

There gently stole from out the brightest glare,
 Distilling through the silence all prepared,
 Like music soft and sweet, the angel-voice.

Flute cannot breathe, nor softest organ-pipe,
 Nor can the voice of nature's echo sound,
 Nor yet the breath of childhood's simple prayer,
 Notes just so sweet, so thrilling to the ear.
 We can but dream, we cannot really hear
 That gentlest, clearest, perfect harmony
 Of soft and holy sound, which angels sing.

The angel sung; his voice distill'd around;
 His words were breath'd on nature's waiting sense,
 And on the shepherds' sooth'd and raptur'd ear,—
 "Fear not," he sung, "for lo, I bring to you
 Good tidings of rejoicing great, which are
 For all mankind;—to you is born this day
 In David's town, a Saviour,—Christ the Lord;
 This is the sign by which to know the child;—
 Like other infants cloth'd, yet He is laid
 Within the manger where the oxen feed."

He sung; his words did sweetly flow; he ceased;
 His music to the sense of nature's realm,
 And to the shepherds' listening ear was borne;
 When, quick as thought, was added to the sound
 Large volume of angelic chorus loud.

Sweet still the noise, for all harmonious sung;
 And sweeter still, and louder far, and grand
 Beyond all earthly music, and above
 High harmonies of man's most speaking chords.
 Thus, deep, and grand, and full, yet clear and sweet,
 Enthralling to the sense of nature's realm,
 And to the shepherds' glowing, wond'ring ears,
 Burst forth in noblest, loftiest tones of praise
 That paean, on that memorable night.

"Glory," they sang!—They swelled!—They shouted loud!
 Magnificent in music, heaven's own choir,
 Supernal orchestra!—"Glory to God
 In highest heaven; peace on the earth beneath;
 Good-will to all mankind;"—then sudden ceased.

Silence profound, unstirred, calm hushed more calm,
 Lay waiting in attention everywhere,
 Listening.

But to the sense of nature's realm,
 Nor to the shepherds' longing, lingering ear,
 No voice responded, no more harmonies
 Chimed forth.