

POEMS

NATURE

O NATURE! I do not aspire
To be the highest in thy quire, —
To be a meteor in the sky,
Or comet that may range on high;
Only a zephyr that may blow
Among the reeds by the river low;
Give me thy most privy place
Where to run my airy race.

In some withdrawn, unpublic mead
Let me sigh upon a reed,
Or in the woods, with leafy din,
Whisper the still evening in:
Some still work give me to do, —
Only — be it near to you!

For I'd rather be thy child
And pupil, in the forest wild,
Than be the king of men elsewhere,
And most sovereign slave of care:
To have one moment of thy dawn,
Than share the city's year forlorn.

INSPIRATION¹

WHATE'ER we leave to God, God does,
 And blesses us;
 The work we choose should be our own,
 God leaves alone.

If with light head erect I sing,
 Though all the Muses lend their force,
 From my poor love of anything,
 The verse is weak and shallow as its source.

But if with bended neck I grope,
 Listening behind me for my wit,
 With faith superior to hope,
 More anxious to keep back than forward it,

Making my soul accomplice there
 Unto the flame my heart hath lit,
 Then will the verse forever wear, —
 Time cannot bend the line which God hath writ.

Always the general show of things
 Floats in review before my mind,
 And such true love and reverence brings,
 That sometimes I forget that I am blind.

But now there comes unsought, unseen,
 Some clear divine electuary,

¹ [Eighteen lines of this poem appear in *Week*, pp. 181, 182, 351, 372.]

And I, who had but sensual been,
 Grow sensible, and as God is, am wary.

I hearing get, who had but ears,
 And sight, who had but eyes before;
 I moments live, who lived but years,
 And truth discern, who knew but learning's lore.

I hear beyond the range of sound,
 I see beyond the range of sight,
 New earths and skies and seas around,
 And in my day the sun doth pale his light.

A clear and ancient harmony
 Pierces my soul through all its din,
 As through its utmost melody, —
 Farther behind than they, farther within.

More swift its bolt than lightning is,
 Its voice than thunder is more loud,
 It doth expand my privacies
 To all, and leave me single in the crowd.

It speaks with such authority,
 With so serene and lofty tone,
 That idle Time runs gadding by,
 And leaves me with Eternity alone.

Then chiefly is my natal hour,
 And only then my prime of life;
 Of manhood's strength it is the flower,
 'T is peace's end, and war's beginning strife.

'T hath come in summer's broadest noon,
 By a gray wall or some chance place,
 Unseasoned time, insulted June,
 And vexed the day with its presuming face.

Such fragrance round my couch it makes,
 More rich than are Arabian drugs,
 That my soul scents its life and wakes
 The body up beneath its perfumed rugs.

Such is the Muse, the heavenly maid,
 The star that guides our mortal course,
 Which shows where life's true kernel's laid,
 Its wheat's fine flour, and its undying force.

She with one breath attunes the spheres,
 And also my poor human heart,
 With one impulse propels the years
 Around, and gives my throbbing pulse its start.

I will not doubt for evermore,
 Nor falter from a steadfast faith,
 For though the system be turned o'er,
 God takes not back the word which once he saith.

I will, then, trust the love untold
 Which not my worth nor want has bought,
 Which wooed me young, and woos me old,
 And to this evening hath me brought.

My memory I'll educate
 To know the one historic truth,

Remembering to the latest date
 The only true and sole immortal youth.

Be but thy inspiration given,
 No matter through what danger sought,
 I'll fathom hell or climb to heaven,
 And yet esteem that cheap which love has bought.

Fame cannot tempt the bard
 Who's famous with his God,
 Nor laurel him reward
 Who hath his Maker's nod.

THE AURORA OF GUIDO¹

A FRAGMENT

THE god of day his car rolls up the slopes,
 Reining his prancing steeds with steady hand;
 The lingering moon through western shadows gropes,
 While morning sheds its light o'er sea and land.

Castles and cities by the sounding main
 Resound with all the busy din of life;
 The fisherman unfurls his sails again;
 And the recruited warrior bides the strife.

