

The vision of immortality - E. P. Weston

I who essayed to sing, in earlier days
The Phanopsis and the Hymn to Death,
Wake now the Hymn to Immortality!

Yet once again, oh! man, come forth and view
The haunts of nature; walk the waving fields,
Enter the silent groves, or pierce again
The depths of the untrodden wilderness,
And she shall teach thee.

Thou hast learned before
One lesson - and her Hymn of Death hath fallen
With melancholy sweetness on thine ear,
Yet she shall tell thee with a myriad tongue
That life is there - life in uncounted forms -
Stealing in silence through the hidden roots,
In every branch that swings - in the green leaves
And waving grain, and the gay summer flowers
That gladden the beholder.

Listen now
And she shall teach thee that the dead have slept
But to awaken in more glorious forms -
And that the mystery of the seeds decay
Is but the promise of the coming life.
Each towering oak that lifts its ^{living} head
To the broad sunlight, in eternal strength,
Glories to tell thee that the acorn died.

The flowers that spring above their last year's grave
 Are eloquent with the voice of life and hope —
 And the green trees clap their rejoicing hands,
 Waving in triumph, o'er the earth's decay!
 Yet not alone shall flower and forest raise
 The voice of triumph and the hymn of life.
 The insect-brood is there:— each faintest wing
 That flutters in the sunshine, broke but now
 From the close cerements of a worm's own shroud,
 Is telling, as it flies, how life may spring
 In its glad beauty from the gloom of death
 Where the crushed mould beneath the sunken foot
 Seems but the sepulchre of old decay;
 Turn thou a keener glance, and thou shalt find
 The gathered myriads of a mimic world.
 The breath of evening and the sultry morn
 Bears on its wing a cloud of witnesses
 That earth from her unnumbered caves of death
 Sends forth a mightier tide of forming life;
 Raise then the Hymn to Immortality!
 The broad green prairies and the wilderness,
 And the old cities where the dead have slept
 Age upon age, a thousand graves in one,
 Shall yet be crowded with the living forms
 Of myriads, waking from the silent dust.
 Kings that lay down in state and earth's poor slaves,
 Resting together in one fond embrace,

The white-haired patriarch and the tender babe,
 Grown old together in the flight of years;
 They of immortal fame and they whose praise
 Was never sounded in the ears of men, —
 Archon and priest, and the poor common crowd, —
 All the vast concourse in the halls of death, —
 Shall waken from the dreams of silent years
 To hail the dawn of the immortal day.
 Aye, learn the lesson! Though the worm shall be
 Thy brother in the mystery of death,
 And all shall pass, humble and proud and gay
 Together, to earth's mighty charnel-house,
 Yet the immortal is thy heritage!
 The grave shall gather thee: yet thou shalt come,
 Beggar or prince, not as thou wentest forth,
 In rags or purple, but arrayed as those
 Whose mortal puts on immortality!
 Then mourn not when thou markest the decay
 Of nature, and her solemn hymn of death
 Steals with a note of sadness to thy heart.
 That other voice, with its rejoicing tones,
 Breaks from the world with every bursting flower.
 "O grave! thy victory!" And thou, oh man!
 Burdened with sorrows at the woes which crowd
 Thy narrow heritage, lift up thy head
 In the strong hope of the undying life,
 And shout the Hymn to Immortality.

The dear departed that have passed away
 To the still house of death, leaving thine own,
 The gray haired sire that died in blessing thee,
 Mother, or sweet-lipped babe, or she who gave
 Thy home the light and bloom of Paradise,
 They shall be thine again, when thou shalt pass
 At God's appointment, through the shadowy vale,
 To reach the sunlight of the Immortal Hills.
 And thou that gloriest to lie down with kings,
 Thine uncrowned head no lowlier than theirs,
 Seek thou the loftier glory to be known
 A king and priest to God! - when thou shalt pass
 Forth from these silent-halls to take thy place
 With patriarchs and prophets and the best
 Gone up from every land to people heaven,
 So live, that when the mighty caravan,
 Which halts one night-time in the vale of death,
 Shall strike its white tents for the morning march,
 Thou shalt mount onward to the Eternal Hills,
 Thy foot unweary'd, and thy strength renewed
 Like the strong eagle's for the upward flight.

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