

Classic Poetry Series

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

- poems -

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"It Might Have Been"

We will be what we could be. Do not say,
"It might have been, had not this, or that, or this."
No fate can keep us from the chosen way;
He only might who is.

We will do what we could do. Do not dream
Chance leaves a hero, all uncrowned to grieve.
I hold, all men are greatly what they seem;
He does, who could achieve.

We will climb where we could climb. Tell me not
Of adverse storms that kept thee from the height.
What eagle ever missed the peak he sought?
He always climbs who might.

I do not like the phrase "It might have been!"
It lacks force, and life's best truths perverts:
For I believe we have, and reach, and win,
Whatever our deserts.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

A Golden Day

The subtle beauty of this day
Hangs o'er me like a fairy spell,
And care and grief have flown away,
And every breeze sings, "all is well."
I ask, "Holds earth or sin, or woe?"
My heart replies, "I do not know."

Nay! all we know, or feel, my heart,
Today is joy undimmed, complete;
In tears or pain we have no part;
The act of breathing is so sweet,
We care no higher joy to name.
What reck we now of wealth or fame?

The past--what matters it to me?
The pain it gave has passed away.
The future--that I cannot see!
I care for nothing save today--
This is a respite from all care,
And trouble flies--I know not where.

Go on, oh noisy, restless life!
Pass by, oh, feet that seek for heights!
I have no part in aught of strife;
I do not want your vain delights.
The day wraps round me like a spell
And every breeze sings, "All is well."

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

A Maiden's Secret

I have written this day down in my heart
As the sweetest day in the season;
From all of the others I've set it apart---
But I will not tell you the reason,
That is my secret---I must not tell;
But the skies are soft and tender,
And never before, I know full well,
Was the earth so full of splendour.

I sing at my labour the whole day long,
And my heart is as light as a feather;
And there is a reason for my glad song
Besides the beautiful weather.
But I will not tell it to you; and though
That thrush in the maple heard it,
And would shout it aloud if he could, I know
He hasn't the power to word it.

Up, where I was sewing, this morn came one
Who told me the sweetest stories,
He said I had stolen my hair from the sun,
And my eyes from the morning glories.
Grandmother says that I must not believe
A word men say, for they flatter;
But I'm sure he would never try to deceive,
For he told me---but there---no matter!

Last night I was sad, and the world to me
Seemed a lonely and dreary dwelling,
But some one then had not asked me to be---
There now! I am almost telling.
Not another word shall my two lips say,
I will shut them fast together,
And never a mortal shall know to-day
Why my heart is as light as a feather.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

A March Snow

Let the old snow be covered with the new:
The trampled snow, so soiled, and stained, and sodden.
Let it be hidden wholly from our view
By pure white flakes, all trackless and untrodden.
When Winter dies, low at the sweet Spring's feet
Let him be mantled in a clean, white sheet.

Let the old life be covered by the new:
The old past life so full of sad mistakes,
Let it be wholly hidden from the view
By deeds as white and silent as snow-flakes.

Ere this earth life melts in the eternal Spring
Let the white mantle of repentance fling
Soft drapery about it, fold on fold,
Even as the new snow covers up the old.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

A Woman's Love

So vast the tide of Love within me surging,
It overflows like some stupendous sea,
The confines of the Present and To-be;
And 'gainst the Past's high wall I feel it urging,
As it would cry "Thou too shalt yield to me!"

All other loves my supreme love embodies;
I would be she on whose soft bosom nursed
Thy clinging infant lips to quench their thirst;
She who trod close to hidden worlds where God is,
That she might have, and hold, and see thee first.

I would be she who stirred the vague fond fancies,
Of thy still childish heart; who through bright days
Went sporting with thee in the old-time plays,
And caught the sunlight of thy boyish glances
In half-forgotten and long-buried Mays.

Forth to the end, and back to the beginning,
My love would send its inundating tide,
Wherein all landmarks of thy past should hide.
If thy life's lesson must be learned through sinning,
My grieving virtue would become thy guide.

For I would share the burden of thy errors,
So when the sun of our brief life had set,
If thou didst walk in darkness and regret,
E'en in that shadowy world of nameless terrors,
My soul and thine should be companions yet.

And I would cross with thee those troubled oceans
Of dark remorse whose waters are despair:
All things my jealous reckless love would dare,
So that thou mightst not recollect emotions
In which it did not have a part and share.

There is no limit to my love's full measure,
Its spirit gold is shaped by earth's alloy;
I would be friend and mother, mate and toy,
I'd have thee look to me for every pleasure,
And in me find all memories of joy.

Yet though I love thee in such selfish fashion,
I would wait on thee, sitting at thy feet,
And serving thee, if thou didst deem it meet.
And couldst thou give me one fond hour of passion,
I'd take that hour and call my life complete.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Ad Finum

On the white throat of useless passion
That scorched my soul with its burning breath
I clutched my fingers in murderous fashion
And gathered them close in a grip of death;

For why should I fan, or feed with fuel,
A love that showed me but blank despair?
So my hold was firm, and my grasp was cruel -
I meant to strangle it then and there!

I thought it was dead. But, with no warning,
It rose from its grave last night and came
And stood by my bed till the early morning.
And over and over it spoke your name.

Its throat was red where my hands had held it;
It burned my brow with its scorching breath;
And I said, the moment my eyes beheld it,
'A love like this can know no death.'

For just one kiss that your lips have given
In the lost and beautiful past to me,
I would gladly barter my hopes of Heaven
And all the bliss of Eternity.

For never a joy are the angels keeping,
To lay at my feet in Paradise,
Like that of into your strong arms creeping,
And looking into your love lit eyes.

I know, in the way that sins are reckoned,
This thought is a sin of the deepest dye;
But I know too that if an angel beckoned,
Standing close by the Throne on High,
And you, adown by the gates infernal,
Should open your loving arms and smile,
I would turn my back on things supernal,
To lie on your breast a little while.

To know for an hour you were mine completely-
Mine in body and soul, my own-
I would bear unending tortures sweetly,
With not a murmur and not a moan.

A lighter sin or lesser error
Might change through hope or fear divine;
But there is no fear, and hell hath no terror,
To change or alter a love like mine.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Advice

I must do as you do? Your way I own
Is a very good way, and still,
There are sometimes two straight roads to a town,
One over, one under the hill.

You are treading the safe and the well-worn way,
That the prudent choose each time;
And you think me reckless and rash to-day
Because I prefer to climb.

Your path is the right one, and so is mine.
We are not like peas in a pod,
Compelled to lie in a certain line,
Or else be scattered abroad.

'T were a dull old world, methinks, my friend,
If we all just went one way;
Yet our paths will meet no doubt at the end,
Though they lead apart today.

You like the shade, and I like the sun;
You like an even pace,
I like to mix with the crowd and run,
And then rest after the race.

I like danger, and storm, and strife,
You like a peaceful time;
I like the passion and surge of life,
You like its gentle rhyme.

You like buttercups, dewy sweet,
And crocuses, framed in snow;
I like roses, born of the heat,
And the red carnation's glow.

I must live my life, not yours, my friend,
For so it was written down;
We must follow our given paths to the end,
But I trust we shall meet--in town.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

After the Engagement

Well, Mabel, 'tis over and ended---
The ball I wrote was to be;
And oh! it was perfectly splendid---
If you could have been here to see.
I've a thousand things to write you
That I know you are wanting to hear,
And one, that is sure to delight you---
I am wearing Joe's diamond, my dear!

Yes, mamma is quite ecstatic
That I am engaged to Joe;
She thinks I am rather erratic,
And feared that I might say "no."
But, Mabel, I'm twenty-seven
(Though nobody dreams it, dear),
And a fortune like Joe's isn't given
To lay at one's feet each year.

You know my old fancy for Harry---
Or, at least, I am certain you guessed
That it took all my sense not to marry
And go with that fellow out west.
But that was my very first season---
And Harry was poor as could be,
And mamma's good practical reason
Took all the romance out of me.

