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# Poems of Experience

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

# Imprint

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## THE EMPTY BOWL

I held the golden vessel of my soul  
And prayed that God would fill it from on high.  
Day after day the importuning cry  
Grew stronger - grew, a heaven-accusing dole  
Because no sacred waters laved my bowl.  
'So full the fountain, Lord, wouldst Thou deny  
The little needed for a soul's supply?  
I ask but this small portion of Thy whole.'  
Then from the vast invisible Somewhere,  
A voice, as one love-authorised by Him,  
Spake, and the tumult of my heart was stilled.  
'Who wants the waters must the bowl prepare;  
Pour out the self, that chokes it to the brim,  
But emptied vessels, from the source are filled.'

## KEEP GOING

Is the goal distant, and troubled the road,  
And the way long?  
And heavy your load?  
Then gird up your courage, and say 'I am strong,'  
And keep going.

Is the work weary, and endless the grind  
And petty the pay?  
Then brace up your mind  
And say 'Something better is coming my way,'  
And keep doing.

Is the drink bitter life pours in your cup -  
Is the taste gall?

Then smile and look up  
And say 'God is with me whatever befall,'  
And keep trusting.

Is the heart heavy with hope long deferred,  
And with prayers that seem vain?  
Keep saying the word -  
And that which you strive for you yet shall attain.  
Keep praying.

#### A PRAYER

Just as I shape the purport of my thought,  
Lord of the Universe, shape Thou my lot.  
Let each ill thought that in my heart may be,  
Mould circumstance and bring ill luck to me.

Until I weed the garden of my mind  
From all that is unworthy and unkind,  
Am I not master of my mind, dear Lord?  
Then as I *think*, so must be my reward.

Who sows in weakness, cannot reap in strength,  
That which we plant, we gather in at length.  
Great God of Justice, be Thou just to me,  
And as my thoughts, so let my future be.

#### THE LONDON 'BOBBY' A TRIBUTE TO THE POLICEMEN OF ENGLAND'S CAPITAL

Here in my cosy corner,

Before a blazing log,  
I'm thinking of cold London  
Wrapped in its killing fog;  
And, like a shining beacon  
Above the picture grim,  
I see the London 'Bobby,'  
And sing my song for him.

I see his stalwart figure,  
I see his kindly face,  
I hear his helpful answer  
At any hour or place.  
For, though you seek some by-way  
Long miles from his own beat,  
He tells you all about it,  
And how to find the street.

He looks like some bold Viking,  
This king of earth's police -  
Yet in his voice lies feeling,  
And in his eye lies peace;  
He knows and does his duty -  
(What higher praise is there?)  
And London's lords and paupers  
Alike receive his care.

He has a regal bearing,  
Yet one that breathes repose;  
It is the look and manner  
Of one who *thinks* and *knows*.  
Oh, men who govern nations,  
In old worlds or in new,  
Turn to the London 'Bobby'  
And learn a thing or two.

READ AT THE BENEFIT  
OF CLARA MORRIS

(AMERICA'S GREAT EMOTIONAL ACTRESS)

The Radiant Rulers of Mystic Regions  
Where souls of artists are fitted for birth  
Gathered together their lovely legions  
And fashioned a woman to shine on earth.  
They bathed her in splendour,  
They made her tender,  
They gave her a nature both sweet and wild;  
They gave her emotions like storm-stirred oceans,  
And they gave her the heart of a little child.

These Radiant Rulers (who are not human  
Nor yet divine like the gods above)  
Poured all their gifts in the soul of woman,  
That fragile vessel meant only for love.  
Still more they taught her,  
Still more they brought her,  
Till they gave her the world for a harp one day:  
And they bade her string it,  
They bade her ring it,  
While the stars all wondered to hear her play.

She touched the strings in a master fashion,  
She uttered the cry of a world's despair:  
Its long hid secret, its pent-up passion,  
She gave to the winds in a vibrant air.  
For oh! the heart of her,  
That was the art of her.  
Great with the feeling that makes men kin.  
Art unapproachable,  
Art all uncoachable,  
Fragrance and flame from the spirit within.

The earth turns ever an ear unheeding  
To the sorrows of art, as it cries 'encore.'  
And she played on the harp till her hands were bleeding,

And her brow was bruised by the laurels she wore.  
She knew the trend of it,  
She knew the end of it -  
Men heard the music and men felt the thrill.  
Bound to the altar  
Of art, could she falter?  
Then came a silence - the music was still.

And yet in the echoes we seem to hear it;  
In waves unbroken it circles the earth:  
And we catch in the light of her dauntless spirit  
A gleam from the centre that gave her birth.  
Still is the fame of her  
Felt in the name of her -  
But low lies the harp that once thrilled to her strain;  
No hand has taken it,  
No hand can waken it -  
For the soul of her art was her secret of pain.

## TWO GHOSTS

Two dead men boarded a spectral ship  
In the astral Port of Space;  
On that ghost-filled barque, they met in the dark,  
And halted, face to face.

'Now whither away' - called one of the ghosts,  
'This ship sets sail for Earth.  
On the astral plane you must remain,  
Where the newly dead have birth.'

