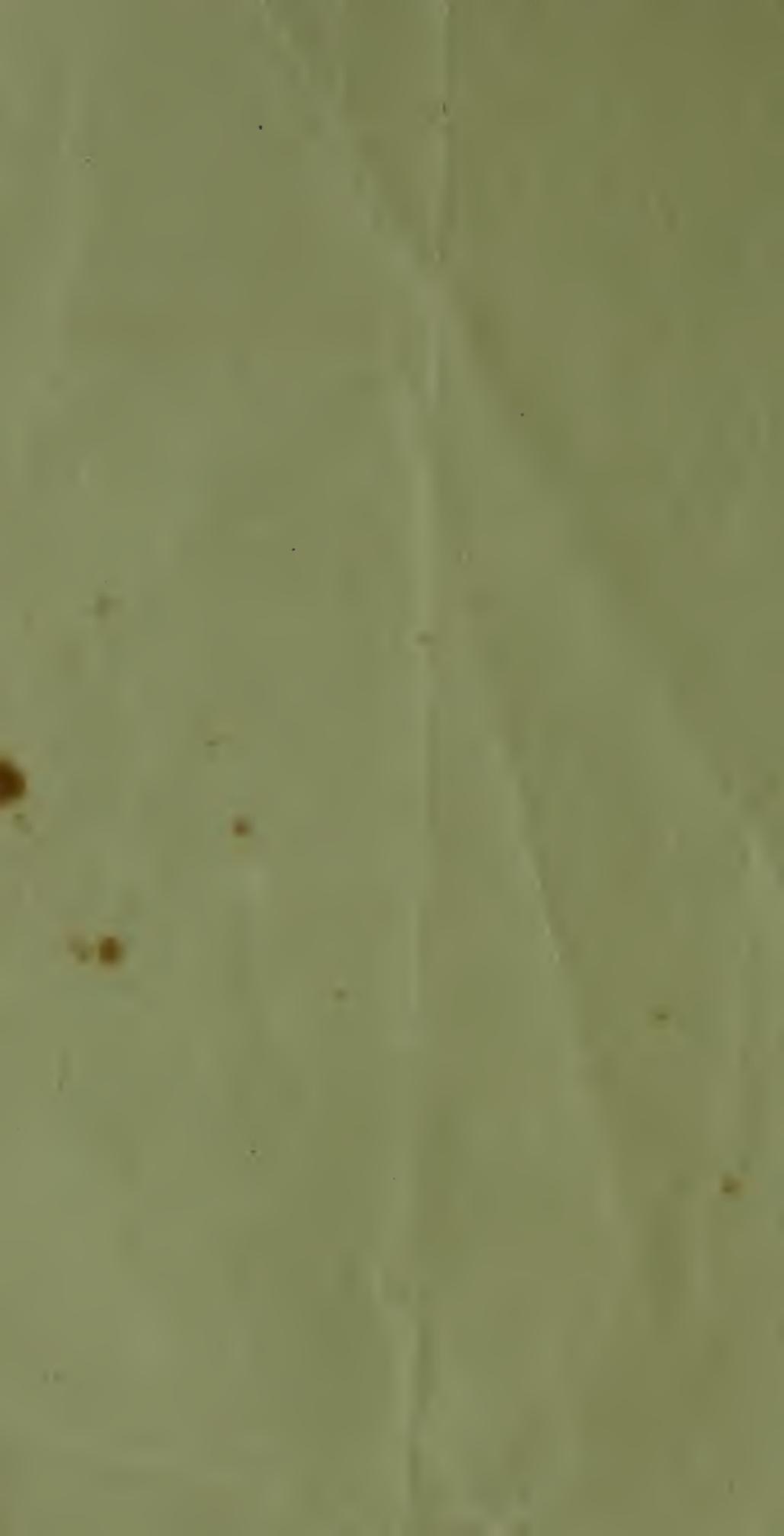


POEM.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST.



