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THE FREEMAN
AND OTHER POEMS

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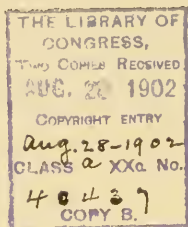
BY
ELLEN GLASGOW



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THE DE VINNE PRESS

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TO
LOUISE COLLIER WILLCOX

CONTENTS

- The Freeman, 13
A Creed, 15
The Traveller, 16
A Prayer, 18
A Battle Cry, 19
Fame, 20
Resurrection, 21
The Shadow, 22
Justice, 25
Drinking-song, 26
Coward Memory, 28
The Sage, 29
War, 31
The True Comedian, 32
Aridity, 33
Reunion, 34
Love has Passed Along the Way, 35
A Suppliant, 36
The Mountain Pine, 38
The Master Hand, 39

- To a Strange God, 40
The Vision of Hell, 44
Death-in-Life, 47
To My Dog, 50
England's Greatness, 51
Mary, 53
The Hunter, 55

THE FREEMAN
AND OTHER POEMS

THE FREEMAN

"Hope is a slave, Despair is a freeman"

A vagabond between the East and West,
Careless I greet the scourging and the rod ;
I fear no terror any man may bring,
Nor any god.

The clankless chains that bound me I have rent,
No more a slave to hope I cringe or cry ;
Captives to Fate, men rear their prison walls,
But free am I.

I tread where arrows press upon my path,
I smile to see the danger and the dart ;
My breast is bared to meet the slings of hate,
But not my heart.

I face the thunder and I face the rain,
I lift my head, defiance far I fling —
My feet are set, I face the autumn as
I face the spring.

Around me, on the battle-fields of life,
I see men fight and fail and crouch in prayer ;
Aloft I stand unfettered, for I know
The freedom of despair.

A CREED

In fellowship of living things,
 In kindred claims of Man and Beast,
In common courtesy that brings
 Help from the greater to the least,
In love that all life shall receive,
 Lord, I believe.

In peace, earth's passion far above,
 In pity, measured not nor priced,
In all souls luminous with love,
 Alike in Buddha and in Christ,
In any rights that wrongs retrieve,
 Lord, I believe.

In truth that falsehood cannot span,
 In the majestic march of Laws,
That weed and flower and worm and man
 Result from One Supernal Cause,
In doubts that dare and faiths that cleave,
 Lord, I believe.

THE TRAVELLER

The storm clouds swirl against the moon,
The hawk flies black across the snow,
My steed shies at the shifting gloom,
The darkness thickens where I go.
But I ride on when stars are flown,
As one who journeys to his own.

From hamlets draped in frozen white
The flames of ruddy windows fall,
Above the lashing of the night
I hear the cheerful voices call.
The homely hearths are lit in vain
For one who rides across the plain.

The sharp blasts beat upon my breast,
The wolves bay loud behind my back ;
I greet their howls with jest for jest,
And laugh to hear them on my track.
Across the night with terrors sown,
I spur and journey to my own.

From open graves on either side,
 Wan fingers rise and beckon me ;
Old wrongs, uprooted as I ride,
 Cry out that right is yet to be.
 Dead faces throng upon the way,
 Dead voices speak and bid me stay.

The night hawk flies across the snow —
 My way leads past the furthest hill ;
Though beggared to the tryst I go,
 Death waits to woo me to her will.
 I press my spurs, I ride alone,
 I laugh and journey to my own.

A PRAYER

Grant me but courage, Lord!

I ask not that Thou smooth the appointed
path ;

I ask not any joys the years afford,

I ask not even Thine averted wrath.

Let me but learn to smile—

Let me face lightly any blow that falls ;

Bear bravely with my bondage all the while,

And hug my freedom within prison walls.

Thus when the end draws near,

With lifted head let me the potion quaff,

And so — as one who never learned to fear —

Pass on to meet Thy judgment with a laugh.

A BATTLE CRY

I have made my stand at last
Where the thickest foes are found ;
I shall fall as I have fought,
Yielding inch by inch the ground.

I have no surrender given,
I have measured hate with hate ;
I have never stooped to call,
“Quarter !” to victorious Fate.

When sore pressed I have not sought
Aid from comrades in the field ;
I have never turned to find
Succour from a friendly shield.

This shall be my guerdon gained,
When the hounds of war are passed :
“Peace to him who fought alone,
And who fell alone at last.”

FAME

In life he lived among them and they cast
Him stones for bread.

He that was mightiest of them all had not
Whereon to lay his head.

In death, where flaming poppies fired the dust,
They brought a laurel wreath :

Honour to ashes on the coffin lid !
Fame to the skull beneath !

