

And if, when a glowing thought comes into your brain, quick and sudden, you could tell it over as to a second self, to that sweet creature, who is not away because she loves to be there; and if you could watch the thought catching that girlish mind, illumining that fair brow, sparkling in those pleasantest of eyes—how far better than to feel it slumbering, and going out, heavy, lifeless and dead, in your own selfish fancy. And if a generous emotion steals over you, coming you know not whither, would there not be a richer charm in lavishing it in caress, or endearing word, upon that fondest and most dear one, than in patting your glossy-coated dog or sinking lonely to smiling slumbers?

How would not benevolence ripen with such monitor to task it! How would not selfishness grow faint and dull, leaning over to that second self, which is the loved one! How would not guile shiver and grow weak before that girl-brow and eye of innocence! How would not all that boyhood prized of enthusiasm, and quick blood, and life, renew itself in such presence!

The fire was getting hotter, and I moved into the middle of the room. The shadows the flames made were playing like fairy forms over floor, and wall, and ceiling.

My fancy would surely quicken, thought I, if such being were in attendance. Surely imagination would be stronger and purer, if it could have the playful fancies of dawning womanhood to delight it. All toil would be torn from mind-labor, if but another heart grew into this present soul, quickening it, warming it, cheering it, bidding it ever God-speed!

Her face would make a halo, rich as a rainbow, atop of all such noisome things as we lonely souls call trouble. Her smile would illumine the blackest of crowding cares; and darkness that now seats you despondent in your solitary chair for days together, weaving bitter fancies, dreaming bitter dreams, would grow light and thin, and spread and float away, chased by that beloved smile.

Your friend—poor fellow!—dies; never mind, that gentle clasp of her fingers, as she steals behind you, telling you not to weep—it is worth ten friends!

Your sister, sweet one, is dead—buried. The worms are busy with all her fairness. How it makes you think earth nothing but a spot to dig graves upon!

—It is more. She, she says, will be a sister; and the waving curls, as she leans upon your shoulder, touch your cheek, and your wet eye turns to meet those other eyes—God has sent his angel, surely!

Your mother, alas for it, she is gone! Is there any bitterness to a youth, alone and homeless, like this!

But you are not homeless; you are not alone; she is there; her tears softening yours, her smile lighting yours, her grief killing yours; and you live again to assuage that kind sorrow of hers.

Then, those children, rosy, fair-haired; no, they do not disturb you with their prattle now; they are yours! Toss away there on the greensward; never mind the hyacinths, the snowdrops, the violets, if so be any are there; the perfume of their healthful lips is worth all the flowers of the world. No need now to gather wild bouquets to love and

cherish; flower, tree, gun, are all dead things; things livelier hold your soul.

And she, the mother, sweetest and fairest of all, watching, tending, caressing, loving, till your own heart grows pained with tenderest jealousy and cures itself with loving.

You have no need now of any cold lecture to teach thankfulness; your heart is full of it. No need now, as once, of bursting blossoms, of trees taking leaf and greenness, to turn thought kindly and thankfully; for ever beside you there is bloom, and ever beside you there is fruit, for which eye, heart and soul are full of unknown and unspoken, because unspeakable, thank-offering.

And if sickness catches you, binds you, lays you down; no lonely moanings and wicked curses at careless stepping nurses. The step is noiseless and yet distinct beside you. The white curtains are drawn, or withdrawn, by the magic of that other presence, and the soft, cool hand is upon your brow.

No cold comfortings of friend-watchers, merely come in to steal a word away from that outer world which is pulling at their skirts; but ever the sad, shaded brow of her, whose lightest sorrow for your sake is your greatest grief, if it were not a greater joy.

The blaze was leaping light and high, and the wood falling under the growing heat.

—So, continued I, this heart would be at length itself; striving with everything gross, even now as it clings to grossness. Love would make its strength native and progressive. Earth's cares would fly. Joys would double. Susceptibilities be quickened; Love master self, and, having made the mastery, stretch onward and upward toward Infinitude.

And if the end came, and sickness brought that follower—Great Follower—which sooner or later is sure to come after, then the heart, and the hand of Love, ever near, are giving to your tired soul, daily and hourly, lessons of that love which consoles, which triumphs, which circleth all and centreth in all—Love infinite and divine!

Kind hands—none but hers—will smooth the hair upon your brow as the chill grows damp and heavy on it; and her fingers—none but hers—will lie in yours as the wasted flesh stiffens and hardens for the ground. Her tears—you could feel no others if oceans fell—will warm your drooping features once more to life; once more your eye, lighted in joyous triumph, kindle in her smile, and then—

The fire fell upon the hearth; the blaze gave a last leap, a flicker, then another, caught a little remaining twig, blazed up, wavered, went out.

There was nothing but a bed of glowing embers, over which the white ashes gathered fast. I was alone, with only my dog for company.

III.

ASHES—SIGNIFYING DESOLATION.

After all, thought I, ashes follow blaze, inevitably as Death follows Life. Misery treads on the heels of Joy; Anguish rides swift after Pleasure.

"Come to me again, Carlo," said I to my dog, and I