

The Old Year.

Farewell, Old Year, we walk no more together,
I catch the sweetest of thy latest sigh:
And, crowned with yellow brake and withered heather,
I see thee stand beneath this cloudy sky.

Here, in the dim light of a gray December,
We part in smiles, and yet we meet in tears.
Watching thy chilly dawn, I well remember
I thought thee saddest born of all the years.

I knew not then what precious gifts were hidden
Under the mists that veiled thy path from sight;
I knew not then that joy would come unbidden
To make thy closing hours divinely bright.

I only saw the dreary clouds unbroken,
I only heard the plash of icy rain;
And, in that winter gloom, I found no token
To tell me that the sun would shine again.

O dear Old Year, I wronged a Father's kindness;
I would not trust Him with my load of care.
I stumbled on in weariness and blindness,
And lo! He blessed me with an answered prayer.

Good-by, kind Year! We walk no more together,
But here in quiet happiness we part;
And, from thy wreath of faded fern and heather,
I take some sprays and wear them on my heart.

The Old and the New Year.

I mused as the midnight hour drew nigh, and methought the Old Year stood before me. Weary and way-worn he seemed, and in his hand was an hour-glass, whence the last sands were fleeing. As I looked upon his wrinkled forehead, memories both pleasant and mournful came over me. Fain would I have constrained his longer stay, and spake earnestly to him:—

"Many blessings hast thou brought me, for which I give thee thanks. New have they been every morning, and fresh every moment. Thou hast indeed, from my heart's garden, uprooted some hopes that I had planted there. With their clustering buds they fell, and were never quickened again."

Then he said: "Praise God, both for what I gave and what I took away. And lay up treasures in heaven, that thy heart may be there also. What thou callest blighted hopes, are oftentimes changed into the fruits of righteousness."

But I answered: "Thou hast also hidden from my sight the loved and the revered. Clods are strewn upon their faces; they reply to my call no more. To the homes that they made so fair they return not, and the places that once knew them know them no more for ever."

Still he said: "Give praise to God. Trouble not thyself about those that are with Him. Rather make thine own salvation sure, that thou mayest go unto them, and be parted no more." Then, in a faint voice, he murmured: "My mission unto man is done. For me, the stone is rolled away from the door of the sepulchre. I will enter in, and slumber with the years beyond the flood, till the last trumpet soundeth."

"I gazed upon his wan brow, and to me it was beautiful. Fain would I have swept away the snows that gathered around his hoary temples; but he suffered me not, and stretched himself out to die. By his side I knelt, and said: 'Oh, departing Year! I behold a scroll folded beneath thy mantle. What witness shall it bear of me at the judgment?'"

Low and solemn were his last tones. "Thou shalt know when the books are opened, and the dead, small and great, stand before God."

The midnight clock struck. And I covered my face, and mourned for his death who had once been to me as a friend. I remember with pain how oft I had slighted his warnings and the opportunities he had given me of doing good, and had cast away the wealth of time, that priceless boon from the Eternal. Methought from the dying lips came a feeble sigh, "Farewell!—farewell." Then a passion of weeping fell upon me. And when again I lifted up my head, lo the New Year stood in the place of the departed.

Smiling, he greeted me with good wishes and words of cheer, while around me lay many bright tokens of friendship and love. But I was afraid. For to me he was a stranger; and when I would have returned his welcome, my lips trembled and were silent.

Then he said, "Fear not. I come unto thee from the Giver of every good and perfect gift."

"New Year, whither wilt thou lead me? Art thou appointed to bring me joy or sorrow, life or death?"

He replied, "I know not. Neither doth the angel nearest the throne know. Only Him who sitteth thereon. Give me thy hand, and question not. Enough for thee, that I accomplish His will. Make that will thine own, and thou shalt taste an angel's happiness even here below. I promise thee nothing. Be content to follow me. Take, with a prayer for wisdom, this winged moment. The next may not be mine to give. Yet, if we walk onward together, forget not that thou art a pilgrim for eternity. If I bring thee the cup of joy, be thankful, and pitiful to those who mourn; and let all men be unto thee as brethren. If the dregs of bitterness cleave unto thy lip, be not too eager to receive relief lest thou betray the weakness of thy faith. God's perfect discipline giveth wisdom. Therefore count them happy who endure. When morn breaketh in the east, 'd thyself in the Holy Spirit's strength for thy duties, with a song of thanksgiving. For God is near to those who trust Him and rejoice in His ways. And when night putteth on her coronet of stars, kneel and ask that the day's sins may, for Christ's sake, be forgiven thee, so, that when I have no longer any days or nights to give thee, and must myself die, thou mayest bless me as a friend and a helper on the road to heaven."

A New Year Meditation.

At the close of the year, as we are listening to the final footfalls of Father Time and anticipating in prophetic vision the happy days that are to come, the question naturally suggests itself—What does the new year contain for us? The wisest of us would assuredly prefer not to know; and why should God part for us the veil that conceals the hidden stores of the future? Were we permitted to read that future in a magic horoscope, and were the pains and pangs, the heartaches and woes which are a part of our heritage revealed to us as clearly as the divine prophecies were revealed to the wise men of old, who would not shrink from the oracle even as Belshazzar blinded his eyes to the awful handwriting on the wall? It was Sheridan, we believe, who called Uncertainty one of the joys of life. And is it not so? Assuredly, as a writer in the current issue of an English periodical declares, if we look for the characteristics which may be found in the highest forms of pleasure and on which its utility chiefly depends we shall find that it all includes elements of uncertainty and wonder. And the appropriateness of these seems to lie in the fact that they provide pleasant changes which are in strong contrast with the ordinary occupations of most working lives, and that they give opportunity for the exercise of powers and good dispositions which, being too little used in the daily business of life, would become feeble or wholly lost. And then, as the most of us are optimists and hope for the best, we do not anticipate trouble that cannot be borne;—we believe the future is bright for us; and that the present, if dark, contains a bow of promise; that fairer flowers bloom than those which have faded and withered in our hand; that life is worth living for the light and perfume of the years to come. And who would know all? If we could rend the veil of the future so as to know what that future has in store for us how could we await the coming pleasure—how endure the thought of the coming pain? Yet, as Pascal says, we are never satisfied with the present. We anticipate the future as too slow, as if to hasten it on, or we recall time past as too swift—in order to stop its flight. "We scarcely bestow a thought," he says, "upon the present, or if we do it is only that we may borrow light from it to bestow on the future; the present is never in our view; the past and the present are our means, but the future alone is our object." Thus we never live, but we hope to live; and so being ever preparing to be happy it is most certain we shall never be so if we do not aspire to some other felicity than can ever be enjoyed in the little cycle of our earthly life.