

1890

**POEMS**

Emily Dickinson

**Dickinson, Emily** (1830-1886) - American poet whose works were uniformly short, usually consisting of four-line stanzas. Though she wrote close to two-thousand poems, only seven were published during her lifetime. *Poems* (1890) - After Dickinson's death her sister, Lavinia, discovered hundreds of poems in her room. Lavinia persuaded an editor and a family friend to publish the verses. "Poems" is the first published collection of her work, consisting of 125 short poems.

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## PRELUDE

This is my letter to the world,  
That never wrote to me,-  
The simple news that Nature told,  
With tender majesty.

Her message is committed  
To hands I cannot see;  
For love of her, sweet countrymen,  
Judge tenderly of me!

## PREFACE

THE verses of Emily Dickinson belong emphatically to what Emerson long since called "the Poetry of the Portfolio"- something produced absolutely without the thought of publication, and solely by way of expression of the writer's own mind. Such verse must inevitably forfeit whatever advantage lies in the discipline of public criticism and the enforced conformity to accepted ways. On the other hand, it may often gain something through the habit of freedom and the unconventional utterance of daring thoughts. In the case of the present author, there was absolutely no choice in the matter; she must write thus, or not at all. A recluse by temperament and habit, literally spending years without setting her foot beyond the doorstep, and many more years during which her walks were strictly limited to her father's grounds, she habitually concealed her mind, like her person, from all but a very few friends; and it was with great difficulty that she was persuaded to print, during her lifetime, three or four poems. Yet she wrote verses in great abundance; and though curiously indifferent to all conventional rules, had yet a rigorous literary standard of her own, and often altered a word many times to suit an ear which had its own tenacious fastidiousness.

Miss Dickinson was born in Amherst, Mass., Dec. 10, 1830, and died there May 15, 1886. Her father, Hon. Edward Dickinson, was the leading lawyer of Amherst, and was treasurer of the well-known college there situated. It was his custom once a year to hold a large reception at his house, attended by all the fami-

lies connected with the institution and by the leading people of the town. On these occasions his daughter Emily emerged from her wonted retirement and did her part as gracious hostess; nor would any one have known from her manner, I have been told, that this was not a daily occurrence. The annual occasion once past, she withdrew again into her seclusion, and except for a very few friends was as invisible to the world as if she had dwelt in a nunnery. For myself, although I had corresponded with her for many years, I saw her but twice face to face, and brought away the impression of something as unique and remote as Undine or Mignon or Thekla.

This selection from her poems is published to meet the desire of her personal friends, and especially of her surviving sister. It is believed that the thoughtful reader will find in these pages a quality more suggestive of the poetry of William Blake than of anything to be elsewhere found,- flashes of wholly original and profound insight into nature and life; words and phrases exhibiting an extraordinary vividness of descriptive and imaginative power, yet often set in a seemingly whimsical or even rugged frame. They are here published as they were written, with very few and superficial changes. In many cases these verses will seem to the reader like poetry torn up by the roots, with rain and dew and earth still clinging to them, giving a freshness and a fragrance not otherwise to be conveyed. In other cases, as in the few poems of shipwreck or of mental conflict, we can only wonder at the gift of vivid imagination by which this recluse woman can delineate, by a few touches, the very crises of physical or mental struggle. And sometimes again we catch glimpses of a lyric strain, sustained perhaps but a for line or

two at a time, and making the reader regret its sudden cessation. But the main quality of these poems is that of extraordinary grasp and insight, uttered with an uneven vigor sometimes exasperating, seemingly wayward, but really unsought and inevitable. After all, when a thought takes one's breath away, a lesson on grammar seems an impertinence. As Ruskin wrote in his earlier and better days, "No weight nor mass nor beauty of execution can outweigh one grain or fragment of thought."

THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON

# LIFE

## I

SUCCESS is counted sweetest  
By those who ne'er succeed.  
To comprehend a nectar  
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple host  
Who took the flag to-day  
Can tell the definition,  
So clear, of victory,

As he, defeated, dying,  
On whose forbidden ear  
The distant strains of triumph  
Break, agonized and clear.

## II

OUR share of night to bear,  
Our share of morning,  
Our blank in bliss to fill,



Our blank in scorning, -  
Here a star, and there a star,  
Some lose their way.  
Here a mist, and there a mist,  
Afterwards- day!

### III

SOUL, wilt thou toss again?  
By just such a hazard  
Hundreds have lost, indeed,  
But tens have won an all.

Angels' breathless ballot  
Lingers to record thee;  
Imps in eager caucus  
Raffle for my soul.

### IV.

'T IS so much joy! 'T is so much joy!  
If I should fail, what poverty!  
And yet, as poor as I  
Have ventured all upon a throw;  
Have gained! Yes! Hesitated so

This side the victory! -  
Life is but life, and death but death!  
Bliss is but bliss, and breath but breath!  
And if, indeed, I fail,  
At least to know the worst is sweet.  
Defeat means nothing but defeat,  
No drearier can prevail!

And if I gain,- oh, gun at sea,  
Oh, bells that in the steeples be,  
At first repeat it slow!  
For heaven is a different thing  
Conjectured, and waked sudden in,  
And might o'erwhelm me so!

V.

GLEE! the great storm is over!  
Four have recovered the land;  
Forty gone down together  
Into the boiling sand.

Ring, for the scant salvation!

Toll, for the bonnie souls,-  
Neighbor and friend and bridegroom,  
Spinning upon the shoals!

How they will tell the shipwreck  
When winter shakes the door,  
Till the children ask, "But the forty?  
Did they come back no more?"

Then a silence suffuses the story,  
And a softness the teller's eye;  
And the children no further question,  
And only the waves reply.

## VI.

IF I can stop one heart from breaking,  
I shall not live in vain;  
If I can ease one life the aching,  
Or cool one pain,  
Or help one fainting robin  
Unto his nest again,  
I shall not live in vain.

