

Daniel Wilson



*Spring Wild
Flowers*

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PARTING INTRODUCTION.

A GARLAND OF WILD ROSES

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A garland of wild roses
With eglantine and daisies and the like,
Some snowdrops, such as winter oft exposes
Between the thaws wherewith she closes;
Meltings, like the regrets that strike
Amid the chill of human hearts, belike,
 When passion looses.

A withered nosegay too,
'Twas plucked one spring day in the fresh green wood;
All laughingly the sun stole through
And quenched his thirst with cups of dew;
Cowslip, heath, and fox glove wooed
Hands that plucked in merriest mood,
 Prizing while new.

A few sweet violets;
The scent methinks still clings to the blue leaf;
Trifles, but yet their breath begets
Sweet memories, no heart forgets;
Even with their life so brief,
Are they not worth, at least such grief,
 Knowing no regrets?

Some dandelions and gorse,
With a marigold or two full blown,
Gathered at the time; the things are coarse
I own, yet this may have its force,
They took my fancy; weeds not grown

In vain, I think, or Nature had not thrown
So many o'er her course.
All are bound up together
With one little sprig of forget-me-not:
Alas! bright flowers so speedily wither,
And grief's so inconstant, one knows not whether
It is not selfishness after all
Makes us so keenly regret their fall
Ere the wintry weather.

EDWARD. A TALE OF THE REFORMATION.

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A simple tale of an old man's faith;
And a maid found faithful in love, to death,
By such trials as Holy Church sanctioneth:
'Tis an old tale hath been told before,
God grant our times have not things in store
Shall give us the like to tell once more.
Yet thanks to God that such things have been,
Since in martyr's faithfulness I ween
Faith's precursor of liberty is seen.

ARGUMENT. PART I.

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The introduction of the Poem, indicates the period of the Tale, depicting the uncertainty of men's minds in the transition state that precedeth change. The past unrolling before the Chronicler, he describeth the scene. An aged monk earnest in chase of truth, having sought vain solace in the legends and traditions of the Church, when satiated with the pleasures of the world, and jaded by conscience to the acknowledgment of virtue, while forsaking her allegiance; turneth his pursuit into the paths of science, and again abandoneth the earnest chase insatiate as before. In his vague search the old Monk stumbleth on the Scriptures, and findeth in the despised and forgotten manuscript, the treasure so long sought in vain; but striving to share it with others, he findeth his mission unhonoured, and the treasure, sought in long pain, and proved in gladness of heart, deemed but a vain illusion; yet are there a few whom the world hath not satisfied, and one, an Orphan Maid, twice desolate by death and separation, the yearnings of whose heart find their full solace in the boundless treasury of Truth.

EDWARD.

PART I. THE MONK.

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A tale of th' Olden Time, when mighty thoughts,
Struggling in fever-dreams of Liberty,
Awoke to war for right inalienate,
Freedom to worship God: leagured by doubts,
When faith with night grappled fearfully,
And the young dawn, wrapt in dim mists, o'ersate.
When conscience echoed in her inmost caves,
Not with the shrill accusing note she flings,
Startling th' affrighted soul, noon-slumbering,--
But muttered voices, as when a summer eve
Darkens to storm, or ere the welkin rings
With the thunder's laugh, or pales 'neath its wing!

Immured in gloomy cell an old Monk sate,
Pouring with studious eye upon a missal,
With saintly portraiture emblazoned quaint,
Himself a picture, as through the narrow grate
Stole a ray, the niggard offspring of th' espousal
Of light and gloom,--such scene as Rembrandt
Caught by his pencil's wondrous Alchemy,
Had made a gem that crowns might wrangle for;
--Yet other far his studies,--he from youth
To this hoar age, within the boundary
Of Benedictine rule, hath sieved her store