She whisked me off over the ocean,
And had me presented at court,
And got me all out of the notion
That ranch life out west was my forte.
Of course I have never repented---
I'm not such a goose of a thing;
But after I had consented
To Joe---and he gave me the ring---

I felt such a queer sensation.
I seemed to go into a trance,
Away from the music's pulsation,
Away from the lights and the dance.
And the wind o'er the wild prairie
Seemed blowing strong and free,
And it seemed not Joe, but Harry
Who was standing there close to me.

And the funniest feverish feeling
Went up from my feet to my head,
With little chills after it stealing---
And my hands got as numb as the dead.
A moment, and then it was over:
The diamond blazed up in my eyes,
And I saw in the face of my lover

A questioning, strange surprise.

Maybe 'twas the scent of the flowers,
That heavy with fragrance bloomed near,
But I didn't feel natural for hours;
It was odd now, wasn't it, dear?
Write soon to your fortunate Clara
Who has carried the prize away,
And say you'll come on when I marry;
I think it will happen in May.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Are you Loving Enough?

Are you loving enough? There is some one dear,
Some one you hold as the dearest of all
In the holiest shrine of your heart.
Are you making it known? Is the truth of it clear
To the one you love? If death's quick call
Should suddenly tear you apart,
Leaving no time for a long farewell,
Would you feel you had nothing to tell---
Nothing you wished you had said before
The closing of that dark door?

Are you loving enough? The swift years fly---
Oh, faster and faster they hurry away,
And each one carries its dead.
The good deed left for the by and by,
The word to be uttered another day,
May never be done or said.
Let the love word sound in the listening ear,
Nor wait to speak it above a bier.
Oh the time for telling your love is brief,
But long, long, long is the time for grief.
Are you loving enough?

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Arise

Why sit ye idly dreaming all the day,
While the golden, precious hours flit away?
See you not the day is waning, waning fast?
That the morn's already vanished in the past?

When the glowing noon approaches, we will rest
Who have worked through all the morning; but at best,
If you work with zeal and ardor till the night,
You can only make the wasted moments right.

Think you life was made for dreaming, nothing more,
When God's work lies all unfinished at your door?
Souls to save and hearts to strengthen--ah! such work,
Such a richly freighted labor, who would shirk?

Then arise, O idle dreamer! Dreams are sweet,
But better flowers are growing at your feet.
If you crush, or pass unheeding, idle friend,
You shall answer for their ruin in the end.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Artist's Life

Of all the waltzes the great Strauss wrote,
mad with melody, rhythm--rife
From the very first to the final note,
Give me his "Artist's Life!"

It stirs my blood to my finger ends,
Thrills me and fills me with vague unrest,
And all that is sweetest and saddest blends
Together within my breast.

It brings back that night in the dim arcade,
In love's sweet morning and life's best prime,
When the great brass orchestra played and played,
And set our thoughts to rhyme.

It brings back that Winter of mad delights,
Of leaping pulses and tripping feet,
And those languid moon-washed Summer nights
When we heard the band in the street.

It brings back rapture and glee and glow,
It brings back passion and pain and strife,
And so of all the waltzes I know,
Give me the "Artist's Life."

For it is so full of the dear old time--
So full of the dear friends I knew.
And under its rhythm, and lilt, and rhyme,
I am always finding--you.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

At an Old Drawer

Before this scarf was faded,
What hours of mirth it knew;
How gayly it paraded
From smiling eyes to view.
The days were tinged with glory,
The nights too quickly sped,
And life was like a story
Where all the people wed.

Before this rosebud wilted,
How passionately sweet
The wild waltz smelled and lilted
In time for flying feet;
How loud the bassoons muttered,
The horns grew madly shrill,
And oh! the vows lips uttered
That hearts could not fulfill.

Before this fan was broken,
Behind its lace and pearl
What whispered words were spoken,
What hearts were in a whirl;
What homesteads were selected
In Fancy's realm of Spain,
What castles were erected
Without a room for pain.

When this odd glove was mated,
How thrilling seemed the play;
Maybe our hearts are sated--
We tire so soon to-day.
O, thrust away these treasures,
They speak the dreary truth;
We have outgrown the pleasures
And keen delights of youth.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Bohemia

Bohemia, o'er thy unatlassed borders
How many cross, with half-reluctant feet,
And unformed fears of dangers and disorders,
To find delights, more wholesome and more sweet
Than ever yet were known to the "elite."

Herein can dwell no pretence and no seeming;
No stilted pride thrives in this atmosphere,
Which stimulates a tendency to dreaming.
The shores of the ideal world, from here,
Seem sometimes to be tangible and near.

We have no use for formal codes of fashion;
No "Etiquette f Courts" we emulate;
We know it needs sincerity and passion
To carry out the plans of God, or fate;
We do not strive to seem inanimate.

We call no time lost that we give to pleasure;
Life's hurrying river speeds to Death's great sea;
We cast out no vain plummet-line to measure
Imagined depths of that unknown To-Be,
But grasp the Now, and fill it full of glee.

All creeds have room here, and we all together
Devoutly worship at Art's sacred shrine;
But he who dwells once in thy golden weather,
Bohemia--sweet, lovely land of mine--
Can find no joy outside thy border-line.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Coleur de Rose

I want more lives in which to love
This world so full of beauty,
I want more days to use the ways
I know of doing duty;
I ask no greater joy than this
(So much I am life's lover,)
When I reach age to turn the page
And read the story over,
(Oh love stay near!)

Oh rapturous promise of the Spring!
Oh June fulfilling after!
If Autumns sigh, when Summers die,
'Tis drowned in Winter's laughter.
Oh maiden dawns, oh wifely noons,
Oh siren sweet, sweet nights,
I'd want no heaven could earth be given
Again with its delights,
(If love stayed near!)

There are such glories for the eye,
Such pleasures for the ear,
The senses reel with all they feel
And see and taste and hear;
There are such ways of doing good,
Such ways of being kind,
And bread that's cast on waters fast
Comes home again, I find.
(Oh love stay near.)

There are such royal souls to know,
There is so much to learn,
While secrets rest in Nature's breast
And unnamed stars still burn.
God toiled six days to make this earth,
I think the good folks say---
Six lives we need to give full meed
Of praise---one for each day,
(If love stay near.)

But oh! if love fled far away,
Or veiled his face from me,
One life too much, why then were such
A life as this would be.
With sullen May and blighted June
Blurred dawn and haggard night,
This dear old world in space were hurled
If love lent not his light.
(Oh love stay near.)

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Fame

If I should die, to-day,
To-morrow, maybe, the world would see
Would waken from sleep, and say,
"Why here was talent! why here was worth!
Why here was a luminous light o' the earth.
A soul as free
As the winds of the sea:
To whom was given
A dower of heaven.
And fame, and name, and glory belongs
To this dead singer of living songs.
Bring hither a wreath, for the bride of death!"
And so they would praise me, and so they would raise me
Mayhap, a column, high over the bed
Where I should be lying, all cold and dead.

But I am a living poet!
Walking abroad in the sunlight of God,
Not lying asleep, where the clay worms creep,
And the cold world will not show it,
E'en when it sees that my song should please;
But sneering says: "Avaunt, with thy lays
Do not sing them, and do not bring them
Into this rustling, bustling life.
We have no time, for a jingling rhyme,
In this scene of hurrying, worrying strife."
And so I say, there is but one way
To win me a name, and bring me fame.
And that is, to die, and be buried low,
When the world would praise me, an hour or so.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Fleeing Away

My thoughts soar not as they ought to soar,
Higher and higher on soul-lent wings;
But ever and often and more and more
They are dragged down earthward by little things,
By little troubles and little needs,
As a lark might be tangled among the weeds.

My purpose is not what it ought to be,
Steady and fixed, like a star on high,
But more like a fisherman's light at sea;
Hither and thither it seems to fly--
Sometimes feeble, and sometimes bright,
Then suddenly lost in the gloom of night.

