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THRENODY (1846)

THE South-wind brings
Life, sunshine and desire,
And on every mount and meadow
Breathes aromatic fire;
But over the dead he has no power,
The lost, the lost, he cannot restore;
And, looking over the hills, I mourn
The darling who shall not return.

I see my empty house,
I see my trees repair their boughs;
And he, the wondrous child,
Whose silver warble wild
Outvalued every pulsing sound
Within the air's cerulean round,—
The hyacinthine boy, for whom
Morn well might break and April bloom,
The gracious boy, who did adorn
The world whereinto he was born,
And by his countenance repay
The favor of the loving Day,—
Has disappeared from the Day's eye;
Far and wide she cannot find him;
My hopes pursue, they cannot bind him.

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Returned this day, the South-wind searches,
And finds young pines and budding birches;
But finds not the budding man;
Nature, who lost, cannot remake him;
Fate let him fall, Fate can't retake him;
Nature, Fate, men, him seek in vain.

And whither now, my truant wise and sweet,
O, whither tend thy feet?
I had the right, few days ago,
Thy steps to watch, thy place to know:
How have I forfeited the right?
Hast thou forgot me in a new delight?
I hearken for thy household cheer,
O eloquent child!
Whose voice, an equal messenger,
Conveyed thy meaning mild.
What though the pains and joys
Whereof it spoke were toys
Fitting his age and ken,
Yet fairest dames and bearded men,
Who heard the sweet request,
So gentle, wise and grave,
Bended with joy to his behest
And let the world's affairs go by,
A while to share his cordial game,
Or mend his wicker wagon-frame,
Still plotting how their hungry ear
That winsome voice again might hear;

For his lips could well pronounce
Words that were persuasions.'

Gentlest guardians marked serene
His early hope, his liberal mien;
Took counsel from his guiding eyes
To make this wisdom earthly wise.
Ah, vainly do these eyes recall
The school-march, each day's festival,
When every morn my bosom glowed
To watch the convoy on the road;
The babe in willow wagon closed,
With rolling eyes and face composed;
With children forward and behind,
Like Cupids studiously inclined;
And he the chieftain paced beside,
The centre of the troop allied,
With sunny face of sweet repose,
To guard the babe from fancied foes.
The little captain innocent
Took the eye with him as he went;
Each village senior paused to scan
And speak the lovely caravan.
From the window I look out
To mark thy beautiful parade,
Stately marching in cap and coat
To some tune by fairies played;—
A music heard by thee alone
To works as noble led thee on.

Now Love and Pride, alas! in vain,
Up and down their glances strain.
The painted sled stands where it stood;
The kennel by the corded wood;
His gathered sticks to stanch the wall
Of the snow-tower, when snow should fall;
The ominous hole he dug in the sand,
And childhood's castles built or planned;
His daily haunts I well discern,—
The poultry-yard, the shed, the barn,—
And every inch of garden ground
Paced by the blessed feet around,
From the roadside to the brook
Whereinto he loved to look.
Step the meek fowls where erst they ranged;
The wintry garden lies unchanged;
The brook into the stream runs on;
But the deep-eyed boy is gone.'

On that shaded day,
Dark with more clouds than tempests are,
When thou didst yield thy innocent breath
In birdlike heavings unto death,
Night came, and Nature had not thee;
I said, 'We are mates in misery.'
The morrow dawned with needless glow;
Each snowbird chirped, each fowl must crow;
Each tramper started; but the feet
Of the most beautiful and sweet

Of human youth had left the hill
 And garden, — they were bound and still.
 There's not a sparrow or a wren,
 There's not a blade of autumn grain,
 Which the four seasons do not tend
 And tides of life and increase lend;
 And every chick of every bird,
 And weed and rock-moss is preferred.
 O ostrich-like forgetfulness!
 O loss of larger in the less!
 Was there no star that could be sent,
 No watcher in the firmament,
 No angel from the countless host
 That loiters round the crystal coast,
 Could stoop to heal that only child,
 Nature's sweet marvel undefiled,
 And keep the blossom of the earth,
 Which all her harvests were not worth?
 Not mine, — I never called thee mine,
 But Nature's heir, — if I repine,
 And seeing rashly torn and moved
 Not what I made, but what I loved,
 Grow early old with grief that thou
 Must to the wastes of Nature go, —
 'T is because a general hope
 Was quenched, and all must doubt and grope.
 For flattering planets seemed to say
 This child should ill of ages stay,
 By wondrous tongue, and guided pen,

Bring the frown Muses back to men.
 Perchance not he but Nature ailed,
 The world and not the infant failed.
 It was not ripe yet to sustain
 A genius of so fine a strain,
 Who gazed upon the sun and moon
 As if he came unto his own,
 And, pregnant with his grander thought,
 Brought the old order into doubt.
 His beauty once their beauty tried;
 They could not feed him, and he died,
 And wandered backward as in scorn,
 To wait an æon to be born.
 Ill day which made this beauty waste,
 Plight broken, this high face defaced!
 Some went and came about the dead;
 And some in books of solace read;
 Some to their friends the tidings say;
 Some went to write, some went to pray;
 One tarried here, there hurried one;
 But their heart abode with none.
 Covetous death bereaved us all,
 To aggrandize one funeral.
 The eager fate which carried thee
 Took the largest part of me:
 For this losing is true dying;
 This is lordly man's down-lying,
 This his slow but sure reclining,
 Star by star his world resigning.

