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1894
THE CRUCIFIXION OF MAN

A Narrative Poem

BY
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Dedication.

TO MY FRIEND,
ARTHUR HERVEY.

THIS book, now bright with dawn, now dark with doom,
Now full of midday song, I bring you, friend—
Not all conceived in light, nor yet in gloom,
But in a sphere where light and darkness blend.

I strive in verse to render forth the song
Of life, to life's strange message I give heed:
But where my Art is faulty, yours is strong,
And where I fail, you triumph and succeed.

For you in music render forth the psalm
Of life, aye all its passion, all its power ;
Music can reproduce June's heavenliest calm
When no breath stirs the frailest cliff-side flower.

And music too can thunder like the seas :
The world's emotion music can express ;
The saint's thoughts praying on his bended knees,
The lover's thrill at beauty's first caress.

Music will lead some stricken soul to seek
Eternal refuge in a Saviour's arms,
Stablish the doubting and uplift the weak,
Expounding heaven's imperishable charms :

Music will lead a lover to decide
 That this night's starry fires shall point the way
 To the sweet robbery of another's bride,
 The sin that cries for blood at dawn of day.

For music stirs in one the lust to storm
 Heaven's breachless walls and unattempted gates,
 But draws another towards the perfect form
 Whose sovereign whiteness in the darkness waits.

At music's trumpet one man climbs the skies
 And gathers strength the untrodden heights to win ;
 Another dares to meet the queenly eyes
 Whose light makes sinning pure and virtue sin.

The same sweet strain in one girl's heart will wake
 Desire for heavenly joys that never pall,
 Possess another, till her swift steps take
 The rose-hung road that leads her to her fall.

One girl will muse : " Is this the heavenly strain
 That sun-bright angels round their Master sing ? "
 Another whisper : " In the moonlit lane
 Again to-night my eyes will greet their king ! "

Through music the one Spirit who sways the whole,
 Creates, pulls down, refashions and destroys,
 Speaks—ever music is the world's deep soul
 Uttering its giant sorrows, giant joys.

From the first hour when on our planet-home
 Love spake, in depths of moonlit forest heard
 Or by some far-off sea's forgotten foam,
 Its priceless first unfathomable word,

From that first hour hath music reigned supreme,
 For music's soul and passion's soul are one ;
 And music still will reign while young hearts dream
 And while sweet darkness follows on the sun.

All dim strange thoughts we struggle, and in vain,
 To utter—pangs and joys, and hopes and fears—
 In music their impassioned utterance gain ;
 All human longings sound in human ears.

The past grows vocal, history speaks once more.
 Above dense war-ranks nods Achilles' plume :
 Pale Dido weeps upon the loveless shore :
 Masked murder dogs love's steps through Venice' gloom.

At music's touch man's visions all grow real ;
 We see the matchless face that Bothwell saw :—
 We enter too the realms of the ideal,
 The mist-clad land where genius' will is law.

A thousand fairies throng the wood-glades, white
 Beneath the rays of an enchanted moon ;
 Their elfin cohorts flash upon our sight,
 Armoured in gems that mock the glittering noon.

At music's summons Oberon's snowy steed
 Tramples the clover, jingling silver reins :
 When music sounds, an unseen world gives heed ;
 Its starlight waxes as our sunlight wanes.

While music sounds, what heart can ever doubt
 That life eternal waits beyond the tomb ?
 For music shuts cold slow-foot reason out,
 And what our souls desire our souls assume.

While music sounds, no barrier to our hope
 Looms dark and threatening on the heavenward way,
 For music gives the glad soul boundless scope
 And points beyond the night to endless day.

Religion owes to music all its power :
 In man's form Jesus on the pale earth trod,
 But music round him made the pale earth flower
 And changed the mortal man to deathless God.

Death conquered life? Nay, music's eager heart
 Repels the thought with everlasting scorn,
 And with the sunlight of triumphant Art
 Transmutes to stainless gold the crown of thorn !

The Christian Church through music scales the skies :
 The humblest chapel built where wild waves foam
 On Cornish rocks, or where Welsh mountains rise,
 Through music conquers, even as mighty Rome.

And love through music conquers—when we hear
 The haunting magic of some wondrous tune,
 Lost loves on golden wings come glimmering near
 And life's December is as passion's June.

Dark eyes we never thought to see again
 In life shine forth, and speechless joys are won :
 Music can crowd with life death's ghostly plain
 And make night's dreams more cogent than the sun.

Words—even Shakespeare's words—must sometimes fail,
 But music never fails : where man has trod
 It follows, gathering up life's tragic tale,
 Blending with man's the language of a god.

And this immortal tongue is yours, O friend !
 While I must labour through the straits of rhyme
 And on my course a world of thought expend,
 Your Art is subject not to space or time.

To you the lover, yearning to express
 Fancies that ravish, eager thoughts that thrill,
 Must turn ; demanding love's own voice, no less,
 He finds your music's cadence tenderer still.

Demanding passion's voice and soul of fire,
 He finds your music equal to his theme ;
 Strong as deep love's illimitable desire,
 Sweet as love's truth, and ardent as its dream.

Demanding that love's sadness shall prevail
 And that love's temple change into a tomb,
 Still can your varying music tell the tale
 Of deepening agony and starless gloom.

To you for many a year will poets turn ;
 Through you their thought that flagged wins timeless wings :
 Eyes soften at your strain, and men's hearts burn
 To whom in vain the unaided poet sings.

When pen betrays and silent paper wrongs
 The poet, stealing witchery from his strain,
 Your touch brings victory ; yes, to you belongs
 The triumph, and to him the priceless gain.

Envious am I, stern fetters we must wear—
 What grim restraints the laws of verse impose !
 A flower described is only half as fair,
 But music adds a fragrance to the rose.