Of legendary rubbish, seeking truth!
Pent stage, whereon th' emasculated soul
Drags through unfruitful years its weary length,
Unsun'd by sympathy's dear charities,
Yet, even thence, a History will unroll
Of the same soul awaking in its strength,
And, armed with God's most glorious verities,
Warring against Hell's principalities,
Leagued to uphold night's undivided empire
And bar her gates against besieging day,
Fanaticism's fierce realities
Thick mustering, too, her flag, the martyr's pyre
God-owned, and streaming far into the night.
A noble soul it was, though long pent up
In superstition's gordian subtleties,
And life's lamp far gone down in the dubious round
Of unravelling error's skene, ere he could grope
Up to dim twilight of morn-promised skies,
And wade through learned sloughs to vantage ground;
With energies untried--a slumbering mine
Which yet a tiny spark may heave on high
With devastation dire,--his youth wore on:
No sun arose with influence benign
To woo the pregnant seeds to fructify,
And heavenward lure the soul, descending prone;
Cast on an evil age, when the Church saw
Man's God-resemblance to brute-night succumb,
Yet saw uncaring, save to lend a hand
To urge him down the steep; the unwritten law
All voiceless as the dead, and conscience numb,

While the waked passions sway the wide command.
He, all impetuous, blindly flung his dower
Of giant intellect adown the stream,
Gathered its harvest in,--then conscience woke,
And, armed to reassert her slighted power,
Startled him shuddering from his guilty dream
To shelter in despair, against her stroke!
Where shall he flee?--The mercy freely given,
Blood-bought by that Great Shepherd of the sheep,
By papal bull, the Church her own declares,
Self-chartered, sole monopolist of Heaven;
With purpose doubtless to retail it cheap,
And clear the market of the devil's wares!
Nay, more, the incarnate veil, in which he bled
Who bore our sins upon the accursed tree,
And, once for all, God's justice satisfied,
By her communicable grace re-made,
Sells in her shambles for adulterous fee,
A sacrifice to quick and dead applied;
Nor conscience scared, nor seared will she deny
Her ready lance or salve, alike ordained
The thunderbolts to forge, or grace dispense
Fresh stamped from mint of Heaven's treasury,
And furnishing with licenses to vend,
The ghostly lords of God's inheritance!
Lured by her specious phrased emolients,
Heart conscience-struck, yet unregenerate,
He donned the cowl, and fearlessly assailed
With meretricious works, Heaven's battlements,
With fasts and prayers 'gainst wrath importunate,

While penances for purchase fee availed.
Vain strife, for victory already won,
The free redemption of Hell's Conqueror spurned,
And, counting all as an unholy thing
The atoning covenant blood of God's dear Son,
Peace came not,--and despairingly he turned
His search to learning's shrine, close communing
With the immortal dead, whose buried gems,
Like orient pearls, the cloistered walls retain,
The shells that in ignoble vassalage
Hide what should glow on kingly diadems;
For him the galaxy relumes again,
The mighty dead revive,--poet and sage,
Historian, sophist, and philosopher:
Science unfolds her sacred mysteries,
And Art her powers, and Nature's self,--coy maid--
Won by the worship that he offers her,
Her mask withdraws, and to his dazzled eyes
Unveils the primal beauties that it hid;
By her seductive charms, the Alchymist
In error wanders while in search of truth,
Still missing it in chase of higher good,
Life's niggard taper running all to waste,
And glimmering in the socket, nothing loath,
While dreaming of elixir to renew't.
So the old monk, enshrouded in his learning,
Nature's false scantling shutting out her God,
And Truth herself, for airy phantoms slighted,
Down to the grave had passed, all undiscerning--
Till lost--the mazes of the devious road,