RESURRECTION

The trumpet of the Judgment shook the night,
Dust quickened and was flesh ; grave-clothes
were shed ;
With moaning of strong travail and lament,
The sea gave up her dead.

One, rising from a rotting tomb, beheld
The heavens unfold beneath Jehovah's
breath.
“ Great God ! ” he cried, “ with Thine eternity,
Couldst Thou not leave me Death ? ”

THE SHADOW

It has followed me for years,
 I have seen It slim and tall ;
 When the day its distance wears,
 It has lengthened on the wall ;
 Slanting black
 On my track,
 I have felt Its presence fall.

Oft I flee at break of day,
 But It races as I ride ;
 Oft I seek to slink away,
 But It slouches at my side ;
 Or It steals
 On my heels,
 As the bridegroom to the bride.

As I roam along the track
 Of the vagrants o'er the leas ;
 Oft I mark one glancing back,
 And I ask him what he sees —
 But they laugh
 As they chaff,
 “ 'Tis his shadow that he flees ! ”

I shall ask of one I love,
 Pointing to Its passage fleet,
 As along the ways we rove,
 What It is that haunts the street.
 She will say,
 “ Nay, nay, nay,
 ’Tis the shadow at your feet ! ”

I shall wink and see the trick —
 Do they dream that I am blind?
 I have but to turn, and quick,
 On my pathway I shall find
 That It wags,
 And It lags,
 But It follows close behind.

All the night It hides Its shape
 In the dusk beside my bed ;
 If my vigil I escape,
 If I once but turn my head,
 While I sleep,
 It will creep,
 Till I lie beneath It dead.

And the end at last shall come,
Weariness will close my eyes,
I shall fall before It dumb,
When unto my heart It flies.
It will gloat
O'er my throat,
As Its length upon me lies.

JUSTICE

They cursed her with the curse of God,
They smote her with His awful Name :
With brands of fire they branded her,
And brands of shame.

She fell beside the road and lay
Silent within the sounding place ;
A dog turned from the passers-by
And licked her face.

Their anger melted into tears ;
They wept for her they had disowned —
They bore her to her grave, and then
The dog they stoned.

DRINKING-SONG

Fill the bowl and praise the wine,
Give good measure, rise and quaff—
(Who dares say the dawn-stars shine?
Brothers, shame him by a laugh.)
What knows he of soon or late,
Who has been the fool of Fate?

Kiss the blue eyes and the brown,
Cheeks that pale and cheeks that glow,
Kiss the smile and kiss the frown,
Lightly love and lightly go.
He knows neither love nor hate,
Who has been the fool of Fate.

Clasp a stranger by the hand,
Call it friendship for a day ;
When alone you see him stand,
Swear you only spoke in play.
What cares he for friend or mate,
Who has been the fool of Fate?

Gather laurels that decay,
 Wear them withered on your breast ;
 Ere they crumble in a day ;
 Tread them under foot in jest.
 What knows he of honour's weight,
 Who has been the fool of Fate ?

Take the best that Life can give,
 Drink, but do not pass it on.
 Live to drink and drink to live —
 (Who spoke of a dream foregone ?)
 He has seen all dreams abate,
 Who has been the fool of Fate.

Dreams ! What dreams of heaven or hell ?
 Gods that bless and Gods that spurn ?
 What if lighter blows befell,
 Does he bide till death to burn ?
 What cares he for hells that wait,
 Who has been the fool of Fate ?

COWARD MEMORY

A street half flecked with shade and sun,
A last year's leaf along it blown,
A gray wall where green lichens run ;
Like water falling on dry stone,
A robin's ripe notes dropping one by one.

Sad sun and shade and sadness over all
The distance blended into solemn hues,
On the warm air suspended as a pall
The sweetness dying violets diffuse,
While from a single tree the ashen elm flowers
fall.

At the street's sudden end a shining square,
The sunny threshold of an open door,
Thick with the dust of an untrodden stair
That leads beyond me to the upper floor —
Then memory halts — it dares not enter there.

THE SAGE

I do not see the lightning's flash,
Nor hear the thunder's din ;
What though the storms about me crash —
My refuge is within.

Though every evil stands confest,
And every pleasure flies,
I bear a world within my breast,
A light within my eyes.

Of every fount from out the earth
I, too, have drunk my fill,
And all the joys I count of worth
Become my own at will.

Though I have never loved a maid,
Love's heights I may ascend ;
Though no friend's hand my own has stayed,
I still can pledge my friend.

From good and bad alike I draw
Security of soul ;
Naught happens but becomes a law
To strengthen my control.