'But I could not stay and I would not stay,'  
The other ghost replied;  
'I must hurry back to the old Earth track  
And stand at my loved one's side.

'She weeps for me in her lonely room,  
In the land from whence I came;  
Oh! stow me away in this ship, I pray,  
For I hear her call my name.'

'You must not go, and you shall not go,'  
The first ghost cried in wrath.  
'Your work is planned, in the astral land,  
And a guide will show you the path.'

'But the one I love' - 'I loved her too,'  
The first ghost stood and cried;  
'And year on year I waited here,  
Yea, waited till you died.

'For I would not come between you two,  
Nor shadow her joy with fear,  
But mine is the right, I claim this night  
To visit the earthly sphere.

'For you are dead, and I am dead,  
And you had her long - so long.  
And to look on the grace of her worshipped face,  
Ah! now it can do no wrong.

'I am fettered to Earth by love of her,  
And hers is the spell divine,  
That can help me rise, to the realm that lies  
Just over the astral line.

'I have kept to the laws of God and man,  
I have suffered and made no moan;  
Now my little share of joy, I swear  
I will have - and have it alone.'

A skeleton crew the anchor drew,  
And the ship from the port swung free;  
With a muffled clang the ghost bell rang,

And the boat sailed out to sea.

And one ghost stood on the deck and laughed,  
As only a glad ghost can;  
While a swooning soul was dragged to his goal,  
To work out the astral span.

And a woman wept, and prayed ere she slept,  
For a dream to ease her pain;  
But she dreamed instead of a man long dead,  
Who had loved her all in vain.

## WOMAN

Strange are the ways that her feet have trod  
Since first she was set in the path of duty,  
Finished and fair by the hand of God,  
To carry her message of love and beauty.  
Delicate creature of light and shade,  
She gleamed like an opal, on wide worlds under:  
And earth looked up to her half afraid,  
While heaven looked down at her, full of wonder.

Flame of the comet and mist of the moon,  
And ray of the sun all mingled in her.  
And the heart of her asked but a single boon -  
That love should seek her, and find her, and win her.  
She grasped the scope of the First Intent  
That made her kingdom *forher*, no other,  
And joyfully into her place she went -  
The primal mate, and the primal mother.

Large was that kingdom and vast her sphere,  
And lightly she lifted and bore each burden.  
Lightly she laughed in the eyes of fear,

For love was her recompense, love her guerdon.  
And never in camp, or in cave, or in home,  
Rose voice of mother or mate complaining.  
And never the foot of her sought to roam,  
Till love in the heart of the man seemed waning.

In the broad rich furrows by woman turned  
Man, unwitting, set plough and harrow.  
For worlds to conquer she had not yearned,  
Till he spoke of her feminine sphere as 'narrow.'  
The lullaby changed to a martial strain -  
When he took her travail, and song for granted -  
And forth she forged in his own domain -  
Till the strange 'new woman,' the old supplanted.

'Strange' with the glow of a wakened soul,  
And 'new' with the purpose of large endeavour,  
She turned her face to the higher goal -  
To the higher goal it is turned for ever.  
Trade and science and craft and art,  
Have opened their doors to the call of woman;  
And greater she grows in her greater part,  
More tenderly wise, and more sweetly human.

Brave foremothers of freedom's birth  
Smile through space on your splendid daughters.  
At one with liberty lighting the earth,  
Their torches flame o'er the darkest waters.  
They lend a lustre to sea and land:  
They sweeten the world with their wholesome graces:  
As out in the harbour of life they stand  
To cheer and welcome the coming races.

Brave forefathers and heroes who fought  
Under the flag of the Revolution,  
War was the price of the freedom you bought,  
But *peace* is the watchword of Evolution.  
The progress of woman means progress of peace,  
She wars on war, and its hosts alarming;

And her great love battle will never cease,  
Till the glory is seen of a world disarming.

The woman wonder with heart of flame,  
The coming man of the race will find her.  
For petty purpose and narrow aim,  
And fault and flaw she will leave behind her.  
He grown tender, and she grown wise,  
They shall enter the Eden by both created;  
The broadened kingdom of Paradise,  
And love, and mate, as the first pair mated.

#### BATTLE HYMN OF THE WOMEN

They are waking, they are waking,  
In the east, and in the west;  
They are throwing wide their windows to the sun;  
And they see the dawn is breaking,  
And they quiver with unrest,  
For they know their work is waiting to be done.

They are waking in the city,  
They are waking on the farm;  
They are waking in the boudoir, and the mill;  
And their hearts are full of pity  
As they sound the loud alarm,  
For the sleepers, who in darkness, slumber, still.

In the guarded harem prison,  
Where they smother under veils,  
And all echoes of the world are walled away;  
Though the sun has not yet risen,  
Yet the ancient darkness pales,  
And the sleepers, in their slumber, dream of day.

And their dream shall grow in splendour  
Till each sleeper wakes, and stirs;  
Till she breaks from old traditions, and is free;  
And the world shall rise, and render  
Unto woman what is hers,  
As it welcomes in the race that is to be.