## VII.

WITHIN my reach!  
I could have touched!  
I might have chanced that way!  
Soft sauntered through the village,  
Sauntered as soft away!  
So unsuspected violets  
Within the fields lie low,  
Too late for striving fingers  
That passed, an hour ago.

## VIII.

A WOUNDED deer leaps highest,  
I've heard the hunter tell;  
'Tis but the ecstasy of death,  
And then the brake is still.

The smitten rock that gushes,  
The trampled steel that springs:  
A cheek is always redder  
Just where the hectic stings!

Mirth is the mail of anguish,  
In which it cautious arm,  
Lest anybody spy the blood  
And "You're hurt" exclaim!

**IX.**

THE heart asks pleasure first,  
And then, excuse from pain;  
And then, those little anodynes  
That deaden suffering;

And then, to go to sleep;  
And then, if it should be  
The will of its Inquisitor,  
The liberty to die.

**X.**

A PRECIOUS, mouldering pleasure 't is  
To meet an antique book,  
In just the dress his century wore;  
A privilege, I think,

His venerable hand to take,

And warming in our own,  
A passage back, or two, to make  
To times when he was young.

His quaint opinions to inspect,  
His knowledge to unfold  
On what concerns our mutual mind,  
The literature of old;

What interested scholars most,  
What competitions ran  
When Plato was a certainty,  
And Sophocles a man;

When Sappho was a living girl,  
And Beatrice wore  
The gown that Dante deified.  
Facts, centuries before,

He traverses familiar,  
As one should come to town  
And tell you all your dreams were true:

He lived where dreams were sown. -  
His presence is enchantment,  
You beg him not to go;  
Old volumes shake their vellum heads  
And tantalize, just so.

**XI.**

MUCH madness is divinest sense  
To a discerning eye;  
Much sense the starkest madness.  
'T is the majority  
In this, as all, prevails.  
Assent, and you are sane;  
Demur,- you're straightway dangerous,  
And handled with a chain.

**XII.**

I ASKED no other thing,  
No other was denied.  
I offered Being for it;  
The mighty merchant smiled.

Brazil? He twirled a button,

Without a glance my way:  
"But madam, is there nothing else  
That we can show to-day?"

**XIII.**

THE soul selects her own society,  
Then shuts the door;  
On her divine majority  
Obtrude no more.

Unmoved, she notes the chariot's pausing  
At her low gate;  
Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling  
Upon her mat.

I've known her from an ample nation  
Choose one;  
Then close the valves of her attention  
Like stone.

**XIV.**

SOME things that fly there be,-  
Birds, hours, the bumble-bee:



Of these no elegy. -  
Some things that stay there be,-  
Grief, hills, eternity:  
Nor this behooveth me.

There are, that resting, rise.  
Can I expound the skies?  
How still the riddle lies!

**XV.**

I KNOW some lonely houses off the road  
A robber'd like the look of,-  
Wooden barred,  
And windows hanging low,  
Inviting to  
A portico,  
Where two could creep:  
One hand the tools,  
The other peep  
To make sure all's asleep.  
Old-fashioned eyes,  
Not easy to surprise!

How orderly the kitchen'd look by night,  
With just a clock,-  
But they could gag the tick,  
And mice won't bark;  
And so the walls don't tell, None will.  
A pair of spectacles ajar just stir-  
An almanac's aware.  
Was it the mat winked,  
Or a nervous star?  
The moon slides down the stair  
To see who's there.

There's plunder,- where?  
Tankard, or spoon,  
Earring, or stone,  
A watch, some ancient brooch  
To match the grandmamma,  
Staid sleeping there.

Day-rattles, too,  
Stealth's slow;  
The sun has got as far

As the third sycamore.  
Screams chanticleer,  
“Who’s there?”  
Sneer- “Where?”  
While the old couple, just astir,  
Fancy the sunrise left the door ajar!

**XVI.**

TO fight aloud is very brave,  
But gallanter, I know,  
Who charge within the bosom,  
The cavalry of woe.

Who win, and nations do not see,  
Who fall, and none observe,  
Whose dying eyes no country  
Regards with patriot love.

We trust, in plumed procession,  
For such the angels go,  
Rank after rank, with even feet  
And uniforms of snow.

**XVII.**

WHEN night is almost done,  
And sunrise grows so near  
That we can touch the spaces,  
It's time to smooth the hair.

And get the dimples ready,  
And wonder we could care  
For that old faded midnight  
That frightened but an hour.

**XVIII.**

READ, sweet, how others strove,  
Till we are stouter;  
What they renounced,  
Till we are less afraid;  
How many times they bore  
The faithful witness,  
Till we are helped,  
As if a kingdom cared!

Read then of faith

That shone above the fagot;  
Clear strains of hymn  
The river could not drown;  
Brave names of men  
And celestial women,  
Passed out of record  
Into renown!

**XIX.**

PAIN has an element of blank;  
It cannot recollect  
When it began, or if there were  
A day when it was not.

It has no future but itself,  
Its infinite realms contain  
Its past, enlightened to perceive  
New periods of pain.

**XX.**

I TASTE a liquor never brewed,  
From tankards scooped in pearl;  
Not all the vats upon the Rhine

Yield such an alcohol!

Inebriate of air am I,  
And debauchee of dew,  
Reeling, through endless summer days,  
From inns of molten blue. -

When landlords turn the drunken bee  
Out of the foxglove's door,  
When butterflies renounce their drams,  
I shall but drink the more!

Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,  
And saints to windows run,  
To see the little tippler  
Leaning against the sun!

**XXI.**

HE ate and drank the precious words,  
His spirit grew robust;  
He knew no more that he was poor,  
Nor that his frame was dust.

He danced along the dingy days,  
And this bequest of wings  
Was but a book. What liberty  
A loosened spirit brings!

**XXII.**

I HAD no time to hate, because  
The grave would hinder me,  
And life was not so ample I  
Could finish enmity.

