Verses for Tableaux Vivants

1905
I.

God made our parents to be blest
In beauty and in innocence,
Where nothing ill deceived the sense,
And nothing pleased but what was best.

Have you not heard how that foul serpent came?
How that dark lying spirit ventured in
The paradise, and tempted them to sin;
Covering them, and all of us, with shame?

Though sin be dreadful, I am sure
That God, in sovereign mercy, still
Will execute His holy will;
I doubt not God will find a cure.

No doubt, in God's good time, man will be raised
To that high place his Maker made for him.
This world is hard for aching brain and limb;
But we deserve to suffer. God be praised.

God's punishments are mercies now.
Our tears are goodlier than gems.
And they are more than diadems,
The beads upon a good man's brow.

II.

Abraham goes to sacrifice his son.
Isaac is questioning: Look, I have the sword,
The wood, the fire: all things to serve the Lord;
Where is the victim? God will furnish one.

For me, I cannot but admire
The father's faith; to lead his boy
To sacrifice him; and employ
The child to bear the wood, the fire.

Obedience to God's command
Explains what Abraham did. Beside,
When once the father's faith was tried,
The angel came and stayed his hand.
Yet in the course of time another son
Of Abraham was sacrificed. Our Lord
Laid down His life to purchase the reward
Of Heaven for us, who else were all undone.

The guiltless suffered to redeem
The freedom of the guilty slave.
He rose in triumph from the grave;
And countless millions reign with Him.

III.

The youthful Joseph journeys far,
To find his brethren where they feed
The flocks; to take the things they need,
And bring the news of how they fare.

Those brothers were unworthy of the name.
They thought their father held the boy too dear,
And as they saw their brother coming near,
Their jealous anger smouldered into flame.

Perhaps they are not all unkind,
And some of them will take his part;
But anger blinds the darkened heart,
And jealously obscures the mind.

They would be happy were he in his grave.
See how they plot to do the boy away;
And think it mercy that they do not slay
Their father's son, but sell him as a slave.

Indeed they almost did the crime
Of fratricide, those heartless men.
But Joseph will be seen again;
All will be well in course of time.

IV.

The day long waited for has come at last.
The slave, exalted, sits upon a throne.
Those brothers bow before him. He alone
Knows all. The sight should make his heart beat fast.
But not with vengeance, not with hate.
Joseph remembers that these men
Are still his father’s sons; and then
He sees their miserable state.

He seems to be a hard man. Will he cast
Them into prison, as was done to him?
Should things be half so threatening as they seem,
I say the day of reckoning dawns at last.

They will atone with, who can tell
What deep confusion, mixed with grief?
And inexpressible relief
To find their brother safe and well.

But mark the retribution; see the hand
Of God in judgment on the guilty race;
Their children’s children branded with disgrace,
And slaves of servants in a heathen land.

V.

A king already reigns in Israel.
Samuel chooses out another king
By God’s command. I fear that this may bring
Great trials and sorrows, and miseries sore to tell.

’Tis God appoints the new-made king,
Anoints him with the holy oil;
The kingdom must be won by toil,
No doubt; but so is everything.

Poor child, a shepherd boy, to wear a crown,
And be the victim of the rage of Saul;
Of foes without, and foes within; with all
These anxious troubles to be weighted down!

A shepherd boy: but is he not
A mortal after God’s own heart?
And called to bear a greater part
Than ever was a monarch’s lot?
VI.

Woe to the Philistine, who boasts
Himself a warrior unsurpassed.
His little hour is all but past,
His hour of daring Israel's hosts.

How is a shepherd boy to fight a man
Of such exceeding stature and such strength?
How will he even get within the length
Of his great spear, or wound him if he can?

I see him armed with stone and sling;
And neat of foot, and lightly shod;
The clear eye shows his trust in God;
The boy can fight as well as sing.

Suppose he slays this giant in his pride,
He will have other foes in time to slay;
And other giants will dispute the way;
And he must overcome himself beside.

Yes; pride and lust and anger, true,
We all must slay or overcome.
The fight is long and hard for some;
Children must slay Goliaths too.

VII.

And now what we expected happens. See,
The king has lost whatever love he had
For David. Wrath and anger make him mad;
A jealous demon holds him mightily.

But David's harp will charm the king;
And he will melt at David's voice;
The demon stilled, he will rejoice
To hear the youthful shepherd sing.

Ah, once that music charmed his restless mind,
And calmed his angry thoughts; but now, behold,
He hides a deadly javelin in the fold
Of his red robe, being murderously inclined.
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Yet David, undismayed, still sings;
The prophet's vision sees afar
A daughter like the morning star,
The mother of the King of kings.

VIII.
The world is filled with Solomon's renown.
He builds the temple; crusts its walls with gold;
And even rumour leaves the half untold.
The wisest king that ever wore a crown.

The Queen of Saba comes from far to see
His glory; and to hear the king expound
His bitter wisdom: I have looked and found
All things beneath the sun are vanity.

Well might he say so. God had given him power,
Riches, dominion, and a mind endowed
Beyond all men's. The temple-builder bowed
To heathen gods, and faded like a flower.

The fading flower of the grass
Affords a momentary sight
To us, of the eternal light
And glory which can never pass.

Apart from God, its only source,
Man's wisdom, like his glory, fades.
It totters by descending grades,
And downward takes its headlong course.