The early breeze ruffles the poplar leaves;
 The curling waves reflect the unseen light;

¹ ["Suggested by the print of Guido's 'Aurora' sent by Mrs. Carlyle as a wedding gift to Mrs. Emerson." (Note in *Poems of Nature*.)]

The slumbering sea with the day's impulse heaves,
While o'er the western hill retires the drowsy night.

The seabirds dip their bills in Ocean's foam,
Far circling out over the frothy waves, —
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TO THE MAIDEN IN THE EAST¹

Low in the eastern sky
Is set thy glancing eye;
And though its gracious light
Ne'er riseth to my sight,
Yet every star that climbs
Above the gnarlèd limbs
Of yonder hill,
Conveys thy gentle will.

Believe I knew thy thought,
And that the zephyrs brought
Thy kindest wishes through,
As mine they bear to you;
That some attentive cloud
Did pause amid the crowd
Over my head,
While gentle things were said.

Believe the thrushes sung,
And that the flower-bells rung,
That herbs exhaled their scent,
And beasts knew what was meant.

¹ [Five stanzas of this poem appear in *Week*, pp. 46, 47.]

The trees a welcome waved,
And lakes their margins laved,
When thy free mind
To my retreat did wind.

It was a summer eve,
The air did gently heave
While yet a low-hung cloud
Thy eastern skies did shroud;
The lightning's silent gleam,
Startling my drowsy dream,
Seemed like the flash
Under thy dark eyelash.

From yonder comes the sun,
But soon his course is run,
Rising to trivial day
Along his dusty way;
But thy noontide completes
Only auroral heats,
Nor ever sets,
To hasten vain regrets.

Direct thy pensive eye
Into the western sky;
And when the evening star
Does glimmer from afar
Upon the mountain line,
Accept it for a sign
That I am near,
And thinking of thee here.

I'll be thy Mercury,
 Thou Cytherca to me,
 Distinguished by thy face
 The earth shall learn my place;
 As near beneath thy light
 Will I outwear the night,
 With mingled ray
 Leading the westward way.

Still will I strive to be
 As if thou wert with me;
 Whatever path I take,
 It shall be for thy sake,
 Of gentle slope and wide,
 As thou wert by my side,
 Without a root
 To trip thy gentle foot.

I'll walk with gentle pace,
 And choose the smoothest place,
 And careful dip the oar,
 And shun the winding shore,
 And gently steer my boat
 Where water-lilies float,
 And cardinal-flowers
 Stand in their sylvan bowers.

TO MY BROTHER

BROTHER, where dost thou dwell?
 What sun shines for thee now?
 Dost thou indeed fare well,
 As we wished thee here below?

What season didst thou find?
 'T was winter here.
 Are not the Fates more kind
 Than they appear?

Is thy brow clear again
 As in thy youthful years?
 And was that ugly pain
 The summit of thy fears?

Yet thou wast cheery still;
 They could not quench thy fire;
 Thou didst abide their will,
 And then retire.

Where chiefly shall I look
 To feel thy presence near?
 Along the neighboring brook
 May I thy voice still hear?

Dost thou still haunt the brink
 Of yonder river's tide?
 And may I ever think
 That thou art by my side?

What bird wilt thou employ
 To bring me word of thee?
 For it would give them joy —
 'T would give them liberty —
 To serve their former lord
 With wing and minstrelsy.

A sadder strain mixed with their song,
 They've slower built their nests;
 Since thou art gone
 Their lively labor rests.

Where is the finch, the thrush,
 I used to hear?
 Ah, they could well abide
 The dying year.

Now they no more return,
 I hear them not;
 They have remained to mourn,
 Or else forgot.

GREECE¹

WHEN life contracts into a vulgar span,
 And human nature tires to be a man,
 I thank the gods for Greece,
 That permanent realm of peace.
 For as the rising moon far in the night
 Checkers the shade with her forerunning light,

¹ [The last four lines appear in *Week*, p. 54.]

So in my darkest hour my senses seem
 To catch from her Acropolis a gleam.