Nor had I time to love; but since  
Some industry must be,  
The little toil of love, I thought,  
Was large enough for me.

**XXIII.**

'T WAS such a little, little boat  
That toddled down the bay!  
'T was such a gallant, gallant sea  
That beckoned it away!

'T was such a greedy, greedy wave

That licked it from the coast;  
Nor ever guessed the stately sails  
My little craft was lost!

**XXIV.**

WHETHER my bark went down at sea,  
Whether she met with gales,  
Whether to isles enchanted  
She bent her docile sails; -  
By what mystic mooring  
She is held to-day,-  
This is the errand of the eye  
Out upon the bay.

**XXV.**

BELSHAZZAR had a letter,-  
He never had but one;  
Belshazzar's correspondent  
Concluded and begun  
In that immortal copy  
The conscience of us all  
Can read without its glasses  
On revelation's wall.



**XXVI.**

THE brain within its groove  
Runs evenly and true;  
But let a splinter swerve,  
'T were easier for you  
To put the water back  
When floods have slit the hills,  
And scooped a turnpike for themselves,  
And blotted out the mills!

# LOVE I

## I.

MINE by the right of the white election!  
Mine by the royal seal!  
Mine by the sign in the scarlet prison  
Bars cannot conceal!

Mine, here in vision and in veto!  
Mine, by the grave's repeal  
Titled, confirmed,- delirious charter!  
Mine, while the ages steal!

## II.

YOU left me, sweet, two legacies,-  
A legacy of love  
A Heavenly Father would content,  
Had He the offer of;

You left me boundaries of pain  
Capacious as the sea,  
Between eternity and time,

Your consciousness and me.

**III.**

ALTER? When the hills do.  
Falter? When the sun  
Question if his glory  
Be the perfect one.

Surfeit? When the daffodil  
Doth of the dew:  
Even as herself, O friend!  
I will of you!

**IV.**

ELYSIUM is as far as to  
The very nearest room,  
If in that room a friend await  
Felicity or doom.

What fortitude the soul contains,  
That it can so endure  
The accent of a coming foot,  
The opening of a door!

V.

DOUBT me, my dim companion!  
Why, God would be content  
With but a fraction of the love  
Poured thee without a stint.  
The whole of me, forever,  
What more the woman can,-

Say quick, that I may dower thee  
With last delight I own!

It cannot be my spirit,  
For that was thine before;  
I ceded all of dust I knew,-  
What opulence the more  
Had I, a humble maiden,  
Whose farthest of degree  
Was that she might,  
Some distant heaven,  
Dwell timidly with thee!

## VI.

IF you were coming in the fall,  
I'd brush the summer by  
With half a smile and half a spurn,  
As housewives do a fly.

If I could see you in a year,  
I'd wind the months in balls,  
And put them each in separate drawers,  
Until their time befalls.

If only centuries delayed,  
I'd count them on my hand,  
Subtracting till my fingers dropped  
Into Van Diemen's land.

If certain, when this life was out,  
That yours and mine should be,  
I'd toss it yonder like a rind,  
And taste eternity.

But now, all ignorant of the length

Of time's uncertain wing,  
It goads me, like the goblin bee,  
That will not state its sting.

**VII.**

I HIDE myself within my flower,  
That wearing on your breast,  
You, unsuspecting, wear me too-  
And angels know the rest.

I hide myself within my flower,  
That, fading from your vase,  
You, unsuspecting, feel for me  
Almost a loneliness.

**VIII.**

THAT I did always love,  
I bring thee proof:  
That till I loved  
I did not love enough.

That I shall love always,  
I offer thee

That love is life,  
And life hath immorality.

This, dost thou doubt, sweet?  
Then have I  
Nothing to show  
But Calvary.

**IX.**

HAVE you got a brook in your little heart,  
Where bashful flowers blow,  
And blushing birds go down to drink,  
And shadows tremble so?

And nobody knows, so still it flows,  
That any brook is there;  
And yet your little draught of life  
Is daily drunken there;

Then look out for the little brook in March,  
When the rivers overflow,  
And the snows come hurrying from the hills,

And the bridges often go.

And later, in August it may be,  
When the meadows parching lie,  
Beware, lest this little brook of life  
Some burning noon go dry!

**X.**

AS if some little Arctic flower,  
Upon the polar hem,  
Went wandering down the latitudes,  
Until it puzzled came  
To continents of summer,  
To firmaments of sun,  
To strange, bright crowds of flowers,  
And birds of foreign tongue!  
I say, as if this little flower  
To Eden wandered in-  
What then? Why, nothing, only  
Your inference therefrom!

**XI.**

MY river runs to thee:



Blue sea, wilt  
welcome me?

My river waits reply.  
Oh, sea, look graciously!

I'll fetch thee brooks  
From spotted nooks,  
Say, sea,  
Take me!

## **XII.**

I CANNOT live with you,  
It would be life,  
And life is over there  
Behind the shelf

The sexton keeps the key to,  
Putting up  
Our life, his porcelain,  
Like a cup

Discarded of the housewife,  
Quaint or broken;  
A newer Sevres pleases,  
Old ones crack.

I could not die with you,  
For one must wait  
To shut the other's gaze down,-  
You could not.

And I, could I stand by  
And see you freeze,  
Without my right of frost,  
Death's privilege?

Nor could I rise with you,  
Because your face  
Would put out Jesus',  
That new grace

Glow-plain and foreign  
On my homesick eye,

Except that you, than he  
Shone closer by.

They'd judge us- how?  
For you served Heaven, you know,  
Or sought to;  
I could not,

Because you saturated sight,  
And I had no more eyes  
For sordid excellence  
As Paradise.

And were you lost, I would be,  
Though my name  
Rang loudest  
On the heavenly fame.

And were you saved,  
And I condemned to be  
Where you were not,  
That self were hell to me.