My life is far from my dream of life--
Calmly contented, serenely glad;
But, vexed and worried by daily strife,
It is always troubled and oftentimes sad--
And the heights I had thought I should reach one day
Grow dimmer and dimmer, and farther away.

My heart never finds the longed-for rest;
Its worldly striving, its greed for gold,
Chilled and frightened the calm-eyed guest
Who sometimes sought me in days of old;
And ever fleeing away from me
Is the higher self that I long to be.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Foes

Thank Fate for foes! I hold mine dear
As valued friends. He cannot know
The zest of life who runneth here
His earthly race without a foe.

I saw a prize, "Run," cried my friend;
"T is thine to claim without a doubt."
But ere I half-way reached the end,
I felt my strength was giving out.

My foe looked on the while I ran;
A scornful triumph lit his eyes.
With that perverseness born in man
I nerved myself, and won the prize.

All blinded by the crimson glow
Of sin's disguise I tempted Fate.
"I knew thy weakness!" sneered my foe,
I saved myself, and balked his hate.

For half my blessings, half my gain,
I needs must thank my trusty foe;
Despite his envy and disdain,
He serves me well wher'er I go.

So may I keep him to the end,
Nor may his enmity abate;
More faithful than the fondest friend,
He guards me with his hate.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Go Plant a Tree

God, what a joy it is to plant a tree,
And from the fallow earth to watch it rise,
Lifting its emerald branches to the skies
In silent adoration; and to see
Its strength and glory waxing with each spring.
Yes, 'tis a goodly, and a gladsome thing
To plant a tree.

Nature has many marvels; but a tree
Seems more than marvellous. It is divine.
So generous, so tender, so benign.
Not garrulous like the rivers; and yet free
In pleasant converse with the winds and birds;
Oh! privilege beyond explaining words,
To plant a tree.

Rocks are majestic; but, unlike a tree,
They stand aloof, and silent. In the roar
Of ocean billows breaking on the shore
There sounds the voice of turmoil. But a tree
Speaks ever of companionship and rest.
Yea, of all righteous acts, this, this is best,
To plant a tree.

There is an oak (oh! how I love that tree)
Which has been thriving for a hundred years;
Each day I send my blessing through the spheres
To one who gave this triple boon to me,
Of growing beauty, singing birds, and shade.
Wouldst thou win laurels that shall never fade?

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

I Love You

I love your lips when they're wet with wine
And red with a wild desire;
I love your eyes when the lovelight lies
Lit with a passionate fire.
I love your arms when the warm white flesh
Touches mine in a fond embrace;
I love your hair when the strands enmesh
Your kisses against my face.

Not for me the cold calm kiss
Of a virgin's bloodless love;
Not for me the saint's white bliss,
Nor the heart of a spotless dove.
But give me the love that so freely gives
And laughs at the whole world's blame,
With your body so young and warm in my arms,
It sets my poor heart aflame.

So kiss me sweet with your warm wet mouth,
Still fragrant with ruby wine,
And say with a fervor born of the South
That your body and soul are mine.
Clasp me close in your warm young arms,
While the pale stars shine above,
And we'll live our whole young lives away
In the joys of a living love.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

If

Dear love, if you and I could sail away,
With snowy pennons to the wind unfurled,
Across the waters of some unknown bay,
And find some island far from all the world;

If we could dwell there, ever more alone,
While unrecorded years slip by apace,
Forgetting and forgotten and unknown
By aught save native song-birds of the place;

If Winter never visited that land,
And Summer's lap spilled o'er with fruits and flowers,
And tropic trees cast shade on every hand,
And twinèd boughs formed sleep-inviting bowers;

If from the fashions of the world set free,
And hid away from all its jealous strife,
I lived alone for you, and you for me--
Ah! then, dear love, how sweet were wedded life.

But since we dwell here in the crowded way,
Where hurrying throngs rush by to seek for gold,
And all is common-place and work-a-day,
As soon as love's young honeymoon grows old:

Since fashion rules and nature yields to art,
And life is hurt by daily jar and fret,
'T is best to shut such dreams down in the heart
And go our ways alone, love, and forget.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

In the Long Run

In the long run fame finds the deserving man.
The lucky wight may prosper for a day,
But in good time true merit leads the van,
And vain pretense, unnoticed, goes its way.
There is no Chance, no Destiny, no Fate,
But Fortune smiles on those who work and wait,
In the long run.

In the long run all goodly sorrow pays,
There is no better thing than righteous pain,
The sleepless nights, the awful thorn-crowned days,
Bring sure reward to tortured soul and brain.
Unmeaning joys enervate in the end,
But sorrow yields a glorious dividend
In the long run.

In the long run all hidden things are known,
The eye of truth will penetrate the night,
And good or ill, thy secret shall be known,
However well 't is guarded from the light.
All the unspoken motives of the breast
Are fathomed by the years and stand confest
In the long run.

In the long run all love is paid by love,
Though undervalued by the hosts of earth;
The great eternal Governemnt above
Keeps strict account and will redeem its worth.
Give thy love freely; do not count the cost;
So beautiful a thing was never lost
In the long run.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Kingdom of Love

In the dawn of the day when the sea and the earth
Reflected the sunrise above,
I set forth with a heart full of courage and mirth
To seek for the Kingdom of Love.
I asked of a Poet I met on the way
Which cross-road would lead me aright.
And he said: "Follow me, and not long you shall see
Its glittering turrets of light."

And soon in the distance a city shone fair,
"Look yonder," he said; "how it gleams!"
But alas! for the hopes that were doomed to despair,
It was only the "Kingdom of Dreams."
Then the next man I asked was a gay Cavalier,
And he said: "Follow me, follow me;"
And with laughter and song we went speeding along
By the shores of Life's beautiful sea.

Then we came to a valley more tropical far
Than the wonderful vale of Cashmere,
And I saw from a bower a face like a flower
Smile out on the gay Cavalier.
And he said: "We have come to humanity's goal:
Here love and delight are intense."
But alas and alas! for the hopes of my soul
It was only the "Kingdom of Sense."

As I journeyed more slowly I met on the road
A coach with retainers behind.
And they said: "Follow me, for our Lady's abode
Belongs in that realm, you will find."
'Twas a grand dame of fashion, a newly made bride,
I followed, encouraged and bold;
But my hopes died away like the last gleams of day,
For we came to the "Kingdom of Gold."

At the door of a cottage I asked a fair maid.
"I have heard of that realm," she replied;
"But my feet never roam from the "Kingdom of Home,"
So I know not the way," and she sighed.
I looked on the cottage; how restful it seemed!
And the maid was as fair as a dove.
Great light glorified my soul as I cried:
"Why home is the 'Kingdom of Love!'"

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Last Love

The first flower of the spring is not so fair
Or bright, as one the ripe midsummer brings.
The first faint note the forest warbler sings
Is not as rich with feeling, or so rare
As when, full master of his art, the air
Drowns in the liquid sea of song he flings
Like silver spray from beak, and breast, and wings.
The artist's earliest effort wrought with care,
The bard's first ballad, written in his tears,
Set by his later toil seems poor and tame.
And into nothing dwindles at the test.
So with the passions of maturer years
Let those who will demand the first fond flame,
Give me the heart's last love, for that is best.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Leudeman's-on-the-River

Toward even when the day leans down,
To kiss the upturned face of night,
Out just beyond the loud-voiced town
I know a spot of calm delight.
Like crimson arrows from a quiver
The red rays pierce the water flowing,
While we go dreaming, singing, rowing,
To Leudeman's-on-the-River.

The hills, like some glad mocking-bird,
Send back our laughter and our singing,
While faint--and yet more faint is heard
The steeple bells all sweetly ringing.
Some message did the winds deliver
To each glad heart that August night,
All heard, but all heard not aright;
By Leudeman's-on-the-River.

Night falls as in some foreign clime,
Between the hills that slope and rise.
So dusk the shades at landing time,
We could not see each other's eyes.
We only saw the moonbeams quiver
Far down upon the stream! that night
The new moon gave but little light
By Leudeman's-on-the-River.