Greece, who am I that should remember thee,
 Thy Marathon and thy Thermopylæ?
 Is my life vulgar, my fate mean,
 Which on such golden memories can lean?

THE FUNERAL BELL

ONE more is gone
 Out of the busy throng
 That tread these paths;
 The church-bell tolls,
 Its sad knell rolls
 To many hearths.

Flower-bells toll not,
 Their echoes roll not
 Upon my ear;
 There still, perchance,
 That gentle spirit haunts
 A fragrant bier.

Low lies the pall,
 Lowly the mourners all
 Their passage grope;
 No sable hue
 Mars the serene blue
 Of heaven's cope.

In distant dell
 Faint sounds the funeral bell;
 A heavenly chime;
 Some poet there
 Weaves the light-burthened air
 Into sweet rhyme.

THE MOON

Time wears her not; she doth his chariot guide;
 Mortality below her orb is placed.

RALEIGH.

THE full-orbed moon with unchanged ray
 Mounts up the eastern sky,
 Not doomed to these short nights for aye,
 But shining steadily.

She does not wane, but my fortune,
 Which her rays do not bless;
 My wayward path declineth soon,
 But she shines not the less.

And if she faintly glimmers here,
 And palèd is her light,
 Yet always in her proper sphere
 She's mistress of the night.

THE FALL OF THE LEAF¹

THANK God who seasons thus the year,
 And sometimes kindly slants his rays;
 For in his winter he's most near
 And plainest seen upon the shortest days.

Who gently tempers now his heats,
 And then his harsher cold, lest we
 Should surfeit on the summer's sweets,
 Or pine upon the winter's crudity.

A sober mind will walk alone,
 Apart from nature, if need be,
 And only its own seasons own;
 For nature leaving its humanity.

Sometimes a late autumnal thought
 Has crossed my mind in green July,
 And to its early freshness brought
 Late ripened fruits, and an autumnal sky.

The evening of the year draws on,
 The fields a later aspect wear;
 Since Summer's garishness is gone,
 Some grains of night tincture the noontide air.

¹ ["The first four of these stanzas (unnamed by Thoreau) were published in the Boston *Commonwealth* in 1863, under the title of 'The Soul's Season,' the remainder as 'The Fall of the Leaf.' There can be little doubt that they are parts of one complete poem." (Note in *Poems of Nature*.)]

Behold! the shadows of the trees
 Now circle wider 'bout their stem,
 Like sentries that by slow degrees
 Perform their rounds, gently protecting them.

And as the year doth decline,
 The sun allows a scantier light;
 Behind each needle of the pine
 There lurks a small auxiliar to the night.

I hear the cricket's slumbrous lay
 Around, beneath me, and on high;
 It rocks the night, it soothes the day,
 And everywhere is Nature's lullaby.

But most he chirps beneath the sod,
 When he has made his winter bed;
 His creak grown fainter but more broad,
 A film of autumn o'er the summer spread.

Small birds, in fleets migrating by,
 Now beat across some meadow's bay,
 And as they tack and veer on high,
 With faint and hurried click beguile the way.

Far in the woods, these golden days,
 Some leaf obeys its Maker's call;
 And through their hollow aisles it plays
 With delicate touch the prelude of the Fall.

Gently withdrawing from its stem,
 It lightly lays itself along

Where the same hand hath pillowed them,
 Resigned to sleep upon the old year's throng.

The loneliest birch is brown and sere,
 The farthest pool is strewn with leaves,
 Which float upon their watery bier,
 Where is no eye that sees, no heart that grieves.

The jay screams through the chestnut wood;
 The crisped and yellow leaves around
 Are hue and texture of my mood,
 And these rough burs my heirlooms on the ground.

The threadbare trees, so poor and thin,
 They are no wealthier than I;
 But with as brave a core within
 They rear their boughs to the October sky.

Poor knights they are which bravely wait
 The charge of Winter's cavalry,
 Keeping a simple Roman state,
 Discumbered of their Persian luxury.