So we must keep apart,  
You there, I here,  
With just the door ajar  
That oceans are,  
And prayer,  
And that pale sustenance,  
Despair!

### **XIII.**

THERE came a day at summer's full  
Entirely for me;  
I thought that such were for the saints,  
Where revelations be.

The sun, as common, went abroad,  
The flowers, accustomed, blew,  
As if no soul the solstice passed  
That maketh all things new.

The time was scarce profaned by speech;  
The symbol of a word

Was needless, as at sacrament  
The wardrobe of our Lord.

Each was to each the sealed church,  
Permitted to commune this time,  
Lest we too awkward show  
At supper of the Lamb.

The hours slid fast, as hours will,  
Clutched tight by greedy hands;  
So faces on two decks look back,  
Bound to opposing lands.

And so, when all the time had failed,  
Without external sound,  
Each bound the other's crucifix,  
We gave no other bond.

Sufficient troth that we shall rise-  
Deposed, at length, the grave-  
To that new marriage, justified  
Through Calvaries of Love!

#### XIV.

I'M ceded, I've stopped being theirs;  
The name they dropped upon my face  
With water, in the country church,  
Is finished using now,  
And they can put it with my dolls,  
My childhood, and the string of spools  
I've finished threading too.

Baptized before without the choice,  
But this time consciously, of grace  
Unto supremest name,  
Called to my full, the crescent dropped,  
Existence's whole arc filled up  
With one small diadem.

My second rank, too small the first,  
Crowned, crowing on my father's breast,  
A half unconscious queen;  
But this time, adequate, erect,  
With will to choose or to reject,  
And I choose- just a throne.

**XV.**

'T WAS a long parting, but the time  
For interview had come;  
Before the judgment-seat of God,  
The last and second time -  
These fleshless lovers met,  
A heaven in a gaze,  
A heaven of heavens, the privilege  
On one another's eyes.

No lifetime set on them,  
Apparelled as the new  
Unborn, except they had beheld,  
Born everlasting now.

Was bridal e'er like this?  
A paradise, the host,  
A cherubim and seraphim  
The most familiar guest.

**XVI.**

I'M wife; I've finished that,

That other state;  
I'm Czar, I'm woman now:  
It's safer so.

How odd the girl's life looks  
Behind this soft eclipse!  
I think that earth seems so  
To those in heaven now.

This being comfort, then  
That other kind was pain;  
But why compare?  
I'm wife! stop there!

**XVII.**

SHE rose to his requirement, dropped  
The playthings of her life  
To take the honorable work  
Of woman and of wife.

If aught she missed in her new day  
Of amplitude, or awe,



Or first prospective, or the gold  
In using wore away,

It lay unmentioned, as the sea  
Develops pearl and weed,  
But only to himself is known  
The fathoms they abide.

**XVIII.**

COME slowly, Eden!  
Lips unused to thee,  
Bashful, sip thy jasmynes,  
As the fainting bee,

Reaching late his flower,  
Round her chamber hums,  
Counts his nectars- enters,  
And is lost in balms!

## NATURE I

### I.

NEW feet within my garden go,  
New fingers stir the sod;  
A troubadour upon the elm  
Betrays the solitude.

New children play upon the green,  
New weary sleep below;  
And still the pensive spring returns,  
And still the punctual snow!

### II.

PINK, small, and punctual,  
Aromatic, low,  
Covert in April,  
Candid in May,

Dear to the moss,  
Known by the knoll,  
Next to the robin

In every human soul.

Bold little beauty,  
Bedecked with thee,  
Nature forswears  
Antiquity.

### III.

THE murmur of a bee  
A witchcraft yieldeth me.  
If any ask me why,  
'T were easier to die  
Than tell. -

The red upon the hill  
Taketh away my will;  
If anybody sneer,  
Take care, for God is here,  
That's all.

The breaking of the day  
Addeth to my degree;

If any ask me how,  
Artist, who drew me so,  
Must tell!

**IV.**

PERHAPS you'd like to buy a flower?  
But I could never sell.  
If you would like to borrow  
Until the daffodil -  
Unties her yellow bonnet  
Beneath the village door,  
Until the bees, from clover rows  
Their hock and sherry draw,

Why, I will lend until just then,  
But not an hour more!

**V.**

THE pedigree of honey  
Does not concern the bee;  
A clover, any time, to him  
Is aristocracy.

## VI.

SOME keep the Sabbath going to church;  
I keep it staying at home,  
With bobolink for a chorister,  
And an orchard for a dome.

Some keep the Sabbath in surplice;  
I just wear my wings,  
And instead of tolling the bell for church,  
Our little sexton sings.

God preaches,- a noted clergyman,-  
And the sermon is never long;  
So instead of getting to heaven at last,  
I'm going all along!

## VII.

THE bee is not afraid of me,  
I know the butterfly;  
The pretty people in the woods  
Receive me cordially.

The brooks laugh louder when I come,  
The breezes madder play.  
Wherefore, mine eyes, they silver mists?  
Wherefore, O summer's day?

### VIII.

SOME rainbow coming from the fair!  
Some vision of the world Cashmere  
I confidently see!  
Or else a peacock's purple train,  
Feather by feather, on the plain  
Fritters itself away!

The dreamy butterflies bestir,  
Lethargic pools resume the whir  
Of last year's Sundered tune.  
From some old fortress on the sun  
Baronial bees march, one by one,  
In murmuring platoon!

The robins stand as thick today  
As flakes of snow stood yesterday,

On fence and roof and twig.  
The orchis binds her feather on  
For her old lover, Don the Sun,  
Revisiting the bog!

Without commander, countless, still,  
The regiment of wood and hill  
In bright detachment stand.  
Behold! Whose multitudes are these?  
The children of whose turbaned seas,  
Or what Circassian land?

**IX.**

THE grass so little has to do,-  
A sphere of simple green,  
With only butterflies to brood,  
And bees to entertain,

And stir all day to pretty tunes  
The breezes fetch along,  
And hold the sunshine in its lap  
And bow to everything;

And thread the dewes all night, like pearls,  
And make itself so fine,-  
A duchess were too common  
For such a noticing.