And his large, hungering soul all undelighted
By the glad rays commissioned to illumine
The murky shallows of eternity,
And light the pass to immortality,
Life's lamp and lantern, in the darkling womb
Of night, alike engulfed, fatuity
Bartering for dreams the great reality!
Life's God-wove mystery held a dream of fate,
A rainbow-tissued brittle firmament
Hung o'er eternity by cords aye loosening,
Until death-shivered and annihilate:
When rose the Sun of Righteousness, and lent
A light that scattered healing from its wing
O'er his wrapt soul. As, all uncared, the vision
Of buried loves re-haunt us in our dreams
As every day familiars,--he had thrown
'Mong theologic rubbish, in derision,
A diamond from him, all its lustrous beams
Hid in the cumbering settings of tradition;
But now soul-fired, its lustre is revealing
Treasures the slave of science never knew;
New birth into the glorious liberty
Of the sons of God; the clouds of error, veiling
The mystery of redemption, in love's dew
Dissolved, in love, the light of Deity!
No field for spiritual knight-errantry,
No meretricious gewgaws, pride's invention;
No garish garniture whence the duplicity
Of the deceitful heart may busk a warrantry
For a half saviour, and self-won redemption,--

But the strong arch of Faith's simplicity;
Faith, all the sinner's righteousness and shield,
Faith, all his armoury against surprise
Of Hell's assaults, his ladder, up to light
Lending the heaven-ward way; till, all revealed,
Hope in her realized realities,
And perfect faith, are swallowed up in sight.
Buried within his studious solitude
The old monk cheated the benevolence
Of his large heart, with blessings his discoveries
Should yet enrich the world with; but, endued
With Mercy's nobler largess to dispense,
He burns to circulate its blessedness,
To share with all the God-bought liberty,
To break Hell's chains, to bid her bondage cease,
And freemen of the Cross to welcome them:
"Drink of life's streams," he cries: "why will ye die
In arms 'gainst mercy welcoming to peace,
And God himself descending to redeem?"
But vain the mission, welcomed by resistance
That spurned God's mercy, laughed at Truth's realities,
Gloried in sin, and armed for its possession
The sensual hive, that droned away existence
In Superstition's stale formalities,
Buzzing all hum and sting against the aggression,
Hurling anathemas 'gainst heresy,
And marshalling the ghostly thunders lent
By Councils, Fathers, with the learned jargon
Invincible, of stolid orthodoxy,
To face the Bible-bannered armament,

Led by their Captain, God's Incarnate Son!
Yet found he list'ners too, and willing sharers,
That owned her power, and bowed in glad submission
To Mercy's welcome terms; but none whose sadness
Yielded to such a joyousness as hers,
The gentle maid, whose sorrow first had won
His sympathy to share with her his gladness.
An orphan was she, to the love entrusted
Of noble relatives,--as some rare flower
Transplanted, drooping for its summer home;
An uncle she had found,--who, rough encrusted
With crabbed whims of age, and wayward, sour,
And petulant by turns, yet gave love's welcome:
A youthful cousin too, and noble hearted,
Who grew up by her, like some lordly oak
Proud in the embraces of the clustering vine.
But, orphan tears twice shedding, as death-parted
From the hoar sire, ere long a crueler stroke
Rent the last home-links that her heart entwined,
And reft her from the unconscious nurturing
Of love's young dream; proudly her heart recoiled
From mercenary minions' disregard
Of her young lover's charge, and, torturing
With the chill touch of charity, till wild
Throbb'd the lone heart of Lowden's Orphan Ward.
But now, nor longer proudly spurning them,
Nor sorrowing, she adores his wondrous love,
That, sinless, bowed beneath the sinner's load;
Till, kindling with the Gospel's burning theme,
Her rapt soul, winging to its rest above,

Reposes on the Fatherhood of God.

ARGUMENT. PART II.

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The Chronicler looking back from the scene before him, telleth of others witnessed there, when a youthful pair, the Orphan Maid and her noble cousin, slumbered in the blessedness of unconscious love; but now, after long absence, the maiden waiteth his return,--unchanged in affection, yet in doubt, yearning for sympathy in new-found hopes; she dwelleth on the memories of past love, till startled from their vividness to doubt the reality of reunion, ere she silently yieldeth to its delight. Her lover telleth of knowledge and beauty received into his soul; she listeneth delighted, and, for a time, doubt marreth not her bliss,--she questioneth of highest hopes, and sinketh with the discovery that he returneth no sympathy to that wherein she findeth peace. Yet love surviving disappointment, forbiddeth the banishment of hope. The consciousness of obstacles increaseth its intensity, and she wins his admiration by eloquence that fails to convince. The mysteries of God's providence demand our wondering admiration; he who travelled far in search of Truth, returneth still unsatisfied, while the untravelled maid hath in her loneliness found out God.