THE THAW

I SAW the civil sun drying earth's tears,
 Her tears of joy that only faster flowed.¹

Fain would I stretch me by the highway-side
 To thaw and trickle with the melting snow;
 That mingled, soul and body, with the tide,
 I too may through the pores of nature flow.

¹ [See p. 120.]

A WINTER SCENE¹

THE rabbit leaps,
 The mouse out-creeps,
 The flag out-peeps
 Beside the brook;
 The ferret weeps,
 The marmot sleeps,
 The owlet keeps
 In his snug nook.

The apples thaw,
 The ravens caw,
 The squirrels gnaw
 The frozen fruit.
 To their retreat
 I track the feet
 Of mice that eat
 The apple's root.

The snow-dust falls,
 The otter crawls,
 The partridge calls,
 Far in the wood.
 The traveler dreams,
 The tree-ice gleams,
 The blue jay screams
 In angry mood.

¹ ["These stanzas formed part of the original manuscript of the essay on 'A Winter Walk,' but were excluded by Emerson." (Note in *Poems of Nature*.)]

The willows droop,
 The alders stoop,
 The pheasants group
 Beneath the snow.
 The catkins green
 Cast o'er the scene
 A summer's sheen,
 A genial glow.

TO A STRAY FOWL

POOR bird! destined to lead thy life
 Far in the adventurous west,
 And here to be debarred to-night
 From thy accustomed nest;
 Must thou fall back upon old instinct now,
 Well-nigh extinct under man's fickle care?
 Did heaven bestow its quenchless inner light,
 So long ago, for thy small want to-night?
 Why stand'st upon thy toes to crow so late?
 The moon is deaf to thy low feathered fate;
 Or dost thou think so to possess the night,
 And people the drear dark with thy brave sprite?
 And now with anxious eye thou look'st about,
 While the relentless shade draws on its veil,
 For some sure shelter from approaching dews,
 And the insidious steps of nightly foes.
 I fear imprisonment has dulled thy wit,
 Or ingrained servitude extinguished it.
 But no; dim memory of the days of yore,
 By Brahmoputra and the Jumna's shore,

Where thy proud race flew swiftly o'er the heath,
 And sought its food the jungle's shade beneath,
 Has taught thy wings to seek yon friendly trees,
 As erst by Indus' banks and far Ganges.

POVERTY

A FRAGMENT

If I am poor,
 It is that I am proud;
 If God has made me naked and a boor,
 He did not think it fit his work to shroud.

The poor man comes direct from heaven to earth,
 As stars drop down the sky, and tropic beams;
 The rich receives in our gross air his birth,
 As from low suns are slanted golden gleams.

Yon sun is naked, bare of satellite,
 Unless our earth and moon that office hold;
 Though his perpetual day feareth no night,
 And his perennial summer dreads no cold.

Mankind may delve, but cannot my wealth spend;
 If I no partial wealth appropriate,
 No armèd ships unto the Indies send,
 None robs me of my Orient estate.

PILGRIMS

"HAVE you not seen,
 In ancient times,
 Pilgrims pass by
 Toward other climes,
 With shining faces,
 Youthful and strong,
 Mounting this hill
 With speech and with song?"

"Ah, my good sir,
 I know not those ways;
 Little my knowledge,
 Tho' many my days.
 When I have slumbered,
 I have heard sounds
 As of travelers passing
 These my grounds.

"'T was a sweet music
 Wafted them by,
 I could not tell
 If afar off or nigh.
 Unless I dreamed it,
 This was of yore:
 I never told it
 To mortal before,
 Never remembered
 But in my dreams
 What to me waking
 A miracle seems."

THE DEPARTURE

In this roadstead I have ridden,
 In this covert I have hidden;
 Friendly thoughts were cliffs to me,
 And I hid beneath their lee.

This true people took the stranger,
 And warm-hearted housed the ranger;
 They received their roving guest,
 And have fed him with the best;

Whatsoe'er the land afforded
 To the stranger's wish accorded;
 Shook the olive, stripped the vine,
 And expressed the strengthening wine.

And by night they did spread o'er him
 What by day they spread before him; —
 That good-will which was repast
 Was his covering at last.