How dusky were those paths that led
Up from the river to the hall.
The tall trees branching overhead
Invite the early shades that fall.
In all the glad blithe world, oh, never
Were hearts more free from care than when
We wandered through those walks, we ten,
By Leudeman's-on-the-River.

So soon, so soon, the changes came.
This August day we two alone,
On that same river, not the same,
Dream of a night forever flown.
Strange distances have come to sever
The hearts that gayly beat in pleasure,
Long miles we cannot cross or measure--
From Leudeman's-on-the-River.

We'll pluck two leaves, dear friend, to-day.
The green, the russet! seems it strange
So soon, so soon, the leaves can change!
Ah, me! so runs all night away
This night wind chills me, and I shiver;
The summer time is almost past.
One more good-bye--perhaps the last

To Leudeman's-on-the-River.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Life

All in the dark we grope along,
And if we go amiss
We learn at least which path is wrong,
And there is gain in this.

We do not always win the race,
By only running right,
We have to tread the mountain's base
Before we reach its height.

The Christs alone no errors made;
So often had they trod
The paths that lead through light and shade,
They had become as God.

As Krishna, Buddha, Christ again,
They passed along the way,
And left those mighty truths which men
But dimly grasp to-day.

But he who loves himself the last
And knows the use of pain,
Though strewn with errors all his past,
He surely shall attain.

Some souls there are that needs must taste
Of wrong, ere choosing right;
We should not call those years a waste
Which led us to the light.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Life's Harmonies

Let no man pray that he know not sorrow,
Let no soul ask to be free from pain,
For the gall of to-day is the sweet of to-morrow,
And the moment's loss is the lifetime's gain.

Through want of a thing does its worth redouble,
Through hunger's pangs does the feast content,
And only the heart that has harbored trouble,
Can fully rejoice when joy is sent.

Let no man shrink from the bitter tonics
Of grief, and yearning, and need, and strife,
For the rarest chords in the soul's harmonies,
Are found in the minor strains of life.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Life's Scars

They say the world is round, and yet
I often think it square,
So many little hurts we get
From corners here and there.
But one great truth in life I've found,
While journeying to the West-
The only folks who really wound
Are those we love the best.

The man you thoroughly despise
Can rouse your wrath, 'tis true;
Annoyance in your heart will rise
At things mere strangers do;
But those are only passing ills;
This rule all lives will prove;
The rankling wound which aches and thrills
Is dealt by hands we love.

The choicest garb, the sweetest grace,
Are oft to strangers shown;
The careless mien, the frowning face,
Are given to our own.
We flatter those we scarcely know,
We please the fleeting guest,
And deal full many a thoughtless blow
To those who love us best.

Love does not grow on every tree,
Nor true hearts yearly bloom.
Alas for those who only see
This cut across a tomb!
But, soon or late, the fact grows plain
To all through sorrow's test:
The only folks who give us pain
Are those we love the best.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Lines from

I'd rather have my verses win
A place in common people's hearts,
Who, toiling through the strife and din
Of life's great thoroughfares, and marts,

May read some line my hand has penned;
Some simple verse, not fine, or grand,
But what their hearts can understand
And hold me henceforth as a friend,--

I'd rather win such quiet fame
Than by some fine thought, bolished so
But those of learned minds would know,
Just what the meaning of my song,--
To have the critics sound my name
In high-flown praises, loud and long.

I sing not for the critic's ear,
But for the masses. If they hear
Despite the turmoil, noise, and strife
Some least low note that gladdens life,
I shall be wholly satisfied,
Though critics to the end deride.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Love

The longer I live and the more I see
Of the struggle of souls towards the heights above,
The stronger this truth comes home to me---
That the Universe rests on the shoulders of love,
A love so limitless, deep, and broad,
That men have re-named it, and called it God.

And nothing that was ever born or evolved,
Nothing created by light or force
But deep in its system there lies dissolved
A shining drop from the great Love source;
A shining drop that shall live for aye;
Though kingdoms may perish and stars decay.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Love is Enough

Love is enough. Let us not ask for gold.
Wealth breeds false aims, and pride and selfishness;
In those serene, Arcadian days of old
Men gave no thought to princely homes and dress.
The gods who dwelt on fair Olympia's height
Lived only for dear love and love's delight.
Love is enough.

Love is enough. Why should we care for fame?
Ambition is a most unpleasant guest:
It lures us with the glory of a name
Far from the happy haunts of peace and rest.
Let us stay here in this secluded place
Made beautiful by love's endearing grace!
Love is enough.

Love is enough. Why should we strive for power?
It brings men only envy and distrust.
The poor world's homage pleases but an hour,
And earthly honours vanish in the dust.
The grandest lives are oftentimes desolate;
Let me be loved, and let who will be great.
Love is enough.

Love is enough. Why should we ask for more?
What greater gift have gods vouchsafed to men?
What better boon of all their precious store
Than our fond hearts that love and love again?
Old love may die; new love is just as sweet;
And life is fair and all the world complete:
Love is enough!

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Love's Coming

She had looked for his coming as warriors come,
With the clash of arms and the bugle's call;
But he came instead with a stealthy tread,
Which she did not hear at all.

She had thought how his armor would blaze in the sun,
As he rode like a prince to claim his bride:
In the sweet dim light of the falling night
She found him at her side.

She had dreamed how the gaze of his strange, bold eye
Would wake her heart to a sudden glow:
She found in his face the familiar grace
Of a friend she used to know.

She had dreamed how his coming would stir her soul,
As the ocean is stirred by the wild storm's strife:
He brought her the balm of a heavenly calm,
And a peace which crowned her life.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Love's Supremacy

As yon great Sun in his supreme condition
Absorbs small worlds and makes them all his own,
So does my love absorb each vain ambition
Each outside purpose which my life has known.
Stars cannot shine so near that vast orb's splendor,
They are content to feed his flames of fire;
And so my heart is satisfied to render
Its strength, its all, to meet thy strong desire.

As in a forest when dead leaves are falling,
From all save some perennial green tree,
So one by one I find all pleasures palling
That are not linked with or enjoyed by thee.
And all the homage that the world may proffer,
I take as perfumed oils or incense sweet,
And think of it as one thing more to offer
And sacrifice to Love, at thy dear feet.

I love myself because thou art my lover,
My name seems dear since uttered by thy voice;
Yet argus-eyed I watch and would discover
Each blemish in the object of thy choice.
I coldly sit in judgment on each error,
To my soul's gaze I hold each fault of me,
Until my pride is lost in abject terror,
Lest I become inadequate to thee.

Like some swift-rushing and sea-seeking river,
Which gathers force the farther on it goes,
So does the current of my love forever
Find added strength and beauty as it flows.
The more I give, the more remains for giving,
The more receive, the more remains to win.
Ah! only in eternities of living
Will life be long enough to love thee in.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

My Comrade

Out from my window westward
I turn full oft my face;
But the mountains rebuke the vision
That would encompass space;
They lift their lofty foreheads
To the kiss of the clouds above,
And ask, "With all our glory,
Can we not win your love?"

I answer, "No, oh mountains!
I see that you are grand;
But you have not the breadth and beauty
Of the fields in my own land;
You narrow my range of vision
And you even shut from me
The voice of my old comrade,
The West Wind wild and free."

But to-day I climbed the mountains
On the back of a snow-white steed,
And the West Wind came to greet me--
He flew on the wings of speed.
His charger, and mine that bore me,
Went gaily neck to neck,
Till the town in the valley belkow us
Looked like a small, dark speck.

And oh! what tales he whispered
As he rode there by me,
Of friends whose smiling faces
I am so soon to see.
And the mountains frowned in anger,
Because I balked their spite,
And met my old-time comrade
There on their very height;

But I laughed up in their faces,
As I rode slowly back,
While the Wind went faster and faster,
Like a race-horse on the track.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

My Home

This is the place that I love the best,
A little brown house, like a ground-bird's nest,
Hid among grasses, and vines, and trees,
Summer retreat of the birds and bees.

