

She dared not bend and kiss those cherub lips.
His lovely face grew paler day by day,
And dread, an awful dread, laid hold of her.
And she herself was wasting swift and sure—
The candle flame was burning low.

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS

Two nights, not more, before the Christmas eve,
A heap of things for washing lay against
The wall. Alas, at any time too great,
The present task might break the weary back,
But Christmas need was pressing and the labour
Must be done. (Oh, spare that wasted frame !
Hear, O Lord, the widow's cry !)

The weary, yet the watchful boy,
His blackboard took and wrote in letters big
And urgent, seeming charged with meaning strange.
And the clock's alarm was set. And now
On bended knee beside his mother's knee
He spoke his simple prayer, pleading lastly
That his mother might have better wages
And have rest. And, oh, the mother's heart
Went with him, with himself before the throne,
Forgetful, ay entirely, of herself.
A wild temptation seized her. She would clasp,
Yea, fiercely hug, that wasted angel-body
To her breast, and kiss those guileless, beauteous,
Sweetest lips. Alas! she knew the worst
Had come—those eyes, uplifted, hollow, shining,
Spoke of death. And why refrain? She would not,
Yea, she drank the cup of pleasure to the full.
The child was glad, and went to rest,
A smile of heaven on his lips.