And even when it dies, to pass  
In odors so divine,  
As lowly spices gone to sleep,  
Or amulets of pine.

And then to dwell in sovereign barns,  
And dream the days away,-

The grass so little has to do,  
I wish I were the hay!

**X.**

A LITTLE road not made of man,  
Enabled of the eye,  
Accessible to thill of bee,  
Or cart of butterfly.



If town it have, beyond itself,  
'T is that I cannot say;  
I only sigh,- no vehicle  
Bears me along that way.

**XI.**

A DROP fell on the apple tree,  
Another on the roof;  
A half a dozen kissed the eaves,  
And made the gables laugh.

A few went out to help the brook,  
That went to help the sea.  
Myself conjectured, Were they pearls,  
What necklaces could be!

The dust replaced in hoisted roads,  
The birds jocosely sung;  
The sunshine threw his hat away,  
The orchards spangles hung.

The breezes brought dejected lutes,

And bathed them in the glee;  
The East put out a single flag,  
And signed the fete away.

## **XII.**

A SOMETHING in a summer's day,  
As slow her flambeaux burn away,  
Which solemnizes me.

A something in a summer's noon,-  
An azure depth, a wordless tune,  
Transcending ecstasy.

And still within a summer's night  
A something so transporting bright,  
I clap my hands to see; -  
The veil my too inspecting fa  
ce,  
Lest such a subtle, shimmering grace  
Flutter too far for me.

The wizard-fingers never rest,

The purple brook within the breast  
Still chafes its narrow bed; -  
Still rears the East her amber flag,  
Guides still the sun along the crag  
His caravan of red,

Like flowers that heard the tale of dews,  
But never deemed the dripping prize  
Awaited their low brows; -  
Or bees, that thought the summer's name  
Some rumor of delirium  
No summer could for them;

Or Arctic creature, dimly stirred  
By tropic hint,- some travelled bird  
Imported to the wood;

Or wind's bright signal to the ear,  
Making that homely and severe,  
Contented, known, before

The heaven unexpected came,

To lives that thought their worshiping  
A too presumptuous psalm.

**XIII.**

THIS is the land the sunset washes,  
These are the banks of the Yellow Sea;  
Where it rose, or whither it rushes,  
These are the western mystery!

Night after night her purple traffic  
Strews the landing with opal bales;  
Merchantmen poise upon horizons,  
Dip, and vanish with fairy sails.

**XIV.**

THERE is a flower that bees prefer,  
And butterflies desire;  
To gain the purple democrat  
The hummingbirds aspire.

And whatsoever insect pass,  
A honey bears away  
Proportioned to his several dearth

And her capacity. -

Her face is rounder than the moon,  
And ruddier than the gown  
Of orchis in the pasture,  
Or rhododendron worn.

She doth not wait for June;  
Before the world is green  
Her sturdy little countenance  
Against the wind is seen,

Contending with the grass,  
Near kinsman to herself,  
For privilege of sod and sun,  
Sweet litigants for life.

And when the hills are full,  
And newer fashions blow,  
Doth not retract a single spice  
For pang of jealousy.

Her public is the noon,  
Her providence the sun,  
Her progress by the bee proclaimed  
In sovereign, swerveless tune.

The bravest of the host,  
Surrendering the last,  
Nor even of defeat aware  
When cancelled by the frost.

**XV.**

LIKE trains of cars on tracks of plush  
I hear the level bee:  
A jar across the flowers goes,  
Their velvet masonry

Withstands until the sweet assault  
Their chivalry consumes,  
While he, victorious, tilts away  
To vanquish other blooms.

His feet are shod with gauze,

His helmet is of gold;  
His breast, a single onyx  
With chrysoprase, inlaid.

His labor is a chant,  
His idleness a tune;  
Oh, for a bee's experience  
Of clovers and of noon!

**XVI.**

PRESENTIMENT is that long shadow on the lawn  
Indicative that suns go down;  
The notice to the startled grass  
That darkness is about to pass.

**XVII.**

AS children bid the guest good-night,  
And then reluctant turn,  
My flowers raise their pretty lips,  
Then put their nightgowns on.

As children caper when they wake,  
Merry that it is morn,

My flowers from a hundred cribs  
Will peep, and prance again.

**XVIII.**

ANGELS in the early morning  
May be seen the dews among,  
Stooping, plucking, smiling, flying:  
Do the buds to them belong?

Angels when the sun is hottest  
May be seen the sands among,  
Stooping, plucking, sighing, flying;  
Parched the flowers they bear along.

**XIX.**

SO bashful when I spied her,  
So pretty, so ashamed!  
So hidden in her leaflets,  
Lest anybody find;

So breathless till I passed her,  
So helpless when I turned  
And bore her, struggling, blushing,



Her simple haunts beyond!

For whom I robbed the dingle,  
For whom betrayed the dell,  
Many will doubtless ask me,  
But I shall never tell!

**XX.**

IT makes no difference abroad,  
The seasons fit the same,  
The mornings blossom into noons,  
And split their pods of flame.

Wild-flowers kindle in the woods,  
The brooks brag all the day;  
No blackbird bates his jargon  
For passing Calvary.

Auto-da-fe and judgment  
Are nothing to the bee;  
His separation from the rose  
To him seems misery. XXI.

THE mountain sat upon the plain  
In his eternal chair,  
His observation omnifold,  
His inquest everywhere.

The seasons prayed around his knees,  
Like children round a sire:  
Grandfather of the days is he,  
Of dawn the ancestor.

**XXII.**

I'LL tell you how the sun rose,-  
A ribbon at a time.  
The steeples swam in amethyst,  
The news like squirrels ran.

The hills untied their bonnets,  
The bobolinks begun.  
Then I said softly to myself,  
“That must have been the sun!”