The stranger moored him to their pier
 Without anxiety or fear;
 By day he walked the sloping land,
 By night the gentle heavens he scanned.

When first his bark stood inland
 To the coast of that far Finland,
 Sweet-watered brooks came tumbling to the shore
 The weary mariner to restore.

And still he stayed from day to day
 If he their kindness might repay;
 But more and more
 The sullen waves came rolling toward the shore.

And still the more the stranger waited,
 The less his argosy was freighted,
 And still the more he stayed,
 The less his debt was paid.

So he unfurled his shrouded mast
 To receive the fragrant blast;
 And that sane refreshing gale
 Which had wooed him to remain
 Again and again,
 It was that filled his sail
 And drove him to the main.

All day the low-hung clouds
 Dropt tears into the sea;
 And the wind amid the shrouds
 Sighed plaintively.

INDEPENDENCE ¹

MY life more civil is and free
 Than any civil polity.

Ye princes, keep your realms
 And circumscribèd power,

¹ ["First printed in full in the Boston *Commonwealth*, October 30, 1863. The last fourteen lines had appeared in *The Dial* under the title of 'The Black Knight,' and are so reprinted in the Riverside Edition." (Note in *Poems of Nature*.)]

Not wide as are my dreams,
Nor rich as is this hour.

What can ye give which I have not?
What can ye take which I have got?
Can ye defend the dangerless?
Can ye inherit nakedness?

To all true wants Time's ear is deaf,
Penurious states lend no relief
Out of their pelf:
But a free soul — thank God —
Can help itself.

Be sure your fate
Doth keep apart its state,
Not linked with any band,
Even the noblest of the land;

In tented fields with cloth of gold
No place doth hold,
But is more chivalrous than they are,
And sigheth for a nobler war;
A finer strain its trumpet sings,
A brighter gleam its armor flings.

The life that I aspire to live
No man proposeth me;
No trade upon the street¹
Wears its emblazonry.

¹ [In *The Dial* this line reads, "Only the promise of my heart."]

DING DONG¹

WHEN the world grows old by the chimney-side
Then forth to the youngling nooks I glide,
Where over the water and over the land
The bells are booming on either hand.

Now up they go ding, then down again dong,
And awhile they ring to the same old song,
For the metal goes round at a single bound,
A-cutting the fields with its measured sound,
While the tired tongue falls with a lengthened boom
As solemn and loud as the crack of doom.

Then changed is their measure to tone upon tone,
And seldom it is that one sound comes alone,
For they ring out their peals in a mingled throng,
And the breezes waft the loud ding-dong along.

When the echo hath reached me in this lone vale,
I am straightway a hero in coat of mail,
I tug at my belt and I march on my post,
And feel myself more than a match for a host.

OMNIPRESENCE

WHO eualetH the coward's haste,
And still inspires the faintest heart;
Whose lofty fame is not disgraced,
Though it assume the lowest part.

¹ ["A copy of this hitherto unpublished poem has been kindly furnished by Miss A. J. Ward." (Note in *Poems of Nature*.)]

INSPIRATION

If thou wilt but stand by my ear,
 When through the field thy anthem 's rung,
 When that is done I will not fear
 But the same power will abet my tongue.

MISSION

I've searched my faculties around,
 To learn why life to me was lent:
 I will attend the faintest sound,
 And then declare to man what God hath meant.

DELAY

No generous action can delay
 Or thwart our higher, steadier aims;
 But if sincere and true are they,
 It will arouse our sight, and nerve our frames.

PRAYER

GREAT God! I ask thee for no meaner pelf
 Than that I may not disappoint myself;
 That in my action I may soar as high
 As I can now discern with this clear eye;

And next in value, which thy kindness lends,
 That I may greatly disappoint my friends,
 Howe'er they think or hope it that may be,
 They may not dream how thou 'st distinguished me;

That my weak hand may equal my firm faith,
 And my life practice more than my tongue saith;
 That my low conduct may not show,
 Nor my relenting lines,
 That I thy purpose did not know,
 Or overrated thy designs.