POEM

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

OF THE

NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING SCHOOL,

AT

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LESSONS FROM THE PAST.

The pensive traveller, doomed by fate to stray
To other realms, in regions far away,
Musingly stops and turns, once more to view
His native city, in the horizon blue.
Enwrapped with vapors nebulous, it lies
Where the dim landscape mingles with the skies,
Its countless mansions, as in shades of night,
No longer greeting his desirous sight.
Yet, o'er its site, through mists that intervene,
In solemn grandeur airy domes are seen,
And spires, towers, turrets,—childhood's friends,—appear
In pleasant guise, his drooping heart to cheer.

Thus on life's path *we* turn, awhile to cast
The enquiring vision backward to the past;
And thus, alas! of all that once hath been,
How few the relics scattered o'er the scene!
Nor can desire, through time's o'ershadowing gloom,
Recall existence from the Past's great tomb.

The vanished Past! within its boundless scope,
What pangs and fears, what promises of hope,

What worst of passions human hearts can move,
 What ties of friendship, ecstasies of love,
 What aspirations that no tongue can tell,
 What deeds angelic and what deeds of hell,
 What arts of peace, what bickerings of strife
 Lie lost, forgotten to the world of life !

Insatiate Past ! of man and man's designs,
 From nation's broad to life's most lowly lines,
 How vast the sum thy glutless greed hath stole,
 Since time's impatient tide began to roll,
 And given them up, the larger and the less,
 Impartial fate ! to dark forgetfulness.
 Speak, Babylon, from thy sepulchral shroud !
 Shout through the depths of time's involving cloud !
 Tell, from thine ashes, slumb'ring and unknown,
 Where Chaldea's queen upraised her golden throne.
 No answer comes ; destruction's work is done :
 Eternal silence sits on Babylon.

Illustrious Illium ! breathe one feeble breath
 From the cold cerements of thy home of death,
 To mark the spot of Troy's imperial pride,
 Where Priam ruled and haughty Hector died.
 Listening, I pause ;—the overshadowing pall
 Unmoved reposes, and 'tis silence all.
 Rise ! shade of Carthage ! rise from Lethe's wave,
 And place memorials o'er her ravaged grave.
 I see thee not ; destruction and decay
 O'er Punic glories hold triumphant sway.

The pitying Past ! that over many a tale
 Of man's degeneracy draws oblivion's veil,
 Yet saves some actions, generous and sublime,
 As beacon-lights throughout all coming time.

Poor, patient student ! Nature's child of love,
 In penury's ranks obscure compelled to move,
 Panting like harts for water-brooks, to gain
 Truth's boundless lore, through all her broad domain,—
 Be boldly brave, nor let despondence drop
 Its lowering cloud upon thy heart's great hope.
 Call to the Past, and ask a radiant light
 To chase the darkness of impending night.
 The Past shall answer :—" Heaven and man agree
 To bless the earnest soul, like that of thee.
 Though Science for herself should win regard,
 And knowledge ever be its own reward,
 Yet may the laborer be refreshed to know
 That other hearts glad recognition show.

" Far to the Orient turn thy wistful eyes
 On the broad realm where proud pagodas rise,
 —Eldest of living empires—her whose throne,
 Secure in self-reliance, and alone,
 Unmoved, unyielding, unsubdued has stood
 Since o'er her mountains rolled Deucalion's flood.
 There, in the early dawning of her years,
 Where first the gleam of history's light appears,
 A peasant boy, in penury's weary lot,
 With toils of science cheered his humble cot,
 Till wreaths of honor bound his brow and Fame,
 With clarion trumpet, spread his magic name.
 Hearts gathered to him, myriad hearts of love,
 Bearing a nation's gift their love to prove.
 Lo! on the imperial throne they bid him stand,
 And Fohi sways the sceptre of the land.

" That vision past, direct thy longing sight
 Where Chaldean shepherds warm regard invite.

