

THE SERMON.

The voices died away, the organ ceased,
 And I stood up before the living sea
 Of human faces, turned awhile to me.
 What did they seek? the bread to feed their souls?
 The medicine for life's sickness? or, perchance,
 For something that should get their brains awork
 Upon a knot of subtle, twisted doubt.
 Each with a separate need, a separate grief,
 A separate soul,—yes, and a separate sin?
 I standing for the moment over all
 To hold their thoughts to theme that I might choose.
 What should I set before them?

There were youths
 And maidens, with life's wilderness untrod
 Stretching before them: how were they to find
 The narrow gate which only leads to life
 Unless one point the way? How should they know
 The wholesome fruit—the everlasting flower
 From sin's luxuriant blooms and poison'd fruit—
 Unless one teach them? All alike were new.
 Perhaps they passionately longed to set
 Their days in harmony with God's great plan;
 But needed that among the clashing notes
 Around them one should hush the frantic sounds
 A moment, that the Master chord be heard.

And there were those on whom the noon of life
 Was shining,—who, perhaps, had plucked the fruit
 Of sin and found it bitter: who had snatched
 The gaudy promise of a self-sown life,
 And smarted from the thorn-pricks of the clutch;
 Those deafened by the cymbal clang and roar
 Of restless days, of jarring hopes and aims,
 Who needed that a thunder peal engulf
 The lesser sounds and force the startled ear
 To hearken.

There were those whose eventide
 Was gathering fast, to whom all flowers were grey,
 And all fruit tasteless; who were deaf alike
 To melody and discord; whose souls' doors
 Were closing one by one, the garish lights
 Put out within, yet no seven-branched lamp
 Aflame to keep the vigil of the Lord.

And I stood up before them, and the air
 Grew still that I might speak; that I might bring
 A satisfaction to their human needs,—
 A comfort to their human griefs,—a key
 To that strange problem of the human life,—