

1868

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Lewis Carroll

Carroll, Lewis (pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) (1832-1898) - English novelist, poet, photographer, and mathematician, best known for his fantastical childrens' classics. He was a mathematical lecturer at Oxford. The Valley of the Shadow of Death (1868) - One of Lewis Carroll's poems. Opening lines: Hark, said the dying man, and sighed, / To that complaining tone-...

VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

HARK said the dying man, and sighed, To that complaining tone
Like sprite condemned, each eventide, To walk the world alone.

At sunset, when the air is still, I hear it creep from yonder hill:

It breathes upon me, dead and chill, A moment, and is gone.

My son, it minds me of a day Left half a life behind, That I have prayed to put away For ever from my mind.

But bitter memory will not die: It haunts my soul when none is nigh: I hear its whisper in the sigh Of that complaining wind.

And now in death my soul is fain To tell the tale of fear That hidden in my breast hath lain Through many a weary year:

Yet time would fail to utter all The evil spells that held me thrall, And thrust my life from fall to fall, Thou needest not to hear.

The spells that bound me with a chain, Sin's stern behests to do, Till Pleasure's self, invoked in vain, A heavy burden grew Till from my spirit's fevered eye, A hunted thing, I seemed to fly Through the dark woods that underlie Yon mountain-range of blue.

Deep in those woods I found a vale No sunlight visiteth, Nor star, nor wandering moonbeam pale; Where never comes the breath

Of summer-breeze- there in mine ear, Even as I lingered half in fear, I heard a whisper, cold and clear, "That is the gate of Death.

“O bitter is it to abide In weariness alway: At dawn to sigh for eventide, At eventide for day.

Thy noon hath fled: thy sun hath shone: The brightness of thy day is gone: What need to lag and linger on Till life be cold and gray?

“O well,” it said, “beneath yon pool, In some still cavern deep, The fevered brain might slumber cool, The eyes forget to weep:

Within that goblet’s mystic rim Are draughts of healing, stored for him Whose heart is sick, whose sight is dim, Who prayeth but to sleep!”

The evening-breeze went moaning by, Like mourner for the dead, And stirred, with shrill complaining sigh, The tree-tops overhead:

My guardian-angel seemed to stand And mutely wave a warning hand With sudden terror all unmanned, I turned myself and fled!

A cottage-gate stood open wide:

Soft fell the dying ray On two fair children, side by side, That rested from their play Together bent the earnest head, As ever and anon they read From one dear Book: the words they said Come back to me to-day.

Like twin cascades on mountain-stair Together wandered down The ripples of the golden hair, The ripples of the brown:

While, through the tangled silken haze, Blue eyes looked forth in eager gaze, More starlike than the gems that blaze About a monarch’s crown.

My son, there comes to each an hour When sinks the spirit’s pride When weary hands forget their power The strokes of death to guide: In such a moment, warriors say, A word the panic-rout may stay, A sudden charge redeem the day And turn the living tide.

I could not see, for blinding tears, The glories of the west: A heavenly music filled mine ears, A heavenly peace my breast.

“Come unto Me, come unto Me-

All ye that labour, unto Me Ye heavy-laden, come to Me And I will give you rest.”

The night drew onwards: thin and blue The evening mists arise To bathe the thirsty land in dew, As erst in Paradise While, over silent field and town, The deep blue vault of heaven looked down; Not, as of old, in angry frown, But bright with angels’ eyes.

Blest day! Then first I heard the voice That since hath oft beguiled
 These eyes from tears, and bid rejoice This heart with anguish
 wild Thy mother, boy, thou hast not known; So soon she left me
 here to moan Left me to weep and watch, alone, Our one beloved
 child.

Though, parted from my aching sight, Like homeward-speeding
 dove, She passed into the perfect light That floods the world above;
 Yet our twin spirits, well I know Though one abide in pain
 below Love, as in summers long ago, And evermore shall love.

So with a glad and patient heart I move toward mine end: The
 streams, that flow awhile apart, Shall both in ocean blend.

I dare not weep: I can but bless The Love that pitied my distress,
 And lent me, in Life's wilderness, So sweet and true a friend.

But if there be- O if there be A truth in what they say, That angel-
 forms we cannot see Go with us on our way; Then surely she is
 with me here, I dimly feel her spirit near The morning-mists grow
 thin and clear, And Death brings in the Day.

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THE END