No passions ever rock my heart,
I know not fear nor hate;
A peace in which all worlds have part
Encompasses my fate.

I dread not any form of wrath,
I hate not any sin;
Whatever grief assail my path,
It cannot come within.

For there secure my spirit reigns,
Serene amid unrest,
Since all that Life or Death contains
I hold within my breast.

WAR

Ripples of ribbons borne on high,
Bloodstains upon a brazen sky;
From cannon belching on the plain,
Fire that by fire is fought again.
A flash where steel by steel is met;
A fume of smoke and blood and sweat.
Sharp from the smeared and trodden gorse
The death-cry of a wounded horse.

Dust of a plain ground into red
By armies of majestic dead.
Gaunt shadows on the changeless sky,
A flock of vultures swarming nigh.
'Mid ashes where a hearth has stood,
Children that cry aloud for food.
Where green the peaceful highways run,
A woman ravished in the sun.
And far across the reeking sod
A Nation sounding thanks to God.

THE TRUE COMEDIAN

What if the road is rough, the dart
Of mischance levelled at thy breast?
Beyond the shudder and the smart,
Canst thou not see the jest?

What if the arrow in the sling
Was tipped with poison ere it flew?
Since thine the hurt and thine the sting,
Be thine the laughter too.

Canst thou not read the wit that lies
Beneath the bold burlesque of Fate?
Or art thou sick of parodies
Who playest with love and hate?

What! take the stage again and gasp
The comedy of self-control?—
Nay, better stand aside to grasp
The humour of the whole.

ARIDITY

She looked unto the east and saw
A pallid stretch of sickly sea;
Unto the west she turned and met
The land's aridity.

A bloodless wave of rising sun
Was flung across her open door;
It smote her like a slimy thing,
And crawled along the floor.

Her hands took up the weary round—
A colourless and common part.
Her stillborn hopes were buried in
The desert of her heart.

REUNION

Ah, hold me fast! What of the day?
I care not if the sun be dead,
Nor if the stars be gold or gray.
Nay, though the rising moon be red,
Our dawn is here, our night is past,
The world may fade—but hold me fast!

Ah, hold me fast! What of the years?
I care not if our youth be fled,
Nor that our drink be blood and tears,
And bitterness our daily bread.
Nay, though the flames of hell be cast—
They light thy face—ah, hold me fast!

LOVE HAS PASSED ALONG
THE WAY

Love has passed along the way —

Lo! the doors have opened wide,

Hands have beckoned him to stay,

Hearts have fluttered to his side.

Let him loiter as he may,

Love has passed along the way.

Ah, what means the vacant room?

Ashes where the flames were red?

What the shudder in the gloom?

What the corpse upon the bed?

Break my heart as best it may,

Love has passed along the way.

A SUPPLIANT

Lo, these many years I lay,
 As a suppliant to my God,
 Bore the Cross upon my breast,
 Bowed my head beneath the rod.

I have kept my temple fair,
 I have watched it day and night,
 Lo, my cruse of oil is full,
 And my lamp of faith is bright !

I have knelt these many years,
 Lord, and I am kneeling still ;
 On my spirit send Thy grace,
 On my body work Thy will.

For at last I shall arise,
 I shall stand before Thy throne,
 Saying : “ Lord, the night is past,
 And I come to claim my own ! ”

Saying : “ I have served Thee well,
 Great my fathers’ God and mine,
 I have kept Thy temple white,
 And the lamp of faith is Thine.

“ I have knelt my whole years long,
 Now I must arise and stand ;
 There is one among the lost
 Who shall clasp me by the hand.

“ All the prayers that I have prayed
 Were as naught could this not be,
 That wherever he has lain
 He might stretch his hand to me.

“ All the years that I have bowed,
 Kneeling there, I knelt in vain,
 Could I not in heaven or hell
 Look and see his face again.

“ I shall hold his hand in mine
 When I make my prayer to Thee.
 ‘ Lord, as one and not as twain,
 Deal with him and deal with me.’ ”

THE MOUNTAIN PINE

Around me in the void of night there moves
The struggle of uncreate worlds to be,
The stars are not the stars, I hear afar
The planets' minstrelsy.

For me there is no time, no space, no depth,
No love, no hate, no passionate despair.
I face my destiny— to what has been
And will be, I am heir.

The vulture sails below me, and across
Immeasurable spaces tempests roll.
Decay cannot unmake me, I am part
Of an eternal whole.

THE MASTER HAND

WRITTEN BEFORE ANDREA DEL SARTO'S
PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF

The master hand lifted the brush, and lo,
Colour and light took form at his command,
When Death struck down with an immortal blow
The master hand.