But how he set, I know not.

There seemed a purple stile  
Which little yellow boys and girls  
Were climbing all the while

Till when they reached the other side,  
A dominie in gray  
Put gently up the evening bars,  
And led the flock away.

**XXIII.**

THE butterfly's assumption-gown,  
In chrysoprase apartments hung,  
This afternoon put on.

How condescending to descend,  
And be of buttercups the friend  
In a New England town!

**XXIV.**

OF all the sounds despatched abroad,  
There's not a charge to me  
Like that old measure in the boughs,  
That phraseless melody

The wind does, working like a hand  
Whose fingers brush the sky,  
Then quiver down, with tufts of tune  
Permitted gods and me.

When winds go round and round in bands,  
And thrum upon the door,  
And birds take places overhead,  
To bear them orchestra,

I crave him grace, of summer boughs,  
If such an outcast be,  
He never heard that fleshless chant  
Rise solemn in the tree,

As if some caravan of sound  
On deserts, in the sky,  
Had broken rank,  
Then knit, and passed  
In seamless company.

**XXV.**

APPARENTLY with no surprise  
To any happy flower,  
The frost beheads it at its play  
In accidental power.  
The blond assassin passes on,  
The sun proceeds unmoved  
To measure off another day  
For an approving God.

**XXVI.**

'T WAS later when the summer went  
Than when the cricket came,  
And yet we knew that gentle clock  
Meant nought but going home.

'T was sooner when the cricket went  
Than when the winter came,  
Yet that pathetic pendulum  
Keeps esoteric time.

**XXVII.**

THESE are the days when birds come back,

A very few, a bird or two,  
To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies put on  
The old, old sophistries of June,-  
A blue and gold mistake.

Oh, fraud that cannot cheat the bee,  
Almost thy plausibility  
Induces my belief,

Till ranks of seeds their witness bear,  
And softly through the altered air  
Hurries a timid leaf!

Oh, sacrament of summer days,  
Oh, last communion in the haze,  
Permit a child to join,

Thy sacred emblems to partake,  
Thy consecrated bread to break,  
Taste thine immortal wine!

**XXVIII.**

THE morns are meeker than they were,  
The nuts are getting brown;  
The berry's cheek is plumper,  
The rose is out of town.

The maple wears a gayer scarf,  
The field a scarlet gown.  
Lest I should be old-fashioned,  
I'll put a trinket on.

**XXIX.**

THE sky is low, the clouds are mean,  
A travelling flake of snow  
Across a barn or through a rut  
Debates if it will go.

A narrow wind complains all day  
How some one treated him;  
Nature, like us, is sometimes caught  
Without her diadem.

**XXX.**

I THINK the hemlock likes to stand  
Upon a marge of snow;  
It suits his own austerity,  
And satisfies an awe

That men must slake in wilderness,  
Or in the desert cloy,-  
An instinct for the hoar, the bald,  
Lapland's necessity.

The hemlock's nature thrives on cold;  
The gnash of northern winds  
Is sweetest nutriment to him,  
His best Norwegian wines.

To satin races he is nought;  
But children on the Don  
Beneath his tabernacles play,  
And Dnieper wrestlers run.



**XXXI.**

THERE'S a certain slant of light,  
On winter afternoons,  
That oppresses, like the weight  
Of cathedral tunes.

Heavenly hurt it gives us;  
We can find no scar,  
But internal difference  
Where the meanings are.

None may teach it anything,  
'T is the seal, despair,-  
An imperial affliction  
Sent us of the air.

When it comes, the landscape listens,  
Shadows hold their breath;  
When it goes, 't is like the distance  
On the look of death.

## TIME AND ETERNITY

### I.

ONE dignity delays for all,  
One mitred afternoon.  
None can avoid this purple,  
None evade this crown.

Coach it insures, and footmen,  
Chamber and state and throng;  
Bells, also, in the village,  
As we ride grand along.

What dignified attendants,  
What service when we pause!  
How loyally at parting  
Their hundred hats they raise!

How pomp surpassing ermine,  
When simple you and I  
Present our meek escutcheon,

And claim the rank to die!

**II.**

DELAYED till she had ceased to know,  
Delayed till in its vest of snow  
Her loving bosom lay.  
An hour behind the fleeting breath,  
Later by just an hour than death,-  
Oh, lagging yesterday!

Could she have guessed that it would be;  
Could but a crier of the glee  
Have climbed the distant hill;  
Had not the bliss so slow a pace,-  
Who knows but this surrendered face  
Were undefeated still?

Oh, if there may departing be  
Any forgot by victory  
In her imperial round,  
Show them this meek apparelled thing,  
That could not stop to be a king,

Doubtful if it be crowned!

**III.**

DEPARTED to the judgment,  
A mighty afternoon;  
Great clouds like ushers leaning,  
Creation looking on.

The flesh surrendered, cancelled,  
The bodiless begun;  
Two worlds, like audiences, disperse  
And leave the soul alone.

**IV.**

SAFE in their alabaster chambers,  
Untouched by morning and untouched by noon,  
Sleep the meek members of the resurrection,  
Rafter of satin, and roof of stone.

Light laughs the breeze in her castle of sunshine;  
Babbles the bee in a stolid ear;  
Pipe the sweet birds in ignorant cadence,-  
Ah, what sagacity perished here!

Grand go the years in the crescent above them;  
Worlds scoop their arcs, and firmaments row,  
Diadems drop and Doges surrender,  
Soundless as dots on a disk of snow.

V.

ON this long storm the rainbow rose,  
On this late morn the sun;  
The clouds, like listless elephants,  
Horizons straggled down.

The birds rose smiling in their nests,  
The gales indeed were done;  
Alas! how heedless were the eyes  
On whom the summer shone!

The quiet nonchalance of death  
No daybreak can bestir;  
The slow archangel's syllables  
Must awaken her.