When twilight bathed the heavens with molten gold,
 Their labor o'er, and closed the guardian fold,
 Upward in joy they turned the admiring eye
 On gorgeous glories of the glowing sky ;
 And, as the day-beams faded from their sight
 Into the solemn, darkabyss of night,
 Each glittering star that drops its jewelled tear
 On the broad curtain of the cycling year,
 Came as a friend familiar to the view,
 And dearer each returning evening grew.
 Now on the measured chart its image fair
 Is fondly pictured, with artistic care,
 Till all the stellar legions stand arrayed,
 —Heaven's marshaled hosts in miniature displayed—
 And Chaldea's shepherds gather, nobly calm,
 In astronomic lore, the world's first palm.

“ Heart of unyielding hope ! regard once more
 Congenial spirits thine have gone before.
 Lo ! in a halo of transcendent light,
 Fame's airy temple bursts upon thy sight.
 In the great throng whom men have thither brought
 As chiefs in science and as kings of thought,
 In simple garb and ever modest mien,
 With beaming lineaments and brow serene,
 While gathered hosts upon his presence wait,
 See god-like Newton, greatest of the great !
 Bright round his head prismatic light expands,
 And countless worlds lie balanced in his hands.
 Beside him, Franklin weaves the mystic chain
 That binds the electric dragon to the plain ;
 And, throned on clouds, he treads the realms above
 To grasp his thunders from the hand of Jove.”

Great preacher, Past! that from the swollen stream
 Of life, which passes as a morning dream,
 Gathers some fragments of the general wreck
 As text or moral homilies to deck,
 And grandly solemn, in his sombre stole,
 Gives wisdom's lessons to the human soul.

Hark! from the dark, unfathomable glooms
 Where giant Past stalks over nations' tombs,
 A warning voice, imperative and loud,
 Calls as the thunder calleth from the cloud.
 "Empires!" it cries, "as self-secure ye ride,
 Like gallant ships, on time's progressive tide,
 Call to your pilots! underneath the wave
 Are rocks where earlier nations found a grave.
 Look to the charts! behold **INTESTINE FEUD,**
 The fatal ledge where numerous wrecks are strewed;
 And, near it, fate's inevitable three,
OPPRESSION, LUST OF CONQUEST, LUXURY.

Now on imagination's fairy wings,
 Through the dim past the muse ethereal springs,
 And cleaves the air to far Euphrates' shore,
 Where Art reared triumphs she has reared no more.
 There, as the fruit of oriental gold
 Which filled the Assyrian realm with wealth untold,
 Proud on her sight rise Babylonia's walls,
 And towers where revel holds high festivals;
 Arch over arch, a never ending chain,
 Springs to the startled heavens from the plain,—
 The world's chief wonder! and the flying cloud
 Enfolds a "hanging garden" in its shroud.
 There, steeped in earliest dews, the lily grows,
 And zephyrs kiss the opening tubérose;

Myriads of flowers in grateful incense vie—
A floral empire blooming in the sky !

Effusing tears bedim the muse's eye,
Amid the abounding pomp and luxury,
As through the air the awful death-knell calls,
And Babylonia with Belshazzar falls.

As in the magic tube's dissolving view,
From the old empire's shadow springs a new ;
And haughty Persia, from her throne, afar
Sends o'er the trembling world the dogs of war.
Glutted with gold, intoxicate with power,
Giddy with victory's culminating hour,
She feasts and revels. Gorgon spectres stand
Before her eye, and palsied is her hand !
And thus appalled she sitteth to await
Him whom the world has long mis-named "The Great."

Lo ! with a hundred battles sternly fought,
A hundred victories gained, but dearly bought,
The son of Philip, never taught to yield,
A conquerer stands upon Arbela's field.
But the young victor, still unsated here,
O'er Chaldea's mountains goads his mad career,
Triumphant ever in his wild emprise,
Till Babylon falls, and palsied Persia dies.