The tenderest light that ever was seen
Sifts through the vine-made window screen--
Sifts and quivers, and flits and falls
On home-made carpets and gray-hung walls.

All through June the west wind free
The breath of clover brings to me.
All through the languid July day
I catch the scent of new-mown hay.

The morning-glories and scarlet vine
Over the doorway twist and twine;
And every day, when the house is still,
The humming-bird comes to the window-sill.

In the cunningest chamber under the sun
I sink to sleep when the day is done;
And am waked at morn, in my snow-white bed,
By a singing bird on the roof o'erhead.

Better than treasures brought from Rome,
Are the living pictures I see at home--
My aged father, with frosted hair,
And mother's face, like a painting rare.

Far from the city's dust and heat,
I get but sounds and odors sweet.
Who can wonder I love to stay,
Week after week, here hidden away,
In this sly nook that I love the best--
This little brown house like a ground-bird's nest?

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

My Ships

If all the ships I have at sea
Should come a-sailing home to me,
From sunny lands, and lands of cold,
Ah well! the harbor could not hold
So many sails as there would be
If all my ships came in from sea.

If half my ships came home from sea,
And brought their precious freight to me,
Ah, well! I should have wealth as great
As any king who sits in state,
So rich the treasures that would be
In half my ships now at sea.

If just one ship I have at sea
Should come a-sailing home to me,
Ah well! the storm clouds then might frown,
For if the others all went down
Still rich and proud and glad I'd be,
If that one ship came back to me.

If that one ship were down at sea,
And all the others came to me,
Weighed down with gems and wealth untold,
With glory, honor, riches, gold,
The poorest soul on earth I'd be
If that one ship came not to me.

O skies be calm! O winds blow free--
Blow all my ships safe home to me.
But if thou sendest some awrack
To never more come sailing back,
Send any--all that skim the sea--
But bring my love-ship home to me.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

My Vision

Wherever my feet may wander
Wherever I chance to be,
There comes, with the coming of even' time
A vision sweet to me.
I see my mother sitting
In the old familiar place,
And she rocks to the tune her needles sing,
And thinks of an absent face.

I can hear the roar of the city
About me now as I write;
But over an hundred miles of snow
My thought-steeds fly tonight,
To the dear little cozy cottage,
And the room where mother sits,
And slowly rocks in her easy chair
And thinks of me as she knits.

Sometimes with the merry dancers
When my feet are keeping time,
And my heart beats high, as young hearts will,
To the music's rhythmic chime.
My spirit slips over the distance
Over the glitter and whirl,
To my mother who sits, and rocks, and knits,
And thinks of her "little girl."

And when I listen to voices that flatter,
And smile, as women do,
To whispered words that may be sweet,
But are not always true;
I think of the sweet, quaint picture
Afar in quiet ways,
And I know one smile of my mother's eyes
Is better than all their praise.

And I know I can never wander
Far from the path of right,
Though snares are set for a woman's feet
In places that seem most bright.
For the vision is with me always,
Wherever I chance to be,
Of mother sitting, rocking, and knitting,
Thinking and praying for me.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Old Times

Friend of my youth, let us talk of old times;
Of the long lost golden hours.
When "Winter" meant only Christmas chimes,
And "Summer" wreaths of flowers.
Life has grown old, and cold, my friend,
And the winter now, means death.
And summer blossoms speak all too plain
Of the dear, dead forms beneath.

But let us talk of the past to-night;
And live it over again,
We will put the long years out of sight,
And dream we are young as then.
But you must not look at me, my friend,
And I must not look at you,
Or the furrowed brows, and silvered locks,
Will prove our dream untrue.

Let us sing of the summer, too sweet to last,
And yet too sweet to die.
Let us read tales, from the book of the past,
And talk of the days gone by.
We will turn our backs to the West, my friend,
And forget we are growing old.
The skies of the Present are dull, and gray,
But the Past's are blue, and gold.

The sun has passed over the noontide line
And is sinking down the West.
And of friends we knew in days Lang Syne,
Full half have gone to rest.
And the few that are left on earth, my friend
Are scattered far, and wide.
But you and I will talk of the days
Ere any roamed, or died.

Auburn ringlets, and hazel eyes
Blue eyes and tresses of gold.
Winds joy laden, and azure skies,
Belong to those days of old.
We will leave the Present's shores awhile
And float on the Past's smooth sea.
But I must not look at you, my friend,
And you must not look at me.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Over the Banisters

Over the banisters bends a face,
Daringly sweet and beguiling.
Somebody stands in careless grace,
And watches the picture, smiling.

The light burns dim in the hall below,
Nobody sees her standing,
Saying good-night again, soft and slow,
Half way up to the landing.

Nobody only the eyes of brown,
Tender and full of meaning,
That smile on the fairest face in town,
Over the banisters leaning.

Tired and sleepy, with drooping head,
I wonder why she lingers;
Now, when the good-nights all are said,
Why somebody holds her fingers.

He holds her fingers and draws her down,
Suddenly growing bolder,
Till the loose hair drops its masses brown,
Like a mantle over his shoulder.

Over the banisters soft hands, fair,
Brush his cheeks like a feather,
And bright brown tresses and dusky hair,
Meet and mingle together.

There's a question asked, there's a swift caress,
She has flown like a bird from the hallway,
But over the banisters drops a "yes,"
That shall brighten the world for him always.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Penalty

Because of the fullness of what I had,
All that I have seems poor and vain.
If I had not been happy, I were not sad--
Tho' my salt is savorless, why complain?

From the ripe perfection of what was mine,
All that is mine seems worse than naught;
Yet I know, as I sit in the dark and pine,
No cup can be drained which has not been fraught.

From the throb and the thrill of a day that was,
The day that now is seems dull with gloom;
Yet I bear the dullness and darkness, because
'Tis but the reaction of glow and bloom.

From the royal feast that of old was spread
I am starved on the diet that now is mine;
Yet, I could not turn hungry from water and bread
If I had not been sated on fruit and wine.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Possession

That which we had we still possess,
Though leaves may drop and stars may fall;
No circumstance can make it less
Or take it from us, all in all.

That which is lost we did not own;
We only held it for a day--
A leaf by careless breezes blown:
No fate could take our own away.

I hold it as a changeless law
From which no soul can ever sway or swerve,
We have that in us which will draw
Whate'er we need or most deserve.

Even as the magnet to the steel
Our souls are to the best desires;
The Fates have hearts and they can feel--
They know what each true heart requires.

We think we lose when most we gain;
We call joys ended ere begun;
When stars fade out do skies complain,
Or glory in the rising sun?

No fate could rob us of our own--
No circumstance can make it less;
What time removes was but a loan,
For what was ours we still possess.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Progress

Let there be many windows to your soul,
That all the glory of the universe
May beautify it. Not the narrow pane
Of one poor creed can catch the radiant rays
That shine from countless sources. Tear away
The blinds of superstition; let the light
Pour through fair windows broad as truth itself
And high as God.
Why should the spirit peer
Through some priest-curtained orifice, and grope
Along dim corridors of doubt, when all
The splendor from unfathomed seas of space
Might bathe it with the golden waves of Love?
Sweep up the debris of decaying faiths;
Sweep down the cobwebs of worn-out beliefs,
And throw your soul wide open to the light
Of Reason and of knowledge. Tune your ear
To all the wordless music of the stars,
And to the voice of Nature; and your heart
Shall turn to truth and goodness as the plant
Turns to the sun. A thousand unseen hands
Reach down to help you to their peace-crowned heights,
And all the forces of the firmament
Shall fortify your strength. Be not afraid
To thrust aside half-truths and grasp the whole.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Smoke

Last summer, lazing by the sea,
I met a most entrancing creature,
Her black eyes quite bewildered me---
She had a Spanish cast of feature.

She often smoked a cigarette,
And did it in the cutest fashion.
Before a week passed by she set
My young heart in a raging passion.

