my soldier husband's pride
Will be to thank you well—till then
We call you friendly, helpful men—"
It seemed she stopped for fear of tears.

She turned—they went—Oh, long the years
Gone by since that brave lady spoke—
And yet I hear the voice that broke.

We watched them climb the lilac hill,
Again the spring grew strangely still

Ere, far upon the turnpike road,
Across a clattering bridge, where flowed
Through sand the stream of Pinckney Run,
We heard the galloping of one
Who, hidden by the higher ground,

Pounded as fast as horse could pound.

Then—all again was still as death—
Till up the slope, with laboring breath,
A white steed rose—his rider gray
Spurring like mad his staggering way.

The man was old and tall and white,
His glooming eyes looked dead to light,
He rode with such a fateful air
I felt a coldness thrill my hair,
He rode as one hard hit rides out

In horror from some battle rout,
Bearing a cry for instant aid—
That aspect made my heart afraid. [Page 63]

The death-like rider drew no rein,
Nor seemed to note us on the plain,

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Nor seemed to know how weak in stride
His horse strove up the long hillside;
When down it lurched, on foot the man
Up through the fringing lilacs ran,
His left hand clutching empty air

As if his sabre still hung there.

'T was plain as day that human blast
Was Colonel Pinckney home at last,
And we were free, since ordered so
That with his coming we might go;

Yet on we ploughed—the sun swung high,
Quiet the earth and blue the sky—
Silent we wrought, as men who wait
Some half-imagined stroke of fate,
While through the trembling shine came knells

Tolling from far-off Lynchburg bells.

The solemn, thrilling sounds of gloom
Bore portents of tremendous doom,
On smoky zephyrs drifted by
Shadows of hosts in charging cry,

In fields where silence ruled profound
Growling musketry echoed round,
Pale phantom ranks did starkly pass
Invisible across the grass,
Flags ghosted wild in powder fume

Till, miracled in memory's room,
Rang the old regiment's rousing cheer
For Father Abraham, smiling queer.

'T was when we turned a furrow's end
We saw a martial form descend

From Mansion Hill the lilac way,
Till in our field the veteran gray
Stood tall and straight as at parade,
And yet as one with soul dismayed.
That living emblem of the South

Faced us unblenching, though his mouth
So quivered with the spoken word
It seemed a tortured heart we heard;—
"Soldiers"—he eyed us nobly when
We stood to "attention"—"Soldiers—men,

For this good work my thanks are due—
But—men—O God—men, if you knew,
Your kindly hands had shunned the plough—
For hell comes up between us now!—
Oh, sweet was peace—but gone is peace—

185

Murder and hate have fresh release!—

The deed be on the assassin's head!—
Men—Abraham Lincoln's lying dead!"

He steadied then—he told us through
All of the tale that Lynchburg knew,

190

While dumbly raged my anguished heart
With woe from pity wrenched apart,
For, in the fresh red furrow, bled
'Twixt us and him the martyred dead.

That precious crimson ran so fast

195

It merged in tinge with battles past,—
Hatcher's, Five Forks, The Wilderness,
The Bloody Angle's maddened stress;
Down Cemetery Hill there poured
Torrents that stormed to Kelly's Ford,

200

And twice Manassas flung its flood
To swell the four years' tide of blood,
And Sumter blazed, and Ellsworth fell,
While memory flashed its gleams of hell.

The colonel's staring eyes declared

205

In visions wild as ours he shared,
Until—dear Christ—with Thine was blent
The death-transfigured President. [Page 65]

Strange—strange—the crown of thorns he wore,
His outspread hands were piercèd sore,

And down his old black coat a tide
Flowed from the javelin-wounded side;
Yet 't was his homely self there stood,
And gently smiled across the blood,

And changed the mystic stream to tears

That swept afar the angry years,
And flung me down as falls a child
Whose heart breaks out in weeping wild.

Yet in that field we ploughed no more,
We shunned the open Southern door,

We saddled up, we rode away,—
It's that that troubles me to-day.

Full thirty years to dust were turned
Before my pondering soul had learned
The blended vision there was sent

In sign that our Belovèd meant;—
Children who wrought so mild my will,
Plough the long furrow kindly still,
'T is sweet the Father's work to see
Done for the memory of me.

Edward William Thomson