

AUTUMN LEAVES.

Woe, woe for the withering leaves!
 Flimsy and lank and falling fast,
 Hither and thither, twirling and whirling
 In the freshening wind, in the bright blue sky;
 Glistening and clear and keen is the sky,
 But it has no mercy, none,
 For the pitiful pelted driven leaves.
 I saw ye, leaves! in your cradle lying
 On that day far back, O where is it now?
 In your varied velvety hues of green,
 That softer and softer grew to the eye,
 As the loving sunlight went glancing by.
 Out of the dark hard tree,
 Wonderful things, ye came;
 A summer hour has passed,
 Sultry, and red, and still,
 As life were pressed down by a mighty force;
 A summer rain has fallen,
 A liquid light and sound,
 And dripped the drops from your shivering edge,
 But they'll drip no more. Your hour has come;
 Remaineth the tree, but passeth the leaf
 Into the damp ground silently sinking,
 Sinking and matted in mud and in snow.
 Leaves never more: ye colored and veined,
 Ye pointed and notched and streaked round about,
 Ye circled and curved and lateral-lined,
 Protean shapes of the Spirit of form!
 With the Sun for a nurse, feeding with light
 Out of his bosom, and moon with the dew
 Filched from the air under secret of night.
 Tenderly nurtured and royally served,
 A company regal, innumerable,
 Crowning the hill-top, and shading the vale,
 Clustering archly the country-home,

And filling the eye of the passer by,
 The wanderer's eye with tremulous tears,
 At the thought of its hidden blessedness,
 Its fount of life-gladness welling within,
 Shaded and covered from scorching outside,
 By greenness and coolness and deep repose.
 Leaves, the delicate setting of flowers,
 Tempering the ruby: round the queen-blossom
 Modestly crowding, never self-seeking,
 Giving the beauty they seem but to follow;
 Living meekly as leaves, only as leaves;
 Yet were they reft from wayside and bower,
 From weed and from tree, — the gaudy flowers,
 Shameless and bold and tarnished all o'er,
 Would weary the eye like a shadowless wall, —
 A glaring day that casteth no night,
 An eye without lashes, a mind with no thought
 Deep hid in its cell, a heart with no love,
 Never uttered, a home with no curtained room.
 But ye are perishing, perishing fast,
 So lovely, so soft, so graceful, so good,
 So many, so varied, why were ye here?
 Out of night ye sprung, tender and juicy,
 Unto night ye return, withered and scorned.
 Birds sung at your birth, and youth leaped to see;
 But none to the burial gather; not one.
 Woe, woe to the spent and withering leaves!
 I too am a leaf, — one of a forest
 Seek I to be, and not part of the whole?
 The wide Forest laughs, and crushes me carelessly
 As it sways to the wind of Eternity.
 Circlets and curves and veinlets and stems
 Must bow to the sweep of the merciless hour.
 The Eternal remains, and out of its depths
 Shall issue the sap, exhaustless and free,
 In forests as mighty and multitudinous.