A heap of clay becomes a heap of sand,
The mad, tumultuous centuries bestow
Laurel and dust to sweeten Death's demand.

Dust chills desire, and laurel lieth low,
But art's eternal hills triumphant stand —
Whose summits feel in one long afterglow
The master hand.

TO A STRANGE GOD

IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM, AUGUST, 1896

All day within the clanging town
 There sounds the press of weary feet ;
All night do men and beasts go down
 Into the struggle of the street.
 From sun to sun, from round to round,
 The reek of sweat pollutes the ground.

The clamour of discordant days
 Reaches the desecrated room
Where faces wan from alien ways
 Shine through the daylight to the gloom,
 Where, thick with dust and shadows sown,
 A heathen god lies overthrown.

His altar is a case of glass ;
 Strange laughter flies into his face ;
From side to side before him pass
 Rude voices of a younger race.
 Around him, stripped of gold and flowers,
 Lie gods of other creeds than ours.

He looks before him and he harks
 The heathen scoffing at his shame;
 Like arrows in the air he marks
 The lips that trifle with his name;
 And he whose worship they disown,
 He smiles on them—a God of stone.

He smiles upon them, on his face
 No graven majesty beguiles.
 They mock his Godhead—from his place
 He bends unto them and he smiles.
 His favours as a garnered sheaf
 Know not belief from unbelief.

He sits in silence, he who saw
 The hoary homage of the East—
 Before whose sovereignty of Law
 There bowed, adoring, man and beast.
 He sits in silence, and a God
 He bows himself beneath the rod.

O God of stone! to whom the years
 Rustle like leaves that drop away,
 The seal upon thy forehead bears
 The impress of a larger day.
 No doubt that damns may bid to cease
 Thine old insuperable peace.

When, blind with carnage that inflames,
 We pander to the pangs of lust,
 Our orgies falter, and the shames
 That hold us dwindle into dust.
 From gods of flesh that we have known
 We turn to thee—a God of stone.

Our right hath been the right of steel,
 Our litany the battle-cry;
 Bound and abased beneath our heel,
 Thy chosen people prostrate lie.
 And where thy children came in prayer,
 Our proud hosannas rend the air.

Though we have warred with doubts for deeds,
Our fortresses and faiths decay,
Our altars rot with canker creeds—
Thou art forever and to-day;
No sacrifice averts thy frown,
No worship brings thy blessing down.

Far as the East is from the West,
Thy graven smile this curse hath cast—
Thy vengeance is our own unrest,
Our future is a people's past.
The blows that on thine image fall
Are blows that smite the God of all.

THE VISION OF HELL

I died and passed from earth and went my way,
I trod the starry gulf from sphere to sphere,
I felt the breath of God upon my brow
As I drew near.

I paused above Infinity's abyss,
Scanning the upward path my spirit trod;
A million silver planets spun between
The earth and God.

Yet, scarlet on the ether's inky waves,
The crooked orbit of the earth was cast;
Dark silhouettes against that solemn light,
Its countless creatures passed.

I saw those mortal shadows stumble on,
Rising in anguish, passing in a breath,
Blind atoms, treading their predestined doom
From birth to death.

Upon the smiling mask that Nature wears,
Was writ the blasphemy of human wills;
I saw man's bloody footprint on the shore,
His hand upon the hills.

I heard his laughter as he passed along,
 I heard the mortal boast immortal breath;
 I saw the earth in tragic irony,
 Plunge to its death.

Then low into Jehovah's listening ear
 I spoke: "O God of Gods, the life you gave
 Is but a lying travesty, whose lie
 Ends in the grave.

"Look on the lives that you have made and
 marred,
 Filing gray phantoms in a hapless train:
 The stronger finds your heaven; the weaker
 finds
 An endless pain.

"O God, within the hollow of whose hand
 A million worlds are tossed to win or lose,
 You choose the stronger for salvation, but
 The damned I choose.

"I take my stand upon the weaker side,
 I grasp the sinner's hand, I share his fate;
 The hell of those who failed, I choose, or those
 Who win too late."

God smiled: across the inky ether way,
A flash that lighted worlds supernal fell.
“It is the damned you look upon,” God said:
“The earth is hell.”