I swore I loved her as my life,
I gave her gems (don't tell my tailor).
She promised to become my wife,
But whispered, 'Papa is my jailer.'

'We must be very sly, you see,
For Papa will not list to reason.
You must not come to call on me
Until he's gone from home a season.

'I'll send you word, now don't forget,
Take this as pledge, I will remember.'
She gave me a perfumed cigarette,
And turned and left me with September.

To-day she sent her 'cards' to me.
'My presence asked' to see her marry
That millionaire old banker C---
She has my 'presents,' so I'll tarry.

And still I feel a keen regret
(About the jewels that I gave her)
I've smoked the little cigarette---
It had a most delicious flavour.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Solitude

Laugh, and the world laughs with you;
Weep, and you weep alone.
For the sad old earth must borrow it's mirth,
But has trouble enough of it's own.
Sing, and the hills will answer;
Sigh, it is lost on the air.
The echoes bound to a joyful sound,
But shrink from voicing care.

Rejoice, and men will seek you;
Grieve, and they turn and go.
They want full measure of all your pleasure,
But they do not need your woe.
Be glad, and your friends are many;
Be sad, and you lose them all.
There are none to decline your nectared wine,
But alone you must drink life's gall.

Feast, and your halls are crowded;
Fast, and the world goes by.
Succeed and give, and it helps you live,
But no man can help you die.
There is room in the halls of pleasure
For a long and lordly train,
But one by one we must all file on
Through the narrow aisles of pain.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Sweet Danger

The danger of war, with its havoc of life,
The danger of ocean, when storms are rife,
The danger of jungles, where wild beasts hide,
The danger that lies in the mountain slide---
Why, what are they but all mere child's play,
Or the idle sport of a summer day,
Beside those battles that stir and vex
The world forever, of sex with sex?

The warrior returns from the captured fort,
The mariner sails to a peaceful port;
The wild beast quails 'neath the strong man's eye,
The avalanche passes the traveller by---
But who can rescue from passion's pyre
The hearts that were offered to feed its fire?
Ah! he who emerges from that fierce flame
Is scarred with sorrow or blackened with shame.

Battle and billow, and beast of prey,
They only threaten the mortal clay;
The soul unfettered can take to wing,
But the danger of love is another thing.
Once under the tyrant Passion's control,
He crushes body, and heart, and soul.
An hour of rapture, an age of despair,
Ah! these are the trophies of love's warfare.

And yet forever, since time began,
Has man dared woman and woman lured man
To that sweet danger that lurks and lies
In the bloodless battle of eyes with eyes;
That reckless danger, as vast as sweet,
Whose bitter ending is joy's defeat.
Ah! thus forever, while time shall last,
On passion's altar must hearts be cast!

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Thanksgiving

We walk on starry fields of white
And do not see the daisies;
For blessings common in our sight
We rarely offer praises.
We sigh for some supreme delight
To crown our lives with splendor,
And quite ignore our daily store
Of pleasures sweet and tender.

Our cares are bold and push their way
Upon our thought and feeling.
They hang about us all the day,
Our time from pleasure stealing.
So unobtrusive many a joy
We pass by and forget it,
But worry strives to own our lives
And conquers if we let it.

There's not a day in all the year
But holds some hidden pleasure,
And looking back, joys oft appear
To brim the past's wide measure.

But blessings are like friends, I hold,
Who love and labor near us.
We ought to raise our notes of praise
While living hearts can hear us.

Full many a blessing wears the guise
Of worry or of trouble.
Farseeing is the soul and wise
Who knows the mask is double.
But he who has the faith and strength
To thank his God for sorrow
Has found a joy without alloy
To gladden every morrow.

We ought to make the moments notes
Of happy, glad Thanksgiving;
The hours and days a silent phrase
Of music we are living.
And so the theme should swell and grow
As weeks and months pass o'er us,
And rise sublime at this good time,
A grand Thanksgiving chorus.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The Engine

Into the gloom of the deep, dark night,
With panting breath and a startled scream;
Swift as a bird in sudden flight
Darts this creature of steel and steam.

Awful dangers are lurking nigh,
Rocks and chasms are near the track,
But straight by the light of its great white eye
It speeds through the shadows, dense and black.

Terrible thoughts and fierce desires
Trouble its mad heart many an hour,
Where burn and smoulder the hidden fires,
Coupled ever with might and power.

It hates, as a wild horse hates the rein,
The narrow track by vale and hill;
And shrieks with a cry of startled pain,
And longs to follow its own wild will.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The King and the Siren

The harsh King--Winter--sat upon the hills,
And reigned and ruled the earth right royally.
He locked the rivers, lakes, and all the rills--
"I am no puny, maudlin king," quoth he,
"But a stern monarch, born to rule, and reign;
And I'll show my power to the end.
The summer's flowery retinue I've slain,
And taken the bold, free North Wind for my friend.

"Spring, Summer, Autumn--feeble queens they were,
With their vast troops of flowers, birds and bees,
Soft winds, that made the long green grasses stir--
They lost their own identity in things like these!
I scorn them all! nay, I defy them all!
And none can wrest the sceptre from my hand.
The trusty North Wind answers to my call,
And breathes this icy breath upon the land."

The Siren--South Wind--listening the while,
Now floated airily across the lea.
"Oh King!" she cried, with tender tone and smile,
"I come to do all homage unto thee.
In all the sunny region, whence I came,
I find none like thee, King, so brave and grand!
Thine is a well deserved, unrivaled fame;
I kiss, in awe, dear King, thy cold white hand."

Her words were pleasing, and most fair her face.
He listened wrapt, to her soft-whispered praise.
She nestled nearer, in her Siren grace.
"Dear King," she said, "henceforth my voice shall raise
But songs of thy unrivaled splendor! Lo!
How white thy brow is! How thy garments shine!
I tremble 'neath thy beaming glance, for Oh,
Thy wondrous beauty mak'st thee seem divine."

The rain King listened, in a trance of bliss,
To this most sweet-voiced Siren from the South,
She nestled close, and pressed a lingering kiss
Upon the stern white pallor of his mouth.
She hung upon his breast, she pressed his cheek,
And he was nothing loth to hold her there,
While she such tender, loving words did speak,
And combed his white locks with her fingers fair.

And so she bound him, in her Siren wiles,
And stole his strength, with every kiss she gave,
And stabbed him through and through with tender smiles,
And with her tender words she dug his grave;
And then she left him, old, and weak, and blind,
And unlocked all the rivers, lakes, and rills,
While the queen Spring, with her whole troop behind,

Of flowers, and birds, and bees, came o'er the hills.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The Kingdom of Love

In the dawn of the day, when the sea and the earth
Reflected the sunrise above,
I set forth, with a heart full of courage and mirth,
To seek for the Kingdom of Love.
I asked of a Poet I met on the way,
Which cross-road would lead me aright,
And he said: "Follow me, and ere long you will see
Its glistening turrets of Light."

And soon in the distance a city shone fair;
"Look yonder," he said, "there it gleams!"
But alas! for the hopes that were doomed to despair,
It was only the Kingdom of Dreams.
Then the next man I asked was a gay cavalier,
And he said: "Follow me, follow me."
And with laughter and song we went speeding along
By the shores of life's beautiful sea,

Till we came to a valley more tropical far
Than the wonderful Vale of Cashmere,
And I saw from a bower a face like a flower
Smile out on the gay cavalier,
And he said: "We have come to humanity's goal---
Here love and delight are intense."
But alas! and alas! for the hope of my soul---
It was only the Kingdom of Sense.

As I journeyed more slowly, I met on the road
A coach with retainers behind,
And they said: "Follow us, for our lady's abode
Belongs in the realm you would find."
'Twas a grand dame of fashion, a newly-wed bride;
I followed, encouraged and bold.
But my hope died away, like the last gleams of day,
For we came to the Kingdom of Gold.