IX.
An evil world; the prophet's lips are dumb;
God's folk are crushed beneath the Roman power,
Rebellious, paralysed; it seems the hour
Of menaces, and wrath untold to come.

Something is happening now which is worth
More than the world that is passing and ended.
See how an archangel kneels, and his splendid
Plumage is marking the dust upon earth.
His is no hidden and dim-spoken presage,
Long distant happenings darkly portrayed.
Thou art the Chosen, he says to the maid;
Thou art the Mother of God, is his message.

But when the time is come, and He is born;
When God made man declares Himself a King
To these long-suffered Hebrews, will they bring
Him what He asks, or answer Him with scorn?

Though they reject Him, He calls to the regions
Yet undiscovered, and peoples to be;
Nations afar on the desolate sea,
Islands and continents furnish His legions.

X.

I glory in the prophecy, that kings
Should come from far to see the Day-star rise.
Beside the manger where the Saviour lies
The kneeling princes place their offerings.

Beside the manger shepherds stand,
Who bring the homage of the poor.
This pleases me as much, or more
Than princes from a distant land.

All worldly wisdom by the crib grows thin.
Things elsewhere great are here exceeding small.
An infant’s arm is mightier than all
The armies of the world in battle din.

On earth are wars and war’s alarms
Until this Infant bids them cease,
The Herald of eternal peace,
The Warrior Babe in Mary’s arms.

XI.

When Herod’s cruel purpose was to slay
Each new-born child; an angel came by night
To warn Saint Joseph he must take flight,
To bear his sacred charges safe away.
He hears, and does not hesitate to take
The unknown road to unknown wandering;
His will is firm to suffer anything
Required for Mary’s and the Infant’s sake.

A thousand stars above them blink and stare.
The desert underfoot; a murderous hand
Behind them; and before an unknown land;
And all this world’s Creator in their care.

Then shortly, when a halt is made,
Saint Joseph tries to do the best
He can; and leaves to God the rest,
That Mary may not feel afraid.

Stretches a tent, and sets alight
A fire to cheer with pleasant glow;
While round about, and to and fro,
He keeps his vigil through the night.

XII.

Saint Joseph, humble, does not seem to seek
His own advantage, nor to look for fame.
His royal lineage, his tribe, his name,
Are all we know; we never hear him speak.

We know him just and meek and pure,
Of steadfast faith, and sturdy heart;
These virtues set him far apart,
And make his place in heaven secure.

And Mary, the bright Virgin, lived a poor
And uneventful life in Galilee;
But eyes of faith may look on her and see
The Portal of the sky and heaven’s door.

Her purity and meekness hurled
The powers of darkness from their seat.
The serpent writhes beneath the feet
Of her, the glory of the world.
And who would think that Mary's tender child,
Who lived in poverty and died in shame,
Should bear above all other names the name
By which the reprobate are reconciled.

This bitter world He meekly trod;
He shaped His lips to human speech;
He was a man, that He might teach
To other men the love of God.

XIII.

As David had ordained, the thousands still
Go to the holy city every year;
To Sion's gates, with confidence and fear,
To worship God upon His holy hill.

Though Sion be fair to the sight,
It is only a symbol, fortelling
Another, a heavenly dwelling,
The mystical city of light.

I see their joy; I hear the strong refrain
The Galileans sing, as from a height,
They see the city, glistening and white,
A queen of cities, in the mellow plain.

With voices and hearts elate,
They are singing the praise of the city.
Hereafter the Saviour with pity
Will weep, as He thinks of its fate.

XIV.

'Twas at the close of such a pilgrimage;
The pious Galileans now returned
Towards the north. What power could assuage
The Virgin Mother's anguish when she learned

Her Son was not among them? Did she wait
For comfort, leaving someone else to find
The holy Child? She turned and hurried straight
The way they came, in agony of mind.
She found Him in the temple. Ancient men,
Fulfilled with years, and learned in the law,
Sat round about Him listening. Now and then
They stroked their beards, and held their breath with awe.

I wonder what it was they heard!
His questions well might cause surprise;
His words might well confound the wise,
Who was Himself the Living Word.

XV.

Ambitions, fed upon unceasing strife,
Fierce passions, tortured many a human heart.
In distant Galilee, removed apart,
Three blessed persons lead their simple life.

A mighty empire forged a linked chain
To bind in one the peoples of the world;
While in a shed the golden shavings curled
As a light touch manipulates a plane.

Beloved as none beyond their circle knew,
Herself the bulwark of the peace she shares,
The Mother broods upon her household cares
With thoughts as silent and serene as dew.

XVI.

Once all unknown, and hardly seen
Beyond her few familiar friends,
For ever, to the ages' ends,
Uncounted millions call her Queen.

The Frank, the Syrian, the Greek,
In praise of her would all excel.
She makes the timid bold; her spell
Has made the fierce and forward meek.

Star of the Sea, she holds in fief
The storm-protected Hebrides;
In other isles on other seas
Her children fish along the reef.
In every land her praise is sung,  
And every moment swells the choir;  
From China to the Land of Fire,  
She is acclaimed in every tongue.

Races on races rise and thrive,  
And faint and fail, but Mary's name  
In hearts of men is still the same;  
Her memory is kept alive.