EDWARD.

PART II. THE LOVERS.

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Years have o'erflown, though still, amid the tracery
Of oriel richly dight with quaint device
Of herald's pageantry, the liv'ried light
Stole into Lowden Hall, since guilelessly
Gazing into the depths o' the other's eyes,
As they would read love's destinies aright,
Edward and Hellen sat; no words they uttered,
Nor pearly fringing tear bespoke or grief
Or overmastering gladness; 'twas the love
Of novices, that yet were all untutored
In cunning torturings of disbelief,
Or what self-slaved precisians disapprove;
Unconscious were they of love's rosy chains,
Rosy in thorns as sweets, entwining them,
Or all that lurks in its enfolded core,
What thrilling joyousness, and eke what pains;
Still in the maze of that delicious dream
That, once awakened from, returns no more.
As sister had she loved, and he as brother,
And then perchance they'd deemed it keenest sorrow--
Though passion strove for stronger utterance,
To find such tie centred in another;
'Tis the brood of fear and faithlessness that borrow
Precocity's love-blinding eagle glance!
But they had parted;--he, the noble scion

Of Lowden's lordly race, to trim the mind-lamp
And seek fresh oil, amid wide Europe's stores
Far wandering, while the orphan, she, alone
'Mong youth's familiars, deepening the stamp
Of influences mutual of yore!
Years had elapsed, I said, her heart is throbbing,
For Edward now returns; perchance that hour
Again they'll meet! whence now the unbidden tear,
And the cheek flushed, and now the roses robbing
From their frail throne? alas! knows she the power
Of love's passionate dream? has she awoke to fear?
Why should she fear? the oriel, that before
Skreened young love sleeping, masquerades light still,
The lawn's still daisy-clad, its herds bound past her
To the woods waked to music, as of yore,
When he with her, there wandering, drank his fill
Of melody: nor miss they now a master
To give the adagio to their wood notes wild
Or list them welcoming: there too the monast'ry
Whence steals along the vale the vesper bell
Pleading that man with God be reconciled;
Or bears it such a mission to the weary
Sin-laden soul?--to her it seems the knell
That summons to fierce warfare; for Religion
Is now no fond enthusiast's dream insipid,
Tickling the fancy with a ghostly fable,
But prize 'gainst flesh and blood that must be won
When spiritual wickedness is vanquished,
And faith, deep mining for foundation stable,
Smiles at the shallow grave!--But now I wander,

While she, absorbed in thoughts set to the pealing
Of that sweet chime, is tracing up time's stream,
Fancy's barque current-borne, until it land her
In that quaint oriel's niche, and love is sealing
His parting infant vows! Hark! does she dream?
"My Hellen!" Is this knight of noble bearing,
With these deep lines of thought upon his brow,
The home-bred boy, her Edward? love ne'er questions,
And yet an onlooker might doubt their caring,
No wild embrace! no words of fevered glow!
Each th' other named, then as fond recollections
Crowded like storm-scared billows on each other,
They gazed unquailing each in the other's eye,
And drank love's fill, and knew no more of fear;
And then joy's sudden current welling smoother,
Yields the quick crowding question and reply,
Self-lost in sympathy of hearts sincere.
He has drank deep at Europe's scattered fountains,
Has slaked his ear, his eye, his thirsting soul,
Knelt for the self-styled God-vicegerent's blessing,
On his seven-hilled throne, and 'mid the Switzer's
mountains

Heard God's own voice through their far vistas roll,
As though dread warning to the universe addressing;
Had seen the Heaven-lit Raphael's soul outpouring,
Till, rapt in inspiration, he expired
As the canvas burned with the transfigured God,
Promethean-winged Buonarotti soaring
O'er the amorphous marble, till soul fired
It woke and shook beneath the Sinai-missioned's load;