Woe for the wreath Aggression's votaries cull !
Woe for the heart when victory's cup is full !
The Macedonian, with his flag unfurled
In every clime, the standard of the world,
Weeps that no realm still rises to his view
For Battle's arm to ravage and subdue,
And cries—O Mercy ! blot the accursed line !—
"Thine be the Heavens, Jehovah ; all *this* world is mine."

Hellas the fair ! the Muse's calls invite
 To thy long age of intellectual light,
 When Art and Science, as with sorcerer's wand,
 Taste, knowledge, beauty, threw o'er all the land.
 With talismanic touch the rock was rent
 And temples rose where art's perfections blent :
 Forth from the marble sprang the human form,
 With youth and beauty, all but passion warm ;
 Nor were the wonder for our faith too great
 Had subtile Phidias met Pygmalion's fate.
 The poet muse, from this, her native clime,
 Sent her rich treasures down the stream of time,
 And heavenly wisdom threw a radiant beam
 Of light and love on Plato's Academe.
 But, the fair picture's loveliness to mar,
 There rose the fierce, relentless fiend of war.
 The pride of chiefs, the rivalry of kings,
 Ambition, jealousy, and envy's stings
 Burst into faction, with its train of woes,
 Internal feuds, aggressive foreign foes.
 Hence all the ills which man and nations feel ;
 The untold wounds which time could never heal ;
 The hollow death-moan from Platea's plain ;
 The valiant hosts at Marathona slain ;
 The crimsoned waves that, moaning, come to kiss
 The mountains' feet at storied Salamis ;
 The haughty Hellene sunk into a slave,—
 And one more nation's wreck on time's engulfing wave.

Muse ! plume thy pinions for another clime :
 Speed, with the course of empire and of time !
 Fly, as the siroc's wings in darkness sweep,
 Along the waves of Adria's troubled deep,
 And rest where Power upreared another home,
 Enthroned in grandeur on the hills of Rome.

What, now, the vision spread before thine eye
 By the great past, O maid of Castaly?
 The muse replies;—"The gifted arts of peace
 That spread their bounties o'er the plains of Greece;
 A wondrous city, all superbly fair,
 Sprung from the nursling of the she-wolf's lair;
 A powerful people who their mandates hurled,
 As Jove from Ida, o'er the obedient world;
 Wise in the Senate, where, in grave debate,
 Patriots true-hearted held the helm of State;
 To move the crowd on bold achievement bent;
 In the thronged forum greatly eloquent
 Prudent in peace, invincible in war,
 Their beacon-light ambition's loftiest star;
 Bitter in hate, unmerciful in wrath,
 Lewd at the mask, luxurious at the bath;
 Of human blood insatiate as the grave,
 Where for his life contends the Dacian slave,
 And crowded benches raise a joyous cry
 To see a thousand gladiators die.

"Rome, young and stalwart! bounding into life
 With every power of vigorous action rife.
 Rome, poor but free! where the stern virtues rest
 Which man with true nobility invest.
 Rome, rich and proud! with all perceptive sense
 Sated with every art's magnificence.
 All-grasping Rome! whose brain in madness reels,
 Striding o'er earth on battle's brazen heels.
 The oppressor, Rome! with adamant bands
 On empire's necks and individual hands.
 Luxurious Rome! her palace and her board,
 With all that earth can yield, profusely stored.
 Rome, the voluptuous! dallying, all day long,
 Where fickle syrens sing seductive song.

Licentious Rome ! whose every vital fire
 Is quenched in sensuous passion's low desire.
 Pale, lifeless Rome ! upon her clay-cold bed
 Of dust and ashes, slumb'ring with the dead."
 Ah ! hapless tale of fate's corrupting three,
 OPPRESSION, LUST OF CONQUEST, LUXURY.