O child of paradise,
 Boy who made dear his father's home,
 In whose deep eyes
 Men read the welfare of the times to come,
 I am too much bereft.
 The world dishonored thou hast left.
 O truth's and nature's costly lie!
 O trusted broken prophecy!
 O richest fortune sourly crossed!
 (Born for the future, to the future lost!

The deep Heart answered, 'Weapest thou?
 Worthier cause for passion wild
 If I had not taken the child.
 And deemest thou as those who pore,
 With aged eyes, short way before, —
 Think'st Beauty vanished from the coast
 Of matter, and thy darling lost?
 Taught he not thee — the man of eld,
 Whose eyes within his eyes beheld
 Heaven's numerous hierarchy span
 The mystic gulf from God to man?
 To be alone wilt thou begin
 When worlds of lovers hem thee in?
 To-morrow, when the masks shall fall
 That dizen Nature's carnival,
 The pure shall see by their own will,
 Which overflowing Love shall fill,

'T is not within the force of fate
 The fate-conjoined to separate.
 But thou, my votary, weapest thou?
 I gave thee sight — where is it now?
 I taught thy heart beyond the reach
 Of ritual, bible, or of speech;
 Wrote in thy mind's transparent table,
 As far as the incommunicable;
 Taught thee each private sign to raise
 Lit by the supersolar blaze.
 Past utterance, and past belief,
 And past the blasphemy of grief,
 The mysteries of Nature's heart;
 And though no Muse can these impart,
 Throb thine with Nature's throbbing breast,
 And all is clear from east to west.

'I came to thee as to a friend;
 Dearest, to thee I did not send
 Tutors, but a joyful eye,
 Innocence that matched the sky,
 Lovely locks, a form of wonder,
 Laughter rich as woodland thunder,
 That thou might'st entertain apart
 The richest flowering of all art:
 And, as the great all-loving Day
 Through smallest chambers takes its way,
 That thou might'st break thy daily bread

With prophet, savior and head ;
 That thou might'st cherish for thine own
 The riches of sweet Mary's Son,
 Boy-Rabbi, Israel's paragon.
 And thoughtest thou such guest
 Would in thy hall take up his rest ?
 Would rushing life forget her laws,
 Fate's glowing revolution pause ?
 High omens ask diviner guess ;
 Not to be coned to tediousness
 And know my higher gifts unbind
 The zone that girds the incarnate mind.
 When the scanty shores are full
 With Thought's perilous, whirling pool ;
 When frail Nature can no more,
 Then the Spirit strikes the hour :
 My servant Death, with solving rite,
 Pours finite into infinite.
 Wilt thou freeze love's tidal flow,
 Whose streams through Nature circling go ?
 Nail the wild star to its track
 On the half-climbed zodiac ?
 Light is light which radiates,
 Blood is blood which circulates,
 Life is life which generates,
 And many-seeming life is one, —
 Wilt thou transfix and make it none ?
 Its onward force too starkly pent
 In figure, bone and lineament ?

Wilt thou, uncalled, interrogate,
 Talker ! the unreplying Fate ?
 Nor see the genius of the whole
 Ascendant in the private soul,
 Beckon it when to go and come,
 Self-announced its hour of doom ?
 Fair the soul's recess and shrine,
 Magic-built to last a season ;
 Masterpiece of love benign,
 Fairer that expansive reason
 Whose omen 't is, and sign.
 Wilt thou not ope thy heart to know
 What rainbows teach, and sunsets show ?
 Verdict which accumulates
 From lengthening scroll of human fates,
 Voice of earth to earth returned,
 Prayers of saints that inly burned, —
 Saying, *What is excellent,*
As God lives, is permanent ;
Hearts are dust, hearts' loves remain ;
Heart's love will meet thee again.
 Revere the Maker ; fetch thine eye
 Up to his style, and manners of the sky.
 Not of adamant and gold
 Built he heaven stark and cold ;
 No, but a nest of bending reeds,
 Flowering grass and scented weeds ;
 Or like a traveller's fleeing tent,
 Or bow above the tempest bent ;

Built of tears and sacred flames,
And virtue reaching to its aims;
Built of furtherance and pursuing,
Not of spent deeds, but of doing.
Silent rushes the swift Lord
Through ruined systems still restored,
Broadsowing, bleak and void to bless,
Plants with worlds the wilderness; †
Waters with tears of ancient sorrow
Apples of Eden ripe to-morrow.
House and tenant go to ground,
Lost in God, in Godhead found. †