## VI.

MY cocoon tightens, colors tease,  
I'm feeling for the air;  
A dim capacity for wings  
Degrades the dress I wear.

A power of butterfly must be  
The aptitude to fly,  
Meadows of majesty concedes  
And easy sweeps of sky.

So I must baffle at the hint  
And cipher at the sign,  
And make much blunder, if at last  
I take the clew divine.

## VII.

EXULTATION is the going  
Of an inland soul to sea,-  
Past the houses, past the headlands,  
Into deep eternity!

Bred as we, among the mountains,  
Can the sailor understand  
The divine intoxication  
Of the first league out from land?

**VIII.**

LOOK back on time with kindly eyes,  
He doubtless did his best;  
How softly sinks his trembling sun  
In human nature's west!

**IX.**

A TRAIN went through a burial gate,  
A bird broke forth and sang,  
And trilled, and quivered, and shook his throat  
Till all the churchyard rang;

And then adjusted his little notes,  
And bowed and sang again.  
Doubtless, he thought it meet of him  
To say good-by to men.

**X.**

I DIED for beauty, but was scarce  
Adjusted in the tomb,  
When one who died for truth was lain  
In an adjoining room.

He questioned softly why I failed?  
"For beauty," I replied.  
"And I for truth,- the two are one;  
We brethren are," he said.

And so, as kinsmen met a night,  
We talked between the rooms,  
Until the moss had reached our lips,  
And covered up our names.

**XI.**

HOW many times these low feet staggered,  
Only the soldered mouth can tell;  
Try! can you stir the awful rivet?  
Try! can you lift the hasps of steel?



Stroke the cool forehead, hot so often,  
Lift, if you can, the listless hair;  
Handle the adamantine fingers  
Never a thimble more shall wear.

Buzz the dull flies on the chamber window;  
Brave shines the sun through the freckled pane;  
Fearless the cobweb swings from the ceiling-

Indolent housewife, in daisies lain!

## **XII.**

I LIKE a look of agony,  
Because I know it's true;  
Men do not sham convulsion,  
Nor stimulate a throe.

The eyes glaze once, and that is death.  
Impossible to feign  
The beads upon the forehead  
By homely anguish strung.

### **XIII.**

THAT short, potential stir  
That each can make but once,  
That bustle so illustrious  
'T is almost consequence,

Is the eclat of death.  
Oh, thou unknown renown  
That not a beggar would accept,  
Had he the power to spurn!

### **XIV.**

I WENT to thank her,  
But she slept;  
Her bed a funnelled stone,  
With nosegays at the head and foot,  
That travellers had thrown,

Who went to thank her;  
But she slept.  
'T was short to cross the sea  
To look upon her like, alive,

But turning back 't was slow.

**XV.**

I'VE seen a dying eye  
Run round and round a room  
In search of something, as it seemed,  
Then cloudier become;  
And then, obscure with fog,  
And then be soldered down,  
Without disclosing what it be,  
'T were blessed to have seen.

**XVI.**

THE clouds their backs together laid,  
The north begun to push,  
The forests galloped till they fell,  
The lightning skipped like mice;  
The thunder crumbled like a stuff-  
How good to be safe in tombs,  
Where nature's temper cannot reach,  
Nor vengeance ever comes!

### **XVII.**

I NEVER saw a moor,  
I never saw the sea;  
Yet know I how the heather looks,  
And what a wave must be.

I never spoke with God,  
Nor visited in heaven;  
Yet certain am I of the spot  
As if the chart were given.

### **XVIII.**

GOD permits industrious angels  
Afternoons to play.  
I met one,- forgot my school-mates,  
All, for him, straightway.

God calls home the angels promptly  
At the setting sun;  
I missed mine. How dreary marbles,  
After playing Crown!

**XIX.**

To know just how he suffered would be dear;  
To know if any human eyes were near  
To whom he could intrust his wavering gaze,  
Until it settled firm on Paradise.

To know if he was patient, part content,  
Was dying as he thought, or different;  
Was it a pleasant day to die,  
And did the sunshine face his way?

What was his furthest mind, of home, or God,  
Or what the distant say  
At news that he ceased human nature  
On such a day?

And wishes, had he any?  
Just his sigh, accented,  
Had been legible to me.  
And was he confident until  
Ill fluttered out in everlasting well?

And if he spoke, what name was best,  
What first,  
What one broke off with  
At the drowsiest?

Was he afraid, or tranquil?  
Might he know  
How conscious consciousness could grow,  
Till love that was, and love too blest to be,  
Meet- and the junction be Eternity?

**XX.**

THE last night that she lived,  
It was a common night,  
Except the dying; this to us  
Made nature different

We noticed smallest things,-  
Things overlooked before,  
By this great light upon our minds  
Italicized, as 't were.

That others could exist  
While she must finish quite,  
A jealousy for her arose  
So nearly infinite.

We waited while she passed;  
It was a narrow time,  
Too jostled were our souls to speak,  
At length the notice came.

She mentioned, and forgot;  
Then lightly as a reed  
Bent to the water, shivered scarce,  
Consented, and was dead.

And we, we placed the hair,  
And drew the head erect;  
And then an awful leisure was,  
Our faith to regulate.

**XXI.**

NOT in this world to see his face

Sounds long, until I read the place  
Where this is said to be  
But just the primer to a life  
Unopened, rare, upon the shelf,  
Clasped yet to him and me.

And yet, my primer suits me so  
I would not choose a book to know  
Than that, be sweeter wise;  
Might some one else so learned be  
And leave me just my A B C,  
Himself could have the skies.

**XXII.**

THE bustle in a house  
The morning after death  
Is solemnest of industries  
Enacted upon earth,

The sweeping up the heart,  
And putting love away  
We shall not want to use again



Until eternity.

**XXIII.**

I REASON, earth is short,  
And anguish absolute.  
And many hurt;  
But what of that?

I reason, we could die:  
The best vitality  
Cannot excel decay;  
But what of that?