Ambition's tocsin, from its tranquil rest,
 With loud reveillé, wakes the youthful breast.
 Her fair, false light, which glitters but to blind,
 —The *ignis fatuus* of the human mind,—
 Allures to perils of the thorny road
 And gory fields by conquest's chieftains trod.
 Ah ! young aspirant, other nations still
 May cling to life unaided by thy will.
 If "Glory" hold to thee her magic glass,
 And forms of light as pleasing spectra pass,
 With wisdom's oil anoint thy truant eye,
 Nor heedless pass grim Retribution by.
 Say, would thou gather Alexander's wreath,
 And then with harlots die the drunkard's death ?
 Conquer the world and meet with Cæsar's end,
 —The helpless victim of a faithless friend ?
 With Swedish Charles, the field of conquest try,
 And, flush with manhood's vigor, rashly die ?
 Mount, with Napoleon, mad Aggression's car,
 While the world trembles with the shock of war,
 And fall, the powerless captive of a realm
 Thy pride presumptuous sought to overwhelm ?

Are such the idol-forms thy heart would rear,
 As guiding pole-stars of thy progress here ?
 Nay : rather tread the path by Howard trod,
 And with Compassion's laurels meet thy God.

Perchance in reveries of some musing hour,
 Thy mental sight to heights of human power
 Turns, till desire delusive o'er thee creeps
 To scale, with dauntless heart, their glittering steeps.
 Alas, for thee! though thousands wait thy beck,
 If Dionysius' sword be o'er thy neck,
 Or Louis Philippe's secret foes await,
 With whetted steel, at every palace gate.
 Of regal glories, would thou take them all
 And go, with Charles, to yield them at Whitehall?
 With Bourbon Louis, sadly though serene,
 Mount the dread ladder of the guillotine?
 Or tread the mysterious pathway of his heir
 To death, the dungeon, or—we know not where?

'Tis an old tale—old tales are often true—
 That mountain heights congeal the morning dew,
 While, in the genial valley, warm and bright,
 It blesses earth and glows in liquid light.

When Diocletian, into other hands,
 Resigned the power o'er Rome's unmeasured lands,
 And, turning from the throne's perpetual broil,
 Sought sweet enjoyment in a gardener's toil,
 Charmed with the change, delighted with his lot,
 —His rood of land, his unpretending cot,—
 He cried, exulting,—“Life is now begun;
 Now first thy beauty seen, thou ever-blessed sun!”

And thou, fair damsel with the placid eye;
 Yearns thy young heart the heights of power to try?
 Then link thy fate with an illustrious line,
 And reap the woes of banished Josephine;
 With Cleopatra draw life's latest gasp,
 Mad with the poison of the envenomed asp;

Go, pride-deceived, a heartless tyrant's mate,
 And meet with Grey's or fair Bolena's fate ;
 In Scottish Mary's prison waste thy years
 In baffled hopes and unrewarded tears,
 Then, in the gush of disappointment's sigh,
 Like the foul traitor or the felon die ;
 Become the peerless idol and the pet
 Of royal courts, like Austrian Antoinette,
 And, lost to mercy, pour thy youthful blood
 In the red tide of Revolution's flood.

Turn, gentle maiden, turn thy wildered sight
 To other spheres for pure and calm delight ;
 Where hearts sincere pursue, from day to day,
 The humbler paths where duty points the way ;
 In scenes domestic cheer the social hearth
 With mental light and all the charms of worth ;
 Console the wearied breasts that gladly flee
 To them for strength and cordial sympathy ;
 Rouse the despondent into hope's control,
 And throw round all their homes the sun-light of the soul.
 Or if, perchance, thy pathway should appear
 To lead to labors in a broader sphere,
 Go where an earnest effort shall impart
 A nobler, loftier life to head and heart.

Behold, where Ocean's ceaseless breakers roar
 Along the beaches of Nantucket's shore !
 There, while the wearied world in silence sleeps,
 One woman still her lonely vigils keeps,
 Watching the blue depths of the starry zone,
 And forcing homage from a royal throne.
 Well may ye envy her an honest claim
 On future tongues, ye devotees of Fame !

For, through all time, along the fields of air,
The fiery comet Mitchell's name shall bear.

At Pity's altars see another form,
With all the spirit's best emotions warm,—
Hers who has taught the world, by deeds of good,
The lofty grandeur of true womanhood.
In dungeons, cells; in cellars dark and dank,
Where'er the maniac's chains and fetters clank;
Wherever lagging Mercy has forgot
The misery of the mental alien's lot;
Where'er heroic love can intervene
To raise and bless, her angel form is seen.
Hers is no narrow bigotry of sect:
Her heart-strings races, empires, realms connect.
Still laboring on and "counting life as dross,"
Beneath the crescent as beneath the cross,
The one great thought which prompts her willing mind
Is, to relieve the wretched of mankind.
Ah! when, in future years, with noble aim,
The world shall build its pantheon of fame,
Its sculptors on the architrave shall fix,
Myrtle-and-ivy-wreathed, the name of Dix.

According nations greet, with glad acclaim,
A worthy scion of De Gournay's name.
She, whose gay youth was nursed in bowers of ease
Where wealth outspread its store of luxuries,
Went from the splendor of ancestral halls,
With heart obedient to her Master's calls,
To build a temple where the felon dwells,
And stand the anointed priest of Newgate's cells.
There, unto hearts by crime and sin defiled,
She taught the precepts given by Mary's child,

And o'er dark souls, in spite of bolt and bar,
Poured the mild light of Bethlehem's Morning Star.

A mournful wail, of poignant anguish born,
Burthens the borders of the Golden Horn ;
Louder anon and louder still it swells,
From Balaklava to the Dardanelles ;
But there, where Crimean soldiers writhe in pain,
With torturing wounds, hot brow and maddened brain,
The parching tongue and fever-reddened lip
From gentle hands receive the grateful sip ;
On burning brows refreshing pledgets lie,
And soothing cares suppress the soldier's sigh ;
Light on his wounds the precious balm is laid
Whence healing springs and pangs of pain are staid ;
Soft on his ear the voice of pity falls,
And grateful love his manly heart enthral.
Admiring realms rejoice, with quickened sense
Of self-denial and beneficence ;
And court, camp, people long shall tell the tale
Of Mercy's dearest child, the British Nightingale.

Hark ! as I write, the fiery cannon's mouth
Belches its thunders through the stormy South.
Shot after shot, with murderous errand, falls,
Like Etna's rocks, on Sumter's stubborn walls ;
And booming mortars, with a startling knell,
Swing through the air the fratricidal shell.
O moment of unutterable woe !
The Past's accuser and the Future's foe.
"What now," ambitious youth, I hear thee ask,
With earnest heart, "is righteous duty's task ?"
The Past's great spirits, from their spirit home,
Hastening to give thee answer, thronging come.

"Bright as the sun," they say, "thy guides appear ;
 Thy lights are lustrous and thy course is clear.
 By every brother by a brother slain,
 Since faithful Abel fell by faithless Cain ;
 By patriot millions who, against the foe,
 Stood by their country in her hour of woe ;
 By every good man who, in error's night,
 Stood boldly up and battled for the right ;
 By bursting hearts, a patriotic band,
 Crushed where Rebellion rollicks o'er the land ;
 By Freedom's hopes to see her flag unfurled
 On every mountain round the rolling world ;
 By holy Truth upon her bosom smote,
 And shrinking from the dagger at her throat,—
 Let not a tyrant band, in traitorous raid,
 Tear the GREAT CHARTER by THE FATHERS made !
 Come what *may* come, in strife or peril cast,
 STAND BY THE UNION,—faithful to the last !"

Hushed are the spirit-voices : Justice, Right,
 Freedom and Truth still struggle against Might.
 And thou, brave soldier in their sacred cause,
 Whose heart from Heaven its inspiration draws,
 Past, present, future all demand of thee
 The toil and patience of a devotee,
 Submission meek,—though heavy be the rod,—
 Hope for mankind and changeless faith in God.