At the door of a cottage I asked a fair maid.
"I have heard of that Realm," she replied,
"But my feet never roam from the Kingdom of Home,
So I know not the way," and she sighed.
I looked on the cottage, how restful it seemed!
And the maid was as fair as a dove.
Great light glorified my soul as I cried,
"Why, home is the Kingdom of Love!"

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The Past

I fling the past behind me, like a robe
Worn threadbare at the seams, and out of date.
I have outgrown it. Wherefore should I weep
And dwell upon its beauty, and its dyes
Of oriental splendor, or complain
That I must needs discard it? I can weave
Upon the shuttles of the future years
A fabric far more durable. Subdued,
It may be, in the blending of its hues,
Where somber shades commingle, yet the gleam
Of golden warp shall shoot it through and through,
While over all a fadeless luster lies,
And starred with gems made out of crystallized tears,
My new robe shall be richer than the old.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The Room Beneath the Rafters

Sometimes when I have dropped asleep,
Draped in soft luxurious gloom,
Across my drowsy mind will creep
The memory of another room,
Where resinous knots in roofboards made
A frescoing of light and shade,
And sighing poplars brushed their leaves
Against the humbly sloping eaves.

Again I fancy in my dreams
I'm lying in my trundle-bed.
I seem to see the bare old beams
And unhewn rafters overhead;
The hornet's shrill falsetto hum
I hear again, and see him come
Forth from his mud-walled hanging house,
Dressed in his black and yellow blouse.

There, summer dawns, in sleep I stirred,
And wove into my fair dream's woof
The chattering of a martin bird,
Or rain-drops pattering on the roof.
Or, half awake, and half in fear,
I saw the spider spinning near
His pretty castle, where the fly
Should come to ruin by and by.

And there I fashioned from my brain
Youth's shining structures in the air,
I did not wholly build in vain,
For some were lasting, firm and fair.
And I am one who lives to say
My life has held more good than gray,
And that the splendor of the real
Surpassed my early dream's ideal.

But still I love to wander back
To that old time and that old place;
To thread my way o'er Memory's track,
And catch the early morning's grace
In that quaint room beneath the rafter,
That echoed to my childish laughter;
To dream again the dreams that grew
More beautiful as they came true.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The Tavern of Last Times

At Box Hill, Surrey

A modern hour from London (as we spin
Into a silver thread the miles of space
Between us and our goal), there is a place
Apart from city traffic, dust, and din,
Green with great trees, where hides a quiet Inn.
Here Nelson last looked on the lovely face
Which made his world; and by its magic grace
Trailed rosy clouds across each early sin.
And, leaning lawnward, is the room where Keats
Wrote the last one of those immortal songs
(Called by the critics of his day 'mere rhymes').
A lark, high in the boxwood bough repeats
Those lyric strains, to idle passing throngs,
There by the little Tavern-of-Last-Times.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The Traveled Man

Sometimes I wish the railroads all were torn out,
The ships all sunk among the coral strands.
I am so very weary, yea, so worn out,
With tales of those who visit foreign lands.

When asked to dine, to meet these traveled people,
My soup seems brewed from cemetery bones.
The fish grows cold on some cathedral steeple,
I miss two courses while I stare at thrones.

I'm forced to leave my salad quite untasted,
Some musty, moldy temple to explore.
The ices, fruit and coffee all are wasted
While into realms of ancient art I soar.

I'd rather take my chance of life and reason,
If in a den of roaring lions hurled
Than for a single year, ay, for one season,
To dwell with folks who'd traveled round the world.

So patronizing are they, so oppressive,
With pity for the ones who stay at home,
So mighty is their knowledge, so aggressive,
I oftentimes wish they had not ceased to roam.

They loathe the new, they quite detest the present;
They revel in a pre-Columbian morn;
Just dare to say America is pleasant,
And die beneath the glances of their scorn.

They are increasing at a rate alarming,
Go where I will, the traveled man is there.
And now I think that rustic wholly charming
Who has not strayed beyond his meadows fair.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The Two Glasses

There sat two glasses, filled to the brim,
On a rich man's table, rim to rim.
One was ruddy and red as blood,
And one was clear as the crystal flood.

Said the glass of wine to his paler brother,
"Let us tell tales of the past to each other;
I can tell of banquet, and revel, and mirth,
Where I was a king, for I ruled in might;
For the proudest and grandest souls on earth
Fell under my touch, as though struck with blight.
From the heads of kings I have torn the crown;
From the heights of fame I have hurled men down.
I have blasted many an honored name;
I have taken virtue and given shame;
I have tempted the youth with a sip, a taste,
That has made his future a barren waste.
Far greater than any king am I,
Or than any army beneath the sky.
I have made the arm of the driver fail,
And sent the train from the iron rail.
I have made good ships go down at sea,
And the shrieks of the lost were sweet to me.
Fame, strength, wealth, genius before me fall;
Ho, ho! pale brother," said the wine,
"Can you boast of deeds as great as mine?"

Said the water-glass: "I cannot boast
Of a king dethroned, or a murdered host,
But I can tell of hearts that were sad
By my crystal drops made bright and glad;
Of thirsts I have quenched, and brows I have laved;
Of hands I have cooled, and souls I have saved.
I have leaped through the valley, dashed down the mountain,
Slept in the sunshine, and dripped from the fountain.
I have burst my cloud-fetters, and dropped from the sky,
And everywhere gladdened the prospect and eye;
I have eased the hot forehead of fever and pain;
I have made the parched meadows grow fertile with grain.
I can tell of the powerful wheel of the mill,
That ground out the flower, and turned at my will.
I can tell of manhood debased by you,
That I have uplifted and crowned anew;
I cheer, I help, I strengthen and aid;
I gladden the heart of man and maid;
I set the wine-chained captive free,
And all are better for knowing me."

These are the tales they told each other,
The glass of wine and its paler brother,
As they sat together, filled to the brim,
On a rich man's table, rim to rim.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The Unattained

A vision beauteous as the morn,
With heavenly eyes and tresses streaming,
Slow glided o'er a field late shorn
Where walked a poet idly dreaming.
He saw her, and joy lit his face.
"Oh, vanish not at human speaking,"
He cried, "thou form of magic grace,
Thou art the poem I am seeking.

"I've sought thee long! I claim thee now---
My thought embodied, living, real."
She shook the tresses from her brow.
"Nay, nay!" she said, "I am ideal.
I am the phantom of desire---
The spirit of all great endeavour,
I am the voice that says, 'Come higher.'
That calls men up and up for ever.

"'Tis not alone the thought supreme
That here upon thy path has risen;
I am the artist's highest dream,
The ray of light he cannot prison.
I am the sweet ecstatic note
Than all glad music gladder, clearer,
That trembles in the singer's throat,
And dies without a human hearer.

"I am the greater, better yield,
That leads and cheers thy farmer neighbour,
For me he bravely tills the field
And whistles gaily at his labour.
Not thou alone, O poet soul,
Dost seek me through an endless morrow,
But to the toiling, hoping whole
I am at once the hope and sorrow.
The spirit of the unattained,
I am to those who seek to name me,
A good desired but never gained.
All shall pursue, but none shall claim me."

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The Undiscovered Country

Man has explored all countries and all lands,
And made his own the secrets of each clime.
Now, ere the world has fully reached its prime,
The oval earth lies compassed with steel bands,
The seas are slaves to ships that touch all strands,
And even the haughty elements sublime
And bold, yield him their secrets for all time,
And speed like lackeys forth at his commands.

Still, though he search from shore to distant shore,
And no strange realms, no unlocated plains
Are left for his attainment and control,
Yet is there one more kingdom to explore.
Go, know thyself, O man! there yet remains
The undiscovered country of thy soul!

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The Winds of Fate

One ship drives east and another drives west
With the selfsame winds that blow.
Tis the set of the sails
And not the gales
Which tells us the way to go.
Like the winds of the seas are the ways of fate,
As we voyage along through the life:
Tis the set of a soul
That decides its goal,
And not the calm or the strife.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The Year

What can be said in New Year rhymes,
That's not been said a thousand times?

The new years come, the old years go,
We know we dream, we dream we know.