DEATH-IN-LIFE

When the blasts beat loud and the tempests shriek,
 And the winds are smote as the chords of a lyre,
 I curtain the cold where the corners leak,
 Tossing the logs till the flames leap higher,
 As I sit on the hearth while the rafters creak,
 Feeding the fangs of the hungry fire.
*(Hark! 't is a child on the howling plain!
 Nay, the fir-tree's tap on the window pane.)*

Do you hear her knock? Are her feet on the
 stones?
 She may call in vain, for the storm is loud,
 And her speech is the rattle of rigid bones.
 Perchance she is lost where the thickets crowd ;
 It is far from the church where a vault she owns,
 And for cover she has but a crumbling shroud.
*('T is a mad soul clutched by a demon—hist!
 Nay, nay, but the wail of the wind, I wist.)*

She enters the door with a blast of cold—

She enters to me and to my embrace ;
Her fingers are freed from their fleshly fold,
The veil is rent from her ashen face.

To her sheet there lingers a scent of mould,
Where the wily worms have woven a trace.

*(Hark! is it Love on the writhing rack!
Nay, nay, but the wolves on a shepherd's track.)*

She has taken her seat at my board of pine,
We have poured the water and broken the
bread,

I have pledged her health in the blood-red wine,
She has bowed to me with her spectral head.

I am hers forever, as she is mine,
I shall lie with her in her nuptial bed.

*(Hark! 't is a stroke on a coffin nail!
Nay, the beat of your heart as the pulses fail.)*

From her fleshless lips I have felt her kiss
 (The room is small, but the world is wide).
What matter the honours that I shall miss,
 When I find her lying against my side?
From the reefs of Fate God has spared me this—
 The love that is long and the breast of a bride.
 (*For bone of my bone I have chosen Death!*
 “*Nay, nay—ah, love, I am Life,*” she saith.)

TO MY DOG

O tried and true ! together we have passed
Life's whirlpool, and have felt Fate's heaviest
blow —

Shall I, then, stand the traitor at the last?
Or prize a heaven that you could never know?

ENGLAND'S GREATNESS

AT THE GRAVE OF CHARLES DARWIN, 1896

England's greatness! not the sword avenging,
Not the nations bowed beneath her heel;
Not the cross of blood that to her kingdoms
Sets its seal.

These are ghosts of old barbaric splendours,
Rotting where Imperial Rome lies low;
Things that thrill the heart like tales of slaughter
Long ago.

Far beyond them is her glory shining,
Brighter than the sword within the sun;
It shall last when her superb oppressions
All are done.

Other armies has she as victorious,
Slayers these whose hands are clean of blood,
Soldiers whose sublime and steadfast phalanx
Wrong withstood.

England's greatness : this abides unchanging,
 Won by arms that sound no loud refrains :
When all wars and warriors shall have perished,
 Truth remains.

MARY

Daughter of dreams and visions,
 Flushed by the world's desire,
Empress of priests' decisions,
 Priestess of altar fire —
Treading a march immortal,
 As the Cross to the sunrise swings,
Passing the inmost portal,
 Over the crowns of kings —
By the worship with which we woo thee,
 By the hymns that our hearts repeat,
By the flames that have burned unto thee,
 By the prayers that have warmed thy feet,
By the moons that have risen below thee,
 By the stars that have set on thy brow,
By the saints that have suffered to know thee,
 We hail thee "Blessed," now.

Mother of all the Sorrows,
 Pierced by the world's despair,
 Wearing a veil that borrows
 Gloom from our earthly air ;
 Broken by ceaseless sighing,
 Ravaged by endless tears,
 Bearing thy pangs undying
 Into the dying years —
By the sweat on thy brow that paleth,
 By the Cross where thy heart has lain,
By memory's pang that nailleth
 Thy heart to the wood again,
By the passions that rise below thee,
 By the sorrows enthroned on thy brow,
By the hearts that have broken to know thee,
 We hail thee "Blessed," now.

THE HUNTER

I sit within the sodden gloom,
Amid the dead that wall the room ;
Through galleries damp that reek decay,
My stumbling feet have groped the way.
Mine eyes that shudder at the light
Have read the secrets of the night —
From skeletons with toothless jaws
I wring the utterance of the laws.

Where foul the spider makes his lair,
I con the lesson of his care.
In threads too fine for mortal eyes
I read Eternal Mysteries.
In graves of mouldered love and lust,
I search for secrets of the dust ;
Through palls with time and ashes spread,
I plunge my hands among the dead.

Then forth into the light of day,
I fare again upon my way.
A grain of sand, a blade of grass,
Smite me to silence as I pass.
In living men and worms I trace
Old allegories of the race ;
In weeds put forth from out the sod
I read the Scriptures of my God.

Unto the hills I mount and see
The vultures of the mountains flee ;
My failing eyes I backward cast
To glean the harvest of the past.
My tottering feet have paused alone
Before the barriers of the known —
For onward still, through wrong and ruth,
I fare—a hunter of the Truth.

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