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## THE ANSWER.

Spare me, dread angel of reproof,  
And let the sunshine weave to-day  
Its gold-threads in the warp and woof  
Of life so poor and gray.

Spare me awhile; the flesh is weak.  
These lingering feet, that fain would stray  
Among the flowers, shall some day seek  
The strait and narrow way.

Take off thy ever-watchful eye,  
The awe of thy rebuking frown;  
The dullest slave at times must sigh  
To fling his burdens down;

To drop his galley's straining oar,  
And press, in summer warmth and calm,  
The lap of some enchanted shore  
Of blossom and of balm.

Grudge not my life its hour of bloom,  
My heart its taste of long desire;  
This day be mine: be those to come  
As duty shall require.

The deep voice answered to my own,  
Smiting my selfish prayers away;  
"To-morrow is with God alone,  
And man hath but to-day.

"Say not, thy fond, vain heart within,  
The Father's arm shall still be wide,  
When from these pleasant ways of sin  
Thou turn'st at eventide.

"'Cast thyself down,' the tempter saith,  
'And angels shall thy feet upbear.'  
He bids thee make a lie of faith,  
And blasphemy of prayer.

"Though God be good and free be heaven,  
No force divine can love compel;  
And, though the song of sins forgiven  
May sound through lowest hell,

"The sweet persuasion of His voice  
Respects thy sanctity of will.  
He giveth day: thou hast thy choice  
To walk in darkness still;

"As one who, turning from the light,  
Watches his own gray shadow fall,  
Doubting, upon his path of night,  
If there be day at all!

"No word of doom may shut thee out,  
No wind of wrath may downward whirl,  
No swords of fire keep watch about  
The open gates of pearl;

"A tenderer light than moon or sun,  
Than song of earth a sweeter hymn,  
May shine and sound forever on,  
And thou be deaf and dim.

"Forever round the Mercy-seat  
The guiding lights of Love shall burn;  
But what if, habit-bound, thy feet  
Shall lack the will to turn?

"What if thine eye refuse to see,  
Thine ear of Heaven's free welcome fail,  
And thou a willing captive be,  
Thyself thy own dark jail?

"Oh, doom beyond the saddest guess,  
As the long years of God unroll,  
To make thy dreary selfishness  
The prison of a soul!

"To doubt the love that fain would break  
The fetters from thy self-bound limb;  
And dream that God can thee forsake  
As thou forsakest Him!"  
1863.



## THE ETERNAL GOODNESS.

O friends! with whom my feet have trod  
The quiet aisles of prayer,  
Glad witness to your zeal for God  
And love of man I bear.

I trace your lines of argument;  
Your logic linked and strong  
I weigh as one who dreads dissent,  
And fears a doubt as wrong.

But still my human hands are weak  
To hold your iron creeds  
Against the words ye bid me speak  
My heart within me pleads.

Who fathoms the Eternal Thought?  
Who talks of scheme and plan?  
The Lord is God! He needeth not  
The poor device of man.

I walk with bare, hushed feet the ground  
Ye tread with boldness shod;  
I dare not fix with mete and bound  
The love and power of God.

Ye praise His justice; even such  
His pitying love I deem  
Ye seek a king; I fain would touch  
The robe that hath no seam.

Ye see the curse which overbroods  
A world of pain and loss;  
I hear our Lord's beatitudes  
And prayer upon the cross.

More than your schoolmen teach, within  
Myself, alas! I know  
Too dark ye cannot paint the sin,  
Too small the merit show.

I bow my forehead to the dust,  
I veil mine eyes for shame,  
And urge, in trembling self-distrust,  
A prayer without a claim.

I see the wrong that round me lies,  
I feel the guilt within;  
I hear, with groan and travail-cries,  
The world confess its sin.

Yet, in the maddening maze of things,  
And tossed by storm and flood,  
To one fixed trust my spirit clings;  
I know that God is good!

Not mine to look where cherubim  
And seraphs may not see,  
But nothing can be good in Him  
Which evil is in me.