I reason that in heaven  
Somehow, it will be even,  
Some new equation given;  
But what of that?

**XXIV.**

AFRAID? Of whom am I afraid?  
Not death; for who is he?  
The porter of my father's lodge  
As much abasheth me.

Of life? 'T were odd I fear a thing  
That comprehendeth me  
In one or more existences  
At Deity's decree.

Of resurrection? Is the east  
Afraid to trust the morn  
With her fastidious forehead?  
As soon impeach my crown!

**XXV.**

THE sun kept setting, setting still;  
No hue of afternoon  
Upon the village I perceived,-  
From house to house 't was noon.

The dusk kept dropping, dropping still;  
No dew upon the grass,  
But only on my forehead stopped,  
And wandered in my face.

My feet kept drowsing, drowsing still,

My fingers were awake;  
Yet why so little sound myself  
Unto my seeming make?

How well I knew the light before!  
I could not see it now.  
'T is dying, I am doing; but  
I'm not afraid to know.

**XXVI.**

TWO swimmers wrestled on the spar  
Until the morning sun,  
When one turned smiling to the land.  
O God, the other one!

The stray ships passing spied a face  
Upon the waters borne,  
With eyes in death still begging raised,  
And hands beseeching thrown.

**XXVII.**

BECAUSE I could not stop for Death,  
He kindly stopped for me;

The carriage held but just ourselves  
And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,  
And I had put away  
My labor, and my leisure too,  
For his civility.

We passed the school where children played,  
Their lessons scarcely done;  
We passed the fields of gazing grain,  
We passed the setting sun.

We paused before a house that seemed  
A swelling of the ground;  
The roof was scarcely visible,  
The cornice but a mound.

Since then 't is centuries; but each  
Feels shorter than the day  
I first surmised the horses' heads  
Were toward eternity.

**XXVIII.**

SHE went as quiet as the dew  
From a familiar flower.  
Not like the dew did she return  
At the accustomed hour!

She dropt as softly as a star  
From out my summer's eve;  
Less skilful than Leverrier  
It's sorer to believe!

**XXIX.**

AT last to be identified!  
At last, the lamps upon thy side,  
The rest of life to see!  
Past midnight, past the morning star!  
Past sunrise! Ah! what leagues there are  
Between our feet and day!

**XXX.**

EXCEPT to heaven, she is nought;  
Except for angels, lone;  
Except to some wide-wandering bee,

A flower superfluous blown; -

Except for winds, provincial;  
Except by butterflies,  
Unnoticed as a single dew  
That on the acre lies.

The smallest housewife in the grass,  
Yet take her from the lawn,  
And somebody has lost the face  
That made existence home!

**XXXI.**

DEATH is a dialogue between  
The spirit and the dust.  
“Dissolve,” says Death. The Spirit, “Sir,  
I have another trust.”

Death doubts it, argues from the ground.  
The Spirit turns away,  
Just laying off, for evidence,  
An overcoat of clay.

**XXXII. -**

IT was too late for man,  
But early yet for God;  
Creation impotent to help,  
But prayer remained our side.

How excellent the heaven,  
When earth cannot be had;  
How hospitable, then, the face  
Of our old neighbor, God!

**XXXIII.**

WHEN I was small, a woman died.  
To-day her only boy  
Went up from the Potomac,  
His face all victory,

To look at her; how slowly  
The seasons must have turned  
Till bullets clipt an angle,  
And he passed quickly round!

If pride shall be in Paradise  
I never can decide;  
Of their imperial conduct,  
No person testified.

But proud in apparition,  
That woman and her boy  
Pass back and forth before my brain,  
As ever in the sky.

**XXXIV.**

THE daisy follows soft the sun,  
And when his golden walk is done,  
Sits shyly at his feet.  
He, waking finds the flower near.  
“Wherefore, marauder, art thou here?  
“Because, sir, love is sweet!”

We are the flower, Thou the sun!  
Forgive us, if as days decline,  
We nearer steal to Thee,-  
Enamoured of the parting west,



The peace, the flight, the amethyst,  
Night's possibility!

**XXXV.**

NO rack can torture me,  
My soul's at liberty.  
Behind this mortal bone  
There knits a bolder one

You cannot prick with saw,  
Nor rend with scymitar.  
Two bodies therefore be;  
Bind one, and one will flee.

The eagle of his nest  
No easier divest  
And gain the sky,  
Than mayest thou,

Except thyself may be  
Thine enemy;  
Captivity is consciousness,

So's liberty.

**XXXVI.**

I LOST a world the other day.  
Has anybody found?  
You'll know it by the row of stars  
Around its forehead bound.

A rich man might not notice it;  
Yet to my frugal eye  
Of more esteem than ducats.  
Oh, find it, sir, for me!

**XXXVII.**

IF I should n't be alive  
When the robins come,  
Give the one in red cravat  
A memorial crumb.

If I could n't thank you,  
Being just asleep,  
You will know I'm trying  
With my granite lip!

**XXXVIII.**

SLEEP is supposed to be,  
By souls of sanity,  
The shutting of the eye.

Sleep is the station grand  
Down which on either hand  
The hosts of witness stand!

Morn is supposed to be,  
By people of degree,  
The breaking of the day. -

Morning has not occurred!  
That shall aurora be  
East of eternity;

One with the banner gay,  
One in the red array,-  
That is the break of day.

**XXXIX.**

I SHALL know why, when time is over,  
And I have ceased to wonder why;  
Christ will explain each separate anguish  
In the fair schoolroom of the sky.

He will tell me what Peter promised,  
And I, for wonder at his woe,  
I shall forget the drop of anguish  
That scalds me now, that scalds me now.

**XL.**

I NEVER lost as much but twice,  
And that was in the sod;  
Twice have I stood a beggar  
Before the door of God!  
Angels, twice descending,  
Reimbursed my store.  
Burglar, banker, father,  
I am poor once more!

**THE END**