

GARFIELD.

PRIZE POEM.

1882.

God's ways are not man's ways—we oft would change
 The issue of events, which seem so strange
 And useless to our darkened sight—Had we,
 We think, the making of life's history.
 How purged would be the page of each man's life
 From bloody tragedy, and Godless strife,
 That when the time for writing "End" should come
 The whole might form a pure and spotless tome!
 A world of doubting Thomases are we,
 For if we do not handle, touch, and see,
 Our Faith is fearful of each coming day
 O'er which uncertainty holds restless sway!

Life is a hidden mystery—we live,
 We are convinced by proofs our feelings give,
 Yet further know we nothing—we but dream,
 And are not sure that things are what they seem;
 The far-eyed sibyl cannot well foresee
 One moment's space into futurity.
 We mark events, but that which will ensue
 We dimly guess—'tis all that we can do!
 Like ships upon the broad and mighty ocean,
 We sail upon the sea of life's emotion;
 The billowy storms that sweep the good ship's deck
 Are like the passions which life's vessel wreck;
 But when a calmer, happier mood holds sway,
 Right merrily the boat glides on her way.
 Another mystery! How can we tell
 Whence come these passions we all know so well,
 Most wondrous are ye, nature's complex laws,
 We feel your force, yet cannot trace your cause.
 But let us pause, and for a moment's space
 With this great mystery stand face to face,
 And see how everywhere, when unrestrained,
 Dark passions have such woeful mastery gained.
 That crimes, too dark to be without them thought,
 Have been with cool deliberation wrought.
 When in Time's morning Cain gave passion vent,
 And shed his brother's blood, so innocent,
 Upon his head the murderer's curse descended
 Which never has nor never will be ended,
 While soul and body are in union blended!
 See Christ transfixed upon the cruel tree,
 A monument of man's depravity!
 And so in every age the world has seen
 Hath Vice the murderer of Virtue been;
 For Virtue ever takes the better part,
 While Vice in malice stabs her to the heart.
 'Twas so with thee, O Garfield, Virtue's son,
 The accursed passions, rising all as one,
 Flew at their monarch's summons, that they might
 By that foul deed make weak the cause of right!

O Garfield, low I bend in homage to
 Thy lofty spirit. Earth has nourished few
 Such God-like natures. Noble lives like thine
 Are beacon-lights upon the shores of time,

To guide the poor storm-beaten vessel past
 The rocks on which 'tis fatal to be cast.
 How many a struggling lad who reads the page
 That tells of thy canal days will assuage
 The grief and sinking in his heart, and take
 From thy strength courage newly-born to make
 Fresh efforts to exalt his sinking spirit
 More to the level of thy lofty merit.
 The careworn student, sad with mental toil,
 Whose thoughts with loathing from his books recoil,
 When grim Despair, fought bravely off till now,
 Has cast its darkening shadow o'er his brow—
 To him remembrance of thy Hiram course
 Will burst with all its quickening moral force,
 And from the ashes of his mental pain
 Hope's smouldering fires awake to life again.
 And all the struggling spirits who aspire
 To elevate themselves to something higher,
 Deep draughts will drink of courage from thy life
 And set anew their weapons for the strife.
 For if this earth-born, sin-begotten man,
 Whose life in poverty and want began,
 Could so superior rise to all mischance
 And break the blows of evil circumstance,
 That king above his fellows, unsurpassed,
 He stood upon Fame's highest throne at last,
 Sure then there is a little hope for me
 To rise above poor mediocrity.
 I said that life was like the surging wave,
 Which men, like storm-toss'd ships, are doomed to brave;
 Subject to all the treacherous winds of heaven,
 By Passion buffeted—by Ill-wind driven.
 More like the drop, each individual soul,
 That added to its fellows makes the whole—
 For just as they have union with each other,
 So close that one's disturbance stirs another.
 So every life is well or ill effected
 By other lives with which it is connected.
 The stone that on a shoreless sea one flings
 O'erspreads the whole with ever-widening rings;
 So when into the sea of life is thrown
 Some great disaster, to no one is known
 The magnitude and limit of its force,
 Nor what the ruin that will mark its course.
 The list of martyrs is by angels guarded,
 And bountifully are their souls rewarded
 Whose names a monument eternal stand
 Emblazoned there by the unerring hand.
 And high upon this list shall Garfield's name,
 Fair traced in shining characters, proclaim
 To all the white-robed host that when he bled
 'Twas for humanity his blood was shed;
 For he was victim pure enough to show
 Into what depth depravity may go.
 And 'mid the incense of a nation's sighs
 That rose around that bloody sacrifice,
 His soul was wafted upwards to the skies.
 Go, soul, and with thy God forever be.
 A mourning world shall sing thy threnody.
 When mother earth received him to her breast,
 There on her bosom through Death's night to rest,
 Her great heart throbbed within her painfully,
 His wasted frame and weary look to see,
 And when she kissed his brow, wet with death's dew,
 And o'er his form her mantle gently drew,
 A quivering tremor shook her mighty frame,
 And low her wind-voice breathed his honoured name.

Thomas Owen Townley.