The wrong that pains my soul below  
I dare not throne above,  
I know not of His hate, — I know  
His goodness and His love.

I dimly guess from blessings known  
Of greater out of sight,  
And, with the chastened Psalmist, own  
His judgments too are right.

I long for household voices gone,  
For vanished smiles I long,  
But God hath led my dear ones on,  
And He can do no wrong.

I know not what the future hath  
Of marvel or surprise,  
Assured alone that life and death  
His mercy underlies.

And if my heart and flesh are weak  
To bear an untried pain,  
The bruised reed He will not break,  
But strengthen and sustain.

No offering of my own I have,  
Nor works my faith to prove;  
I can but give the gifts He gave,  
And plead His love for love.

And so beside the Silent Sea  
I wait the muffled oar;  
No harm from Him can come to me  
On ocean or on shore.

I know not where His islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air;  
I only know I cannot drift  
Beyond His love and care.

O brothers! if my faith is vain,  
If hopes like these betray,  
Pray for me that my feet may gain  
The sure and safer way.

And Thou, O Lord! by whom are seen  
Thy creatures as they be,  
Forgive me if too close I lean  
My human heart on Thee!  
1865.

## THE COMMON QUESTION.

Behind us at our evening meal  
The gray bird ate his fill,  
Swung downward by a single claw,  
And wiped his hooked bill.

He shook his wings and crimson tail,  
And set his head aslant,  
And, in his sharp, impatient way,  
Asked, "What does Charlie want?"

"Fie, silly bird!" I answered, "tuck  
Your head beneath your wing,  
And go to sleep;"—but o'er and o'er  
He asked the self-same thing.

Then, smiling, to myself I said  
How like are men and birds!  
We all are saying what he says,  
In action or in words.

The boy with whip and top and drum,  
The girl with hoop and doll,  
And men with lands and houses, ask  
The question of Poor Poll.

However full, with something more  
We fain the bag would cram;  
We sigh above our crowded nets  
For fish that never swam.

No bounty of indulgent Heaven  
The vague desire can stay;  
Self-love is still a Tartar mill  
For grinding prayers alway.

The dear God hears and pities all;  
He knoweth all our wants;  
And what we blindly ask of Him  
His love withholds or grants.

And so I sometimes think our prayers  
Might well be merged in one;  
And nest and perch and hearth and church  
Repeat, "Thy will be done."

## OUR MASTER.

Immortal Love, forever full,  
Forever flowing free,  
Forever shared, forever whole,  
A never-ebbing sea!

Our outward lips confess the name  
All other names above;  
Love only knoweth whence it came  
And comprehendeth love.

Blow, winds of God, awake and blow  
The mists of earth away!  
Shine out, O Light Divine, and show  
How wide and far we stray!

Hush every lip, close every book,  
The strife of tongues forbear;  
Why forward reach, or backward look,  
For love that clasps like air?

We may not climb the heavenly steeps  
To bring the Lord Christ down  
In vain we search the lowest deeps,  
For Him no depths can drown.

Nor holy bread, nor blood of grape,  
The lineaments restore  
Of Him we know in outward shape  
And in the flesh no more.

He cometh not a king to reign;  
The world's long hope is dim;  
The weary centuries watch in vain  
The clouds of heaven for Him.

Death comes, life goes; the asking eye  
And ear are answerless;  
The grave is dumb, the hollow sky  
Is sad with silentness.

The letter fails, and systems fall,  
And every symbol wanes;  
The Spirit over-brooding all  
Eternal Love remains.

And not for signs in heaven above  
Or earth below they look,  
Who know with John His smile of love,  
With Peter His rebuke.

In joy of inward peace, or sense  
Of sorrow over sin,  
He is His own best evidence,  
His witness is within.

No fable old, nor mythic lore,  
Nor dream of bards and seers,  
No dead fact stranded on the shore  
Of the oblivious years;—

But warm, sweet, tender, even yet  
A present help is He;  
And faith has still its Olivet,  
And love its Galilee.