Unto woman, God the Maker  
Gave the secret of His plan;  
It is written out in cipher, on her soul;  
From the darkness, you must take her,  
To the light of day, O man!  
Would you know the mighty meaning of the scroll.

#### MEMORIES {1}

I am thinking of the Springtime  
On the farm out in the West,  
When my world held nothing for me that I wanted,  
(Save a courage all undaunted),  
And my foolish little rhymes,  
Were but heart beats, rung in chimes,  
That I sounded, just to ease my life's unrest.  
Yes, I sang them, and I rang them,  
Just to ease my youth's unrest.

When I heard the name of London,  
In that early day, afar,  
In that Springtime of my Country over yonder,  
Then I used to sit and wonder  
If the day would come to me,  
When my ship should cross the sea,  
To the land that seemed as distant as a star.  
In my dreaming, ever gleaming  
Like a distant unknown star.

Now in London in the Springtime,  
I am sitting here, your guest.  
Nay - I think it is a vision, or a fancy -  
Part of dreamland Necromancy;  
And I question: is it true  
That the great warm hearts of you,  
Heard the winging of that singing in the West,  
Heard the chiming of my rhyming  
From the farmhouse in the West?

Let me linger in the fancy,  
For the soul of me is stirred  
As I dream that I am sitting here among you;  
And the songs that I have sung you  
Shall grow stronger through the art  
Of heart speaking unto heart,  
Through the gladness of the singer who is heard  
Lo! my songs have crossed the ocean  
But the voice of my emotion finds no word.

SEE?

If one proves weak who you fancied strong,  
Or false who you fancied true,  
Just ease the smart of your wounded heart  
By the thought that it is not you!

If many forget a promise made,  
And your faith falls into the dust,  
Then look meanwhile in your mirror and smile,  
And say, 'I am one to trust!'

If you search in vain for an ageing face  
Unharrowed by fretful fears,

Then make right now (and keep) a vow  
To grow in grace with the years.

If you lose your faith in the word of man  
As you go from the port of youth,  
Just say as you sail, 'I will not fail  
To keep to the course of truth!'

For this is the way, and the only way -  
At least so it seems to me.  
*It is up to you, to be, and do,  
What you look for in others. See?*

## THE PURPOSE

Over and over the task was set,  
Over and over I slighted the work,  
But ever and alway I knew that yet  
I must face and finish the toil I shirk.

Over and over the whip of pain  
Has spurred and punished with blow on blow;  
As ever and alway I tried in vain  
To shun the labour I hated so.

Over and over I came this way  
For just one purpose: O stubborn soul!  
Turn with a will to your work to-day,  
And learn the lesson of *Self-Control*.

## THE WHITE MAN

Wherever the white man's feet have trod  
(Oh far does the white man stray)  
A bold road rifles the virginal sod,  
And the forest wakes out of its dream of God,  
To yield him the right of way.  
For this is the law: *By the power of thought,  
For worse, or for better, are miracles wrought.*

Wherever the white man's pathway leads,  
(Far, far has that pathway gone)  
The Earth is littered with broken creeds -  
And always the dark man's tent recedes,  
And the white man pushes on.  
For this is the law: *Be it good or ill,  
All things must yield to the stronger will.*

Wherever the white man's light is shed,  
(Oh far has that light been thrown)  
Though Nature has suffered and beauty bled,  
Yet the goal of the race has been thrust ahead,  
And the might of the race has grown.  
For this is the law: *Be it cruel or kind,  
The Universe sways to the power of mind.*

#### A MOORISH MAID

Above her veil a shrouded Moorish maid  
Showed melting eyes, as limpid as a lake;  
A brow untouched by care; a band of jetty hair,  
And nothing more. The all-concealing haik  
Fell to her high arched instep. At her side  
An old duenna walked; her withered face  
Half covered only, since no lingering grace  
Bespoke the beauty once her master's pride.

Above her veil, the Moorish maid beheld  
The modern world, in Paris-decked Algiers;  
Saw happy lad and lass, in love's contentment pass,  
Or in sweet wholesome friendship, free from fears.  
She saw fair matrons, walking arm-in-arm  
With life-long lovers, time-endear'd, and then  
She saw the ardent look in eyes of men,  
And thrilled and trembled with a vague alarm.

Above her veil she saw the stuccoed court  
That led to dim secluded rooms within.  
She followed, dutiful, the dame unbeautiful,  
Who told her that the Christian world means sin.  
Some day, full soon, she would go forth a bride -  
Of one whose face she never had beheld.  
Something within her, wakened, and rebelled;  
She flung aside her veil, and cried, and cried.

## LINCOLN

When God created this good world  
A few stupendous peaks were hurled  
From His strong hand, and they remain  
The wonder of the level plain.  
But these colossal heights are rare,  
While shifting sands are everywhere.

So with the race. The centuries pass  
And nations fall like leaves of grass.  
They die, forgotten and unsung;  
While straight from God some souls are flung,  
To live immortal and sublime.  
So lives great Lincoln for all time.