We rise up laughing with the light,
We lie down weeping with the night.

We hug the world until it stings,
We curse it then and sigh for wings.

We live, we love, we woo, we wed,
We wreath our prides, we sheet our dead.

We laugh, we weep, we hope, we fear,
And that's the burden of a year.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Two Sunsets

In the fair morning of his life,
When his pure heart lay in his breast,
Panting, with all that wild unrest
To plunge into the great world's strife

That fills young hearts with mad desire,
He saw a sunset. Red and gold
The burning billows surged and rolled,
And upward tossed their caps of fire.

He looked. And as he looked the sight
Sent from his soul through breast and brain
Such intense joy, it hurt like pain.
His heart seemed bursting with delight.

So near the Unknown seemed, so close
He might have grasped it with his hand.
He felt his inmost soul expand,
As sunlight will expand a rose.

One day he heard a singing strain--
A human voice, in bird-like trills.
He paused, and little rapture-rills
Went trickling downward through each vein.

And in his heart the whole day long,
As in a temple veiled and dim,
He kept and bore about with him
The beauty of that singer's song.

And then? But why relate what then?
His smoldering heart flamed into fire--
He had his one supreme desire,
And plunged into the world of men.

For years queen Folly held her sway.
With pleasures of the grosser kind
She fed his flesh and drugged his mind,
Till, shamed, he sated turned away.

He sought his boyhood's home. That hour
Triumphant should have been, in sooth,
Since he went forth an unknown youth,
And came back crowned with wealth and power.

The clouds made day a gorgeous bed;
He saw the splendor of the sky
With unmoved heart and stolid eye;
He knew only West was red.

Then suddenly a fresh young voice
Rose, bird-like, from some hidden place,

He did not even turn his face;
It struck him simply as a noise.

He trod the old paths up and down.
Their ruf-hued leaves by Fall winds whirled--
How dull they were--how dull the world--
Dull even in the pulsing town.

O! worst of punishments, that brings
A blunting of all finer sense,
A loss of feelings keen, intense,
And dulls us to the higher things.

O! penalty most dire, most sure,
Swift following after gross delights,
That we no more see beauteous sights,
Or hear as hear the good and pure.

O! shape more hideous and more dread
Than Vengeance takes in creed-taught minds,
This certain doom that blunts and blinds,
And strikes the holiest feelings dead.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Upon the Sand

All love that has not friendship for its base,
Is like a mansion built upon the sand.
Though brave its walls as any in the land,
And its tall turrets lift their heads in grace;
Though skillful and accomplished artists trace
Most beautiful designs on every hand,
And gleaming statues in dim niches stand,
And mountains play in some flow'r-hidden place:

Yet, when from the frowning east a sudden gust
Of adverse fate is blown, or sad rains fall
Day in, day out, against its yielding wall,
Lo! the fair structure crumbles to the dust.
Love, to endure life's sorrow and earth's woe,
Needs friendship's solid masonwork below.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Voice of the Voiceless

I am the Voice of the Voiceless
Through me the dumb shall speak
Till the world's deaf ear be made to hear
The wrongs of the wordless weak.
Oh shame on the mothers of mortals
Who do not stoop to teach
The sorrow that lies in dear dumb eyes
The sorrow that has no speech.
From street, from cage, from kennel
From stable and from zoo
The wall of my tortured kin proclaims the sin
Of the mighty against the frail.
But I am my brother's keeper
And I shall fight their fight
And speak the word for beast and bird
Till the world shall set things right.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

What We Want

We have scores of temperance men,
Bold and earnest, brave and true,
Fighting with the tongue and pen,
And we value what they do.
But, my friends,
To gain our ends,
You must use the ballot, too.

When we tell about our cause,
Politicians only smile;
While they mould and make our laws,
What care they for rank or file?
"Preach and pray,"
They sneer and say;
"We'll make liquor laws the while."

We want men who dare to fling
Party ties and bonds away;
Who will cast them off, and cling
To the RIGHT, and boldly say,
"No beer bloats
Shall get our votes."
Then shall our cause gain the day.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

When you go Away

When you go away, my friend,
When you say your last good-bye,
Then the summer time will end,
And the winter will be nigh.

Though the green grass decks the heather,
And the birds sing all the day,
There will be no summer weather
After you have gone away.

When I look into your eyes,
I shall thrill with deepest pain,
Thinking that beneath the skies
I may never look again.

You will feel a moment's sorrow,
I shall feel a lasting grief;
You forgetting on the morrow,
I to mourn with no relief.

When we say the last sad word,
And you are no longer near,
And the winds and all the birds
Cannot keep the summer here,

Life will lose its full completeness---
Lose it not for you, but me;
All the beauty and the sweetness
Each can hold, I shall not see.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Which are You?

There are two kinds of people on earth to-day;
Just two kinds of people, no more, I say.

Not the sinner and saint, for it's well understood,
The good are half bad, and the bad are half good.

Not the rich and the poor, for to rate a man's wealth,
You must first know the state of his conscience and health.

Not the humble and proud, for in life's little span,
Who puts on vain airs, is not counted a man.

Not the happy and sad, for the swift flying years
Bring each man his laughter and each man his tears.

No; the two kinds of people on earth I mean,
Are the people who lift, and the people who lean.

Wherever you go, you will find the earth's masses,
Are always divided in just these two classes.

And oddly enough, you will find too, I ween,
There's only one lifter to twenty who lean.

In which class are you? Are you easing the load,
Of overtaxed lifters, who toil down the road?

Or are you a leaner, who lets others share
Your portion of labor, and worry and care?

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Will

You will be what you will to be;
Let failure find its false content
In that poor word "environment,"
But spirit scorns it, and is free,

It masters time, it conquers space,
It cows that boastful trickster Chance,
And bids the tyrant Circumstance
Uncrown and fill a servant's place.

The human Will, that force unseen,
The offspring of a deathless Soul,
Can hew the way to any goal,
Though walls of granite intervene.

Be not impatient in delay,
But wait as one who understands;
When spirit rises and commands,
The gods are ready to obey.

The river seeking for the sea
Confronts the dam and precipice,
Yet knows it cannot fail or miss;
You will be what you will to be!

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Worth While

It is easy enough to be pleasant,
When life flows by like a song,
But the man worth while is one who will smile,
When everything goes dead wrong.
For the test of the heart is trouble,
And it always comes with the years,
And the smile that is worth the praises of earth
Is the smile that shines through tears.

It is easy enough to be prudent,
When nothing tempts you to stray,
When without or within no voice of sin
Is luring your soul away;
But it's only a negative virtue
Until it is tried by fire,
And the life that is worth the honor of earth
Is the one that resists desire.

By the cynic, the sad, the fallen,
Who had no strength for the strife,
The world's highway is cumbered to-day;
They make up the sum of life.
But the virtue that conquers passion,
And the sorrow that hides in a smile,
It is these that are worth the homage on earth
For we find them but once in a while.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

You Will Forget Me

You will forget me. The years are so tender,
They bind up the wounds which we think are so deep,
This dream of our youth will fade out as the splendour
Fades from the skies when the sun sinks to sleep,
The cloud of forgetfulness, over and over
Will banish the last rosy colours away,
And the fingers of time will weave garlands to cover
The scar which you think is a life-mark today.

You will forget me. The one boon you covet
Now above all things will soon seem no prize,
And the heart, which you hold not in keeping to prove it
True or untrue, will lose worth in your eyes.
The one drop to-day, that you deem only wanting
To fill your life-cup to the brim, soon will seem
But a valueless mite; and the ghost that is haunting
The aisles of your heart will pass out with the dream.

You will forget me, will thank me for saying
The words which you think are so pointed with pain.
Time loves a new lay, and the dirge he is playing
Will change for you soon to a livelier strain.
I shall pass from your life, I shall pass out forever,
And these hours we have spent will be sunk in the past.
Youth buries its dead, grief kills seldom or never
And forgetfulness covers all sorrows at last.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox