

**SELECTED
POEMS**

of

EGBERT MARTIN

Egbert Martin
SELECTED POEMS
with an Introduction by David Dabydeen

Egbert Martin wrote under the name of 'Leo'. His *Poetical Works* was published in 1883 and *Leo's Local Lyrics* in 1886

This edition © The Caribbean Press 2010
Series Preface © Bharrat Jagdeo 2010
Introduction © David Dabydeen 2006

Cover design by Cristiano Coppola

All rights reserved
No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted
in any form without permission

Published by The Caribbean Press for the Government of
Guyana

This publication was made possible by the financial support
of the Peepal Tree Press (Leeds), the Lord Gavron Trust and
the Government of Guyana

ISBN 978-1-907493-05-8



THE GUYANA CLASSICS LIBRARY

**Series Preface by the President of Guyana,
H.E. Bharrat Jagdeo**

General Editor:

David Dabydeen

Consulting Editor:

Ian McDonald

Director of Research:

Letizia Gramaglia

SERIES PREFACE

Modern Guyana came into being, in the Western imagination, through the travelogue of Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Discoverie of Guiana* (1595). Raleigh was as beguiled by Guiana's landscape ("I never saw a more beautiful country...") as he was by the prospect of plunder ("every stone we stooped to take up promised either gold or silver by his complexion"). Raleigh's contemporaries, too, were doubly inspired, writing, as Thoreau says, of Guiana's "majestic forests", but also of its earth, "resplendent with gold." By the eighteenth century, when the trade in Africans was in full swing, writers cared less for Guiana's beauty than for its mineral wealth. Sugar was the poet's muse, hence the epic work by James Grainger *The Sugar Cane* (1764), a poem which deals with subjects such as how best to manure the sugar cane plant, the most effective diet for the African slaves, worming techniques, etc. As John Singleton confessed (in his *General Description of the West Indies*, 1776), there was no contradiction between the manufacture of odes and that of sugar: "...a fine exuberant plant, which clothes the fields with the richest verdure. There is, I believe, scarcely any cultivation which yields so lucrative a return per acre as under favourable circumstances, than that of the sugar cane. So bountiful a gift of Providence seems not only calculated to call forth the activity and enterprise of the agriculturalist and merchant, but to awaken also feelings of a higher and more refined enthusiasm." The refinement of art and that of sugar were one and the same process.

The nineteenth century saw the introduction of Indian indentureship, but as the sugar industry expanded, literary works contracted. Edward Jenkins' novel *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877) was the only substantial fiction on Guiana, and whilst it was broadly sympathetic to the plight of Indian labourers, it was certain of Britain's imperial destiny, and rights over mineral

resources. It was not until the period leading up to Guiana's Independence from Britain (1966) and the subsequent years, that our own writers of Amerindian, African, Asian and European ancestry (A.J. Seymour, Wilson Harris, Jan Carew, Edgar Mittelholzer, Martin Carter, Rajkumari Singh et al.) attempted to purify literature of its commercial taint, restoring to readers a vision of the complexity of the Guyanese character and the beauty of the Guyanese landscape.

The Guyana Classics Library will republish out-of-print poetry, novels and travelogues so as to remind us of our literary heritage, and it will also remind us of our reputation for scholarship in the fields of history, anthropology, sociology and politics, through the reprinting of seminal works in these subjects. The Series builds upon previous Guyanese endeavours, like the institution of CARIFESTA and the Guyana Prize. I am delighted that my government has originated the project and has pledged that every library in the land will be furnished with titles from the Series, so that all Guyanese can appreciate our monumental achievement in moving from Exploitation to Expression. If the Series becomes the foundation and inspiration for future literary and scholarly works, then my government will have moved towards fulfilling one of its primary tasks, which is the educational development of our people.

President Bharrat Jagdeo

SELECTED POEMS

of

EGBERT MARTIN

edited by
David Dabydeen



The Caribbean Press

The Guyana Classics Library

CONTENTS

Introduction	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xix

Section I from *Leo's Poetical Works* (1883)

Inscription	1
Thanksgiving	3
The Poet	4
Looking Back	6
The Almshouse	7
Sky Pictures	9
Along Yon Stretch	11
The Unfolding Rose	13
Of Humble Life	14
Made Perfect Through Suffering	16
Disappointment	18
The Magic View	19
The Hammock Maker, An Indian Eclogue	24
The Negro Village	26

Section II from *Leo's Local Lyrics* (1886)

The Creek	35
The River	39
The Image	41
The Forest-Walk	43
The Palm-Soul	46
A Shaded Spot	48
Serenity	49
Spirit Fulness	51

The One Power	53
The Spirit Stone	54
The Swallow	56
The Sorrel-Tree	57
The Old Book	59
A Patch Of Cloud	60
Palm Leaves	61
Themes Of Song	62
The Two Palms	63
Amor	64
Regret	65
Had'st Thou But Spoken	66
Dost Thou Remember	67
Oh! Call It By Some Other Name	68
I Can No Longer Hide	69
Matrimony	70
The Lost For Ever	72
A Dream Of Angels	73
On The River	74
Writ In Tears	75
Trade	76
Patria Mea Te Amo	77
The Locust Tree	79
Sing, Bird	80
Oh! Say Not	81
What Is The Good?	82
 <i>Appendix</i>	
The Two Prefaces	85

INTRODUCTION

Egbert Martin, who published under the pen name 'Leo,'¹ was the most accomplished and prolific of Guianese writers in the nineteenth-century, highly praised by his contemporaries. The great West Indian/American collector and bibliophile, Arthur Schomburg, described Martin as "one of the greatest Negro poets in history."² Nineteenth-century Guianese journals commented on the quality of his writing. The *Daily Chronicle* declared him to be "the ablest of the poetical writers of whom British Guiana can boast" and the *Berbice Gazette* spoke of him as "one whose works plainly bespeak talent and ability of the highest order."³ Lord Tennyson was said to have admired his work.⁴ Today Martin is almost totally forgotten, his work routinely ignored in anthologies of Caribbean writing. Only two copies of his first book of poetry, *Leo's Poetical Works* (1883), are traceable in libraries worldwide; only one copy of his second collection, *Leo's Local Lyrics* (1886), has survived; his collection of short stories, *Scriptology* (1885), is untraceable.

Very little is remembered and recorded of Martin's life. He was born around 1861, presumably in the capital, Georgetown. His father, Richard, was a journeyman tailor. No information survives about his mother or any siblings. A. J. Seymour, who described him as "a fair mulatto," states that "from early youth he was confined to an invalid's bed, as a result of illness."⁵ *The Colonist*, a Guianese journal, first published his poetry when he was nineteen years of age, and thereafter he was a frequent contributor to *The Argosy* and *Echo*. His patrons were James Thompson, editor of *The Argosy*, and George Anderson Forshaw, Mayor of Georgetown. It was said that Thompson would visit Martin at his home in East Street, Georgetown, to collect his poetry for printing in *The Argosy*. Martin gained a degree of international prominence in 1887 when he won an empire-wide competition for adding two verses to the British national anthem,

an event sponsored by the *London Standard* to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. He died on the 23rd of June 1890. His death certificate states his age as twenty-nine and the cause of death as "phthisis" (tuberculosis, or 'consumption', also known as the 'White Plague' because its sufferers appeared markedly pale. It may well be that Martin was a "fair mulatto" because of his medical condition). His death was registered by his cousin Edwin Heyliger, so it would appear that Martin was partly of German ancestry.⁶

Contemporaries and Cultural Milieu

British Guiana, though a lonely colony in South America, separated geographically from the rest of Britain's Caribbean colonial possessions, was not a backwater in cultural terms. In 1851, the Athenaeum Society (possibly modelled after London's Athenaeum Club, founded in 1823 for men of scientific, literary and artistic talent) was established in Georgetown and hosted dramatic performances. The Assembly Rooms, owned by the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society, was also a leading theatre venue, containing an auditorium which could seat up to one thousand people. In the 1860s, establishments like the Adelphie Theatre and the Philharmonic Hall staged "numerous plays, musicals and operas ... by local clubs and foreign theatrical companies." There were regular performances by members of societies like the Amateur Dramatic Club and the Histrionic Club, and later, the Demerara Dramatic Club and the Georgetown Dramatic Club. On the 17th of April 1890, two months before Martin's death, the Georgetown Botanical Gardens was the venue for a program of music, played by the Militia Band, including works by the French composers Daniel Auber and Emile Waldteufel.⁷ Literary texts were available in the reading rooms of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society and in educational establishments like Queen's College: N. E. Cameron lists public readings of works by Shakespeare, Horace, Byron, Homer, Racine, and Ovid at Queen's College in the 1870s.⁸ Learned people like Martin's patrons would have owned personal libraries and made their books available to each other. The cultural milieu of nineteenth-century Georgetown produced local musicians, actors and directors. Among the most notable poets were Simon Christian Oliver and Thomas Don. Oliver was a schoolmaster who was writing and publishing in

the 1830s. He was relatively wealthy, his son being a businessman and his daughter receiving an education in England. Don, by contrast, was a former slave, and like African slaves in the New World, he became literate by exposure to the Bible. His book, *Pious Effusions*, published in 1873, consisted of hymn-like stanzas on religious subjects. These poets belonged, according to P. H. Daly, to “a generation of Spiritual Men ... however much they were engrossed with the affairs of their temporal order, they saw only the spiritual side of the synthesis.”⁹ The following generations (late nineteenth-century/early twentieth-century) represented by poets T. R. F. Elliott and J. E. Clare McFarlane nurtured racial pride or protested about social injustices.

Martin’s Poetry

Apart from the odd poem like ‘The Negro Village’, which speaks of the African-Guianese history of “toil and struggle” and asserts their humanity, their capacity to love, to form families and to be governed by “nobler passions”, Martin’s poetry is more preoccupied with spiritual matters. Given his frail physical condition, it is unsurprising that he writes extensively on change, disintegration and death. His meditations on the passage of time can be startlingly postmodern in their sense of dimensions beyond the linear.

‘Tis looking back that gives the future colour,
Because, in life, we find
The past analogizes all the future
Upon the plastic mind;
Foreshadowing what “will be,” and what “had been”,
A mingled repetition
Of words and deeds, events, and many a scene,
And fantasy and vision.
(‘Looking Back’)

And yet, whilst recognising the ways in which time ravishes the human body, moulding and sculpting past and future together into an aesthetic of suffering, Martin is constantly seeking a perfection of form that transcends the material, that is not, nor cannot be, shaped by time. Sudden moments of natural beauty (‘Thanksgiving’; ‘Along Yon Stretch’) yield intimations of divine

truth, and of a space beyond time “Where all that’s rich is permanent/ Where visions bright endure/ Unchanging, blessed and beautiful/ And true for evermore.” The echo here of Keats is diminished elsewhere, for Martin constantly struggles to maintain his faith in the truth of beauty. In ‘Disappointment’, Wordsworthian sentiments about intimations of immortality are dismissed in favour of a Darwinian vision of nature:

With hasty hand I tore the flower
 And flung it from its place;
And since that agonizing hour,
 For me it lost all grace.

Anon I thought, in pensive mood,
 How ‘midst a gem so fair,
In hidden ambuscade there should
 Repose a viper’s lair.
 (‘Disappointment’)

Martin effects a Christian synthesis between the truth of decay and the truth of beauty: it is *through suffering* that man is made perfect (‘Made Perfect Through Suffering’). For Martin, the poet is almost a divine figure — “he weaves a song divine” (‘The Poet’). The poet is God’s alchemist:

He takes into his hands the clay
 All shapeless, black and dull,
Tears every harsher vein away,
 And leaves it beautiful;
Leaves in the place of what had been
 A mass of baseless mould,
A figure, shape, or fantasy,
 Transformed to purest gold.
 (‘The Poet’)

Men like Sir Walter Raleigh came to the Guianas in search of gold, but died in penury, for the true gold is the poet’s imagination. The poet *creates*, through his imagination, but he also *perceives* the perfection of what already exists:

A golden glow of rippling clouds

Serenely saileth by,
As if the hand of God has writ
A poem in the sky.
(‘Along Yon Stretch’)

Perfection of form is what Martin’s poetry strives to achieve. His body is that of man, subject to decay, but his poetry is testament to faith in a perfection that survives such decay. Martin is above all a poet. Hence his mastery of the cadences of Victorian verse as well as the network of allusions to English poetry from the Medieval period onwards.

Hence, too, his utmost delight in the spaciousness and poetical quality of English words: his poetry is sprinkled with adjectives like ‘umbrageous’, ‘eocene’, ‘auriferous’ and the like. Martin may have been a Victorian writer in terms of using the language and formal models of his age, but he was also conscious of his role as a *Guianese* poet. In the ‘Preface’ to *Leo’s Local Lyrics* (the title of the volume being provocatively “native”) he admits to having been criticised for composing too many precious, universalist poems, and declares his intention of providing a few “tropical studies” for his Guianese readership. A poem like ‘The Sorrel-Tree’, celebrating the gracefulness and lushness of the Guianese fruit, is, for its time, a radical effort: in the next century Derek Walcott was to confess to a nervousness about introducing local fruits, like the mango, into a poem, since they lacked the English canonical status of, say, A. E. Housman’s cherry (from ‘A Shropshire Lad’). Poems like ‘The Creek’ and ‘The Spirit Stone’ attempt to convey Guiana as the habitation of spirits alien to a Christian worldview. Although he does not name the ghosts (‘jumbies’, ‘churiles’, ‘ol’ hignes’, ‘backoos’, etc.) and in the ‘Preface’ appears to belittle “Creole superstitions and the peculiar beliefs of Indian animism”, his poems still strive to recognise a landscape haunted by non-human presences:

I fear the forest and its rivers clear,
I fear its loneliness, its depths I fear,
For spirits live, and moan, and wander there.
(‘The Spirit Stone’)

It would take some seventy years before Guianese writers — Edgar Mittelholzer, Wilson Harris, Jan Carew, Martin Carter,

and more recently Pauline Melville and Fred D'Aguiar — began to use as resource the mythical dimension of the Guianese landscape.¹⁰

In the months before his death, the Guianese newspapers waxed wroth on the impropriety of language in the streets of Georgetown: “it is exceedingly painful to hear and witness the extraordinary amount of indecent language and unbecoming behaviour exhibited by drunken women every hour of the day ... in the very face of the police, the most offensive language is used ...” (*Daily Chronicle*, 18th April 1890). It was not until the next century that a new poetry arose, based on the *thew and sinew* of the Creole language of the streets.¹¹ The ‘vulgarity’ (diction and tone) of the new writing would appear to be utterly different from Martin’s, but the poetic project was the same: the quest for El Dorado, sifting through the rubble of experience for the gold of the imagination.

DAVID DABYDEEN
University of Warwick

Notes

¹ The self-naming is ironic, in light of the Classical names — Caesar, Horace, Juno, etc. — given mockingly to slaves; in light, too, of Martin's frailty.

² See Eleanor Sinnette, *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg* (1989).

³ Quotations from newspapers are to be found on the end-page of *Leo's Local Lyrics* (1886).

⁴ According to *The Argosy* and *The Guiana Herald*, both quoted in *Leo's Local Lyrics*, *ibid.*

⁵ A. J. Seymour, in *Kyk-Over-Al*, Vol. 1, No. 3, December 1946.

⁶ I am grateful to Evan Persaud for helping me to locate Martin's death certificate in the Georgetown Registry of Births, Marriages and Deaths (Superintendent Registrar's District K, Division No. 28, Page 119, Entry 1188). His death and burial at Le Repentir Cemetery, Georgetown, are reported in his obituary, in *Daily Chronicle*, 25th June, 1890. Between 1834 and 1838, 1,300 German immigrants landed in Jamaica to work on the sugar plantations. Others migrated elsewhere in the Caribbean. See M. S. Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers. The Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America* (1999).

⁷ *Daily Chronicle*, 17th April, 1890. See also *Stabroek News*, 8th April 2004, pp. 14-15.

⁸ N. E. Cameron, *A History of the Queen's College* (1951), pp. 25-26.

⁹ P. H. Daly, *Currents in Caribbean Life* (1955), p. 37. See too N. E. Cameron (ed.), *Guianese Poetry* (1931) and A. J. Seymour, *The Making of Guianese Literature* (1982).

¹⁰ English novelists like Arthur Conan Doyle, in *The Lost World* (1912) and W. H. Hudson, in *Green Mansions* (1904), had already used the Guianese/Amazonian jungle as a setting for mythic fable.

¹¹ See my 'Introduction,' in *Slave Song* (1984).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the British Academy for assisting with research expenses, and Ian McDonald for introducing me to the work of Egbert Martin and encouraging me to reprint his poetry; to Jonathan Morley and Ziqian Chan at The Heaventree Press for their meticulous typesetting and design; finally, to Evan Persaud, master of archival research.

Section I
from *Leo's Poetical Works* (1883)

Inscription

I have scattered songs in numbers,
Songs of joy and songs of pain,
And my heart hath often whispered,
"Wilt thou find them once again?"

Anxious thoughts, with cruel voices,
Questioned wisely, "Is it well
To indulge these moods and fancies,
To be captive to their spell?"

Often have I paused and faltered,
By these dreary dreams opprest,
Asking meekly, craving answer,
Of the pathway that is best.

But I found they came unbidden,
Like first speech in childhood's day,
Came like tears at touch of sorrow
And would not be put away.

So, all fresh with indecision,
Here and there I flung them by,
Hoping that their simple music
Might repress a tear or sigh.

After much of contradiction,
Eager longing and distress,
With a holy consolation,
I behold them come to bless.

For the seed that I have scattered,
I am gath'ring, one by one,
Flowers of fresh and grateful odours,
And I know them mine alone.

I am finding out the guerdon^o
Ling'ring patience gives to those
Who have steadily kept onward
Through the ranks of mighty foes;

reward

And to those whose hands have sent me
 Kindly cheer and greeting strong;
And to those whose words have lent me
 Extra purpose for my song;

Gratitude and trust I render
 As a twofold off'ring rare;
Gratitude for past assistance,
 Trust for still a future share.

Thanksgiving

Up comes the sun,
And lifts the vapours wide,
As the bridegroom lifts the veil
To kiss his blushing bride.

From wold, and wood,
A whisper of content rolls by,
Through the umbrageous^o brotherhood,
Beneath the purple sky.

shady

Alone, and sad,
I catch the pleasant light,
And bless the Lord, in looking,
For the refreshing sight.

The Poet

The poet is a magician,
The philosopher's stone is his;
It turns all baser metals
To priceless rarities.
The common scenes around us,
The graceless and the old,
Beneath his pencil's shaping touch
Assume the sheen of gold.

From every habitation
He takes some shining thread;
By many a distant channel
His "Land of Song" is fed;
From regions that are distant,
From home's familiar dress,
From many a verdant solitude,
From many a wilderness,

From babbling streams and rivers,
From air, and wood, and sky,
He steals the "light-winged" sweetness
That floats unbidden by.
With trill of birds' enchantment,
With low of pensive kine^o,
With shadows from the verdure,
He weaves a song divine.

cattle

And ever as the moments
Assert their constant change,
The numbers rise still higher,
And grow more surely strange.
The uncommon and the common
Meet in such perfect blend,
The myst'ry is where each begins,
Or either finds its end.

He takes into his hands the clay
 All shapeless, black, and dull,
Tears every harsher vein away,
 And leaves it beautiful;
Leaves in the place of what had been
 A mass of baseless mould,
A figure, shape, or fantasy,
 Transformed to purest gold.

Looking Back

It is good, on gaining every station
In life's progressive day,
To pause a little while in contemplation,
And mark the travelled way;
Look backward o'er the pathway in the distance,
And view each stumbling stone;
To gather fresh experience for resistance
Of griefs we knew alone.

'Tis looking back that gives the future colour,
Because, in life, we find
The past analogizes all the future
Upon the plastic mind;
Foreshadowing what "will be", as what "had been",
A mingled repetition
Of words and deeds, events, and many a scene,
And fantasy and vision.

Like Ezekiel's dry bones in the valley
These scattered thoughts will meet
Each joint to each, and build to rare perfection
Their histories complete —
Their histories, that after careful reading
May cause the reflective heart
A secret pang, or bitter pain and bleeding,
Or joyous tears to start.

It is good to use experience rightly,
To guard ourselves withal;
And not to pass o'er circumstances lightly,
Forget them as they fall.
Life is too serious for a vapid wasting,
Too deep for hurried speed;
Too much prophetic of an after lasting
Effect from word and deed.

The Almshouse

Here's the graveyard of human ambition!
The storehouse of failure and woes!
The total of life's long addition!
The aggregate brought to a close!

Where no prospect on earth lies before,
And the past is an agent of ill;
Where the striving must cease evermore,
Though sorely against heart and will.

Oh, how many jest at the anguish
They hear of, but yet never know,
Making light of the spirits that languish
When mem'ry is full to o'erflow!

When the arrow is shot, spent, and lieth,
When the wing of the bird droops and hangs;
When the heart knows its sorrow and sigheth,
When the body groans under its pangs;

The only belief that can brighten
Comes forth from the cause of Christ's death;
'Tis the ray whose effulgence will lighten,
'Tis the breeze with the balm in its breath.

Here are many spent arrows, and broken,
Here are birds with the wings cleft and weak,
Here are hearts wearing misery's token,
Here are bodies that silently speak —

That speak in the language of feeling,
That eloquent, voiceless appeal,
Whose dew, on the countenance stealing,
Makes the heart of the gazer to feel.

How much it is given to mortals
To suffer on earth's callous sod,
Ere death opes the silvery portals
That leads the soul in to its God!

We should ever condone the position
Of them by misfortune opprest;
For poverty bringeth contrition
To hearts that are wild with unrest.

Here's the graveyard of human ambition!
The storehouse of failure and woes!
The total of life's long addition!
The aggregate brought to a close!

Sky Pictures

One sweep of blue
 Framing many a picture rare;
Fantastic clouds of varied hue,
 Devices quaint and queer.
Pillared columns,
 Antique works of art and skill,
Piles of continents infused
 With deep and hill.

Bastions fringed with fire,
 Hooded heads of aged men
Roll serenely onward, higher,
 And lose their shape again.
Purple minarets,
 Relieved in coloured gold,
Cloaks of sombre, sober grey
 In sparkling borders rolled.

Ruined towers
 Lift their battered arches wide,
As if to free the passage for
 A rich, prismatic tide.
Slender spires cleave,
 And twinkling flash and gleam.
Who may deny the thought,
 This is a waking dream?

A dream indeed!
 Where light is weaved in skeins,
Then twined in thick and braided cords,
 And then in widest veins;
Where change is king,
 And works its own infinite will,
To bless the charmed eyes that gaze
 With pictures, pictured sweeter still.

Who lifts his sight,
 And looks no farther than the sky,
Discerning not the Deity,
 Deserves our fervent pity.
One sweep of blue,
 Fashioned to a million ends,
Must be the great provision
 Of the master-mind it blends.

Along Yon Stretch

Along yon stretch the shadows lie,
The day enwraps her cloak;
And meekly lays her down to die,
While evening tolls each stroke,

Each solemn note of mournful sound
So softly rising now
In undertone, to fall around
In echoes still more low.

A golden glow of rippling clouds
Serenely saileth by,
As if the hand of God had writ
A poem in the sky.

Where colour, harmony, and art,
Strove each to shame the rest;
By blending every simple part
With perfect grace, and best.

It is not all to own the joy
These marvellous pictures give;
But surely in the heart of man
Some nobler thoughts might live.

The deep creative power that springs
From fancy's ready mind
Will see the soul on buoyant wings
Leave everything behind

To soar where sweeter glories dwell,
And softer pictures shine;
And holier inspirations swell,
And wonders more divine.

Though earth's cerulean beauties charm,
The thought of sin and pain
Will call the flight of fancy back
Unto its shore again.

Thus in the midst of every sweet
Some bitter tracings run,
Defacing all our brightest joys,
As spots deface the sun;

Yet like a curtain over all,
The time descendeth slow;
When each will hear the Master's call,
And straightway rise and go,

Where all that's rich is permanent,
Where visions bright endure
Unchanging, blessed, and beautiful,
And true for evermore.

The Unfolding Rose

I saw a rose unfold,
 Leaf by leaf, leaf by leaf,
Its tints of yellow gold
 In exquisite relief.

First from the bud uncurled
 A tiny velvet wing,
Like a fairy banner furled
 Upon a silken string.

Then slowly came the rest
 In order's quiet walk;
Till in perfection drest
 The rose adorned its stalk.

How like the soul, I thought,
 Might this unfolding seem;
Through quiet stages wrought
 Unto the perfect beam;

The light that owes its birth,
 All brilliant and divine,
Unto the shores of earth,
 At first to faintly shine;

Till crust by crust of age
 Unfolds its gradual way
Upon the upward stage
 To full and perfect day.

Of Humble Life

Within the humblest walks of life,
How many a tale we find,
That moves with pleasure or with pain
The poet's brooding mind!

'Tis not the learned and great alone
Who feel th'impulsive thrill
Of Nature's undercurrent glide
Beneath life's tortuous rill°.

stream

In lowly cots, affection beams
As in the lordly hall;
And dreams that fire the hearts of kings
Upon the peasant fall.

Not high whose aspirations soar,
Not far whose fancy flies;
Each little round of grief and glee
In humble measure lies —

Lies in the scenes around them spread,
The homestead's little span
That holds in modified degree
The lights and shades of man.

And many tender thoughts arise
These humbler scenes among;
More meet° than loftier themes to claim
The gracious notes of song.

fitting

And who hath seen a lovelier grace
Adorn this verdant sod,
Than some poor humble family
Believing in their God?

There pure example breathes apace
The kindly dew of love;
And that the humblest can be good
Doth bountifully prove.

Yes, even the lowliest hearts of earth
 Beat to the changeful strain
Of joy's entrancing harmony,
 Or discord's jarring pain.

Made Perfect Through Suffering

I've wondered why the butterfly
 With its resplendent wings,
Which seem to give our lower sky
 A rainbow's garnishings,
Is always blithely roving,
Through cloud and sunshine moving,
 Than thought more free,
 A mystery
Of such exquisite colours blending,
That here perfection finds its ending.

Its coat is made of feathers golden,
 Azure, blue, and sunny brown;
Each o'er each in tier enfolden
 Smoother than a velvet gown.
Who would deem this heavenly vision
Sprung to being, in transition
 From a creeping,
 Loathsome thing,
A lowly, grovelling, sinuous worm
That could not raise its evil form?

Ah! but then there came an hour,
 When its strength the suffering bore;
When the light of life's watch-tower
 Fell extinguished on the shore,
And within the darksome prison,
Second life as yet unrisen,
 Pain and anguish,
 Made it languish
Till asunder burst the viewless spring,
And made it perfect through its suffering.

I've wondered why the gloom of pain
 Can thus o'er shade the soul;
When we do know a nobler reign
 Awaits another goal;
It is decreed that, like the worm

That passes through the fiery storm
So must the
By God's own plan,
Be spent with fiery doubts and fears,
Until made perfect through his sufferings and his tears.

Disappointment

I found a little bud one day,
 A floweret wondrous fair;
Far brighter than a diamond's ray,
 And unto me more rare.

I hid it where we hide fair things,
 Beside a thankful heart;
And thought to taste the joy that springs
 From such a simple art.

But 'tween the velvet leaves there lay
 A viper hidden low,
That did mine ecstasy repay
 With an envenomed blow:

A blow that, in its wealth of pain,
 The while it did endure,
Exceeded all the pleasure-gain
 I haply knew before.

With hasty hand I tore the flower
 And flung it from its place;
And since that agonizing hour,
 For me it lost all grace.

Anon I thought, in pensive mood,
 How, 'midst a gem so fair,
In hidden ambuscade there should
 Repose a viper's lair.

The Magic View

Turn the slides and fit them well,
Cast the pictures on the screen;
Let them linger, while I tell
The hist'ry lurking in between.

Tall trees, invaded by a house
With jealousies^o of dainty green,
And broad white patches in between.
A shady pathway running down,
A breast of palings old and brown;
A pierced gateway leading through
A blush of flowers, a pretty view:
A child at play upon the land
With roses clasped in either hand,
A careless, inattentive boy,
Imperious as a little king,
A stranger to the least annoy,
With many a dainty, fragile toy,
In peace and pleasure wandering.

shutters, louvres

Change the slide, and fit another,
Time will pass, and infants grow;
Years will lengthen one to other,
Like bubbles clinging in a row.

A spacious room with pictures hung,
A maiden at the window sings,
The carols falling from her tongue
Like moisture from the morning's wings.
Her hair is braided on a brow
Where radiant beauty dwells at home,
Her furtive gaze is anxious now,
Through falling boughs her glances roam,
"He comes," she whispers, and a rose
On either soft cheek burns and glows.

In *Leo's Poetical Works*, Leo characterises the following three pieces as "Domestic Chords, or Narrative Poems", as opposed to the earlier "Silver Chords, or Heart Poems".

Change the slide, another place,
Youth builds its own bright universe;
Its every curve is one of grace,
It brooks not terror or asperse°.

opposition

A room pervaded by the light —
The witching light of infant eve;
It is not day — it is not night,
It is fond nature's golden sieve
Through which she pours the harsh unkind,
And leaves the lovelier glow behind.
Too sweet for tears, too sad for mirth,
The time when holiest thoughts have birth.
A youth and maiden dream a dream
That takes two hearts to give its beam.

They're silent, caring not for speech,
For silence is the wealth of each,
And speech would only mar the hour,
And rob the dream of half its power.
The breezes rustle through the room,
As if at frolic with the curtain,
And wing athwart the semi-gloom
A music distant and uncertain.
A pressure of the little hand,
A soul thrown into glowing eyes;
A passage of a viewless wand —
A start — expressive of surprise,
A word reluctant — now a sigh,
As of a soul to joyance given.
Soft interchanges passing by
Are all that tell this youth and maid,
With hopeful hearts yet undismayed,
Enjoy a herald taste of heaven.

Change the slide, the time is fleeting,
Tales of joy are short and few,
Parting breaks the heart of meeting,
False desires outlive the true.

A stormy sea — a rage of waters,
A vessel struggling in the tide;
Bright whips of light'ning side by side
With roar of thunder clouds unrolled
Through vivid sheets of living gold.
Breezes shrieking shrill in fury,
Faces blanched at nature's rage;
Heaven is now a book mysterious,
Portentous trials, fast and serious,
In written blackness gloom its page.
Crashing go the timbers. Crashing
Go the masts — the sails are tattered,
Fierce and strong the waters lashing
Leave at last a wreck all shattered,
Hurling, to the billows' madness,
All those hearts by consternation
Smitten to a stony sadness —
To a fearful resignation.

Place another slide above it,
Disappointment quenches hope:
Human sight is only finite,
And of very bounded scope.

A calm sea like an azure mirror
Dimpling into many a smile;
A treacherous, fair, enchanting error
The simple fancy to beguile.
So calm! as if no forms were hurried
Underneath its breast and buried.
But now, advancing with its motion,
Drifts a form more fair and cold
Than itself — the changing ocean —
Changeful ever as of old.

Who would deem that young man lifeless,
He who cheated childhood's leisure
When the days were green and strifeless —
With a careless whim and pleasure!

Who would deem the youthful lover,
Ardent in a vanished day.
From the maiden to discover
Hopes to feed his boyish ray!
Who would deem that rising fever
Here lay buried — past for ever!
Not the anxious maiden waiting
Can recall his spirit flown,
Death has fixed the iron grating,
They have planted — He hath mown.

Turn the slide — the charm of life
Lies hid away in expectation:
Stripped of this what else is rife
But trial, error, and vexation.

A little chamber snowy white,
Perhaps some inadvertent fairy
Straying through a starry night,
Might think this region of delight
Her own, it is so neat and airy.
But the woman hither reigning
Thinks not of such fancies idle,
Her heart a calm restraint sustaining
Is held, as 'twere, with bit and bridle,
For she hath found that earth is poor,
That youth is vain, and sorrow sure:
All her visions of entrancement,
All her hopes of high advancement,
All her rosy dreams and building,
All of youth's excessive gilding,
Bit by bit have fallen away,
And left her life's unsightly clay
To mould with careful introspection
Measures worthy of correction;
And step by step to lead the way
That wends "unto the perfect day".

Change the slide — so old the story,
But how happy if the close
Shows another soul in glory,
Chastened by its many woes.

A spacious room with pictures hung,
A woman at the window gazing;
All the evening bells have rung,
And the fitful lights are blazing.
She is thinking now a while
Of a joy that might have been,
Her chastened face and saddened smile
Becloud the orbs'° erst brilliant sheen,
'Twas in this room they said "Adieu!"
Her hero lad, whose pallid form
Lays sleeping 'neath the ocean blue,
Borne downward by the ruthless storm.

her eyes

That was a time of melody
In air, and wood, and everything,
But now 'twas but a memory —
A teardrop, and a fleeting sigh
That doth from memory spring.
Her chastening had performed the end
God sent it downward to attain,
It made the spirit writhe and bend,
It filled the heart with gall of pain,
But tempered all with hope divine
Whose great rewards in heaven shine,
Whose voices echo faith's sweet song
More real than youth's light dream, and strong,
Whose trust points ever far away
To Him Whom storm and sea obey.

Pull out the slide, obscure the light,
The view is o'er, the history's told,
It is not weak, it is not strong,
It is not new, it is not old,
It is a flake from life's domain,
And flakes like these will fall again.

The Hammock Maker,
An Indian Eclogue

Bowed with age and feebleness,
 Crowned with locks all silvery white
Eyes so dim and lustreless,
 Slowly sinking in life's night.
Crooning over bygone days
 When his feeble limbs were strong
To pursue the forest ways
 In the hurried hunt along.
Harko weaves the ravelled string,
 Weaves and sings in undertone,
As the breezes echoing
 Rise and fall in sobbing moan.
All around each troolie^o dwelling
 In the noonday's glare repose,
Younger braves are proudly telling,
 Conquests over many foes.
Hung amid the trees in numbers,
 Hammocks oscillating slow;
Soothe their inmates' dreamy slumbers,
 Swinging gently to and fro.
But the sage's busy fingers
 Ply the interweaving strings;
Never once in sloth he lingers,
 'Tentive unto other things.
Two-and-eighty years have glided
 O'er the dark and furrowed brow,
Once, in youth, so firm decided:
 Dim, relaxed, and failing now.
Once the pride of old and young,
 When his daring deeds of skill
Fell in song from every tongue,
 Every Indian heart did fill.
Now at last, like vessel nearing
 Its bedestined final shore,
Past all seas and stormy faring
 Taking rest for evermore.
Harko twined the hammocks' mazes,

*covered with leaves
of the bussu palm*

All the sunny daytime through,
 Work that gained the white man's praises
'Yond the hill-tops' misty blue —
 Soon would he depart the meadows,
Soon desert his native glades;
 For "grim" death's affrighting shadows,
Thence to softer, sweeter shades.
 For his heart is constant sighing
In a superstitious dread;
 Longing, longing to be dying,
Fearing, fearing to be dead.
 So he sits, and deftly weaveth
All the careless hours away,
 While dear mem'ry's voice conceiveth
Stories of a bygone day.

The Negro Village

The little village smiles a slow adieu
 Unto our day lord dying in the west,
The brooding sky is of a chastened hue,
 It is an hour of universal rest;
 And humble cotters^o through the door *peasants,*
 To interchange in quaintest lore *cottagers*
 The superstitious tale with eager zest.

The artless children gambol in their play,
 Spin round the giddy ring, or join in song,
Or haply wile the fleet-winged hours away
 In rustic sports that please their noisy throng,
 Outpouring their abundant might
 In shouts of pleasure and delight
 That hold the voice of echo loud and long.

Toil-wearied sires, in contemplation, view
 Their playful offspring with excessive pride,
Give now a smile, an admonition due,
 Or some contentive dispute eke^o decide; *also*
 Directing here the busy game,
 With words of praise, or whispered blame,
 A temporary judge and lenient guide.

See how love's filial dew steals o'er the face
 Of yonder dusky mother — youthful wife —
And wreathes it with an indescribable grace,
 Its simplest gift to every walk of life;
 Her pleasant gaze divides its glee
 'Tween husband fond and children free,
 Joys at their joy, and sorrows at their strife.

And yet there are, who will in strength maintain,
 The negro heart is foreign to all thought
Which breathes of hopeful love, affection's reign,
 Or nobler passions in the bosom wrought;
 Such reason in a blind conceit,
 Where prejudice and false pride meet,
 Yea! *man is man* with all emotions fraught.

Their hearts can love with all the lavish strength,
Impetuous fervour of ungoverned will,
Running unbroken to its utmost length:
Passion's frenzy, but pure love's offspring still;
Unweaned by cold decorum's laws,
Cleaving persistent to its cause,
Free and natural as the mountain rill.

Hard by a mutt'ring hag at ease reclines,
Like some poor stranded wreck, unfit for sea;
That, having played its part, no longer shines
In pride of strength, but rests all peacefully,
Worn with the toil and struggle past,
Serenely waiting death's cold blast,
That soon will lay her form for ever by.

The children shun her withered face and mien,
Or if they gaze, stern awe directs the look;
For in those battered lineaments is seen
The mystic lore of superstition's book;
Their untaught hearts accord to age,
The wisdom of some wizard sage,
Whose boundless power no mortal thing will brook.

While with just thought enough to know she lives,
The agèd grandam heeds nor old, nor young;
But ever and again some proverb gives
That in her youthful days was said or sung,
Repeating o'er and o'er the rune,
Until it grows a weary tune,
Like bells in monotonous cadence rung.

And soon some youth to music's rapture leal°,
With deep accordion wakes a lively air,
In thrilling numbers of the sprightly reel,
Or quick fandango to the negro dear;
Nodding his woolly head in time,
As if in measure keeping rhyme,
Unto the tramping feet now here, now there.

faithful
(usually
religious,
deriv.
Old Fr.
"loyal")

Wild with delight, the urchins prance and bound,
Now with a peacock's stride strut to and fro;
Now in a circle hand in hand spin round,
Then up and down in wild disorder go,
With clapping hands and hearty mirth,
As if for them this care-fed earth
Knew not the bitter pangs of toil and woe.

O weighted hearts! be lightsome for a while;
O toiling hands! rest for one little hour;
O happy faces! wear your happiest smile;
O voices! laugh and shout with all your power;
Your hearts do bear opprobrium's scorn;
Free heirs to toil, in error born;
Disdain, your birthright — Ignorance, your dower.

All ills to thee earth's happier sons accord,
They paint thee 'neath thy native vales and skies,
Dark, indolent, and one to be abhorred,
Unfeeling, thankless, savage, and unwise.
Perhaps there is a vein of truth,
But hadst thou guides unto thy youth,
How bright would beam the light that in thee lies!

E'en now the bard can point to one who stands
A fair ensample of the hidden worth
Concealed within your poor, downtrodden bands,
As diamonds hidden lie beneath the earth,
Awaiting but a hand to tear
The dross away, and leave it fair,
An ornament unto the home and hearth.

Yet let us trust the Gospel's levelling breath,
And holy ray of charity supreme,
Will raise the negro from his night of death,
And light his heart with learning's grateful beam;
Will teach him that his simple fears,
His dark beliefs, his mystic cares,
Are but the base delusions of a dream;

Will teach him to revere that gentler might
That seems to him effeminate and weak,
That noblest of all virtues is the right,
Which holds its greatest strength in being meek;
Like to the camel bending low,
Through poor humility to go
Unto the restful haven it would seek.

"I bear them record," as the Apostle said,
Of worthy zeal, when brought into the road
Which leads from superstition's folly spread,
Unto the home celestial of our God.
Their hearts are rivers flowing wide,
Awaiting but a kindly guide
To turn their course to wisdom's fertile sod.

When Sunday's stillness wraps the earth around
In that calm beauty local to the day;
When all is peace — and every harsher sound
To more congenial regions flies away;
When all the village seems asleep,
So quietly the hours creep
In slow procession to the twilight's grey,

A humble preacher gathers those anear,
Just as they are without the pride of dress;
Invades each cranny for a bench or chair,
To make the pleaded difficulties less,
Gives forth some well known hymn of praise,
And invitation to the ways,
Being found wherein, the Lord will surely bless;

Then 'neath a palm-tree's overhanging boughs,
That graceful droop upon the silent wind,
In all the freedom which the scene allows,
The scanty number some meek station find,
While with a mien sedate and grave,
The preacher speaks God's power to save
In simplest language from his simple mind;

He tells them of the awful deeds of sin,
And from his own past life some story takes,
O'er which he glows, with fervour from within,
That now a tear and now a deep sigh wakes,
As ever from the throng is heard
Some softly muttered, rueful word,
That half contrition, half regret partakes.

He warns against believing in the spell
Whose very name brings terror to each breast,
Dread Obeah, the foulest weed of hell,
The awful foe to pure, inspiring rest:
He tells them God's omnific power
Will shield them from life's dawning hour,
Until death claims the spirit for its guest.

It is not vain delusion to believe
Pure angels joy o'er such a work as this,
For earnest hearts which toil anew and grieve,
Hereafter is preserved the purer bliss;
The life which knows no end, no close,
The everlasting, blest repose,
No tears — no sorrows — nothing more amiss.

O holy joy — O purer life desired! —
Who would not brave the world's poor scorn to be,
When flesh and spirit, head and heart grow tired,
Received into your bright eternity?
O life that earth can never give!
Upon thy praise I fain would live,
While thy fair light for evermore I see!

Anon! as darkness spreads her gloomy wing,
And deeper stillness clothes the welkin round,
While e'en the breezes scarcely seem to sing,
So low and mournful is the solemn sound,
The preacher kneels upon the sod,
And pours his simple prayer to God,
With trembling voice and earnestness profound:

Then, rising, bids his little flock adieu,
With leisured step pursues his homeward way;
Leaving behind a comfort warm and true,
As twilight beams outlive the parted day.
When night, as if to bless the hour,
Throws downward in a golden shower,
The distant light of stars in fair array.

Now like a bird the village nestles down,
Through open windows gleams each flick'ring light,
Athwart the air from some distant way is blown
The note of owls that roam the silent night,
While through the portals of the east,
The moon, like some devoted priest,
Arises, decked in gleaming robes of white.

Sleep! village, sleep! like yonder rising moon,
The "Son of Man" shall come in greater might.
Time groweth old, and life's grey afternoon
Proclaims the coming shadow of its night.
But its unending morrow,
Will hold nor wrong nor sorrow,
Where hope and faith will change to love and light.

Section II
from *Leo's Local Lyrics* (1886)

The Creek

Across the creek the midnight moonlight breaks,
Along the creek the witching moonlight breaks,
'Tis like a soul that dreams but never wakes.

The creek it hath a spirit in its breast,
It hath a secret spirit in its breast,
And oft it moves upon the water's crest.

And oft it sings in dreadful notes and low,
In thrilling, sighing, pining notes and low,
That make you shudder as you hear them flow.

And that is why the village people find,
And that is why the simple people find
A something in the creek that's like the wind;

And that is why the little children flee,
And that is why the merry children flee,
From by its side when evening's dusk they see.

Because they hear the mournful spirit song,
They hear its low, sad, mournful spirit song,
Flow thro' the trees and whistle far along.

And even wise old men with silvery locks,
Grey, aged men, with frosty, rev'rent locks,
Hear moanings like the wind by seashore rocks.

And so they say in whispers tinged with fright,
They say with awe-struck tones and low and light,
"The spirit of the creek goes forth to-night."

And little children leave their merry play,
They leave awhile their merry, aimless play,
To peer into each other's eyes and say:

The poems up to 'The Old Book' (p. 75) are grouped together by Leo as "Tropical Studies".

“Hark to the spirit of the creek, it cries,
Hark how the spirit of the water cries!
One long, sad wail that rises, sobs and dies.”

And there are teardrops in the spirit’s call —
Fresh, flowing teardrops in the spirit’s call,
Which tremble in the moaning notes that fall.

And that is why the simple people see,
And that is why the village people see
Upon the rose, bright tears of mystery.

And that is why the little children say,
And that is why the tender children say,
“The spirit past last evening by this way.”

And that is why they call the drops of dew,
The glistening, shimmering little drops of dew,
“The spirit’s tears” that melt while day is new.

But who hath ever seen the spirit’s face?
Hath any seen that fair, white, fragile face,
Miraculous with beauty and with grace?

Ah! no, for none can see its face and live,
No mortal eye may see its face and live.
Its voice is all to mortal ear ‘twill give.

But aged men there are who whisper low,
Who, with pale, awe-struck faces, whisper low:
“Its eyes are full beneath a marble brow,

“Its eyes are large like crystal wells of light,
Like incandescent, lambent wells of light
That would illumine, like stars, the gloomy night.

“And that its locks hang down like golden fire,
Like twining, flowing strands of flashing fire
That ray its forehead like a burning tire.

"Its face is thin and white and strange to view,
Too weird and full of mystery to view,
But it is like the water lily's hue."

And that is why the village people tell,
And that is why the simple people tell
That it is there the spirit loves to dwell.

And if they see the moonlight thro' the leaves,
The soul that's in the moonlight, thro' the leaves,
Peer in large discs where molten verdure weaves:

They say 'tis like the spirit's shining eyes,
The light within the restless spirit-eyes,
That peers and, ere you mark its beauty, flies.

And old men tell that, once, a little child,
A little, chubby, harmless, merry child,
That played about in freedom gay and wild,

Went too, too near the silent creek at night,
Too near the dreadful, silent creek at night,
And saw a something moving — shine and white.

And how a song more thrilling sweet was heard,
How, on that night, a song more dread was heard,
More soft than wind, more sweet than note of bird.

And how, at morn, they sought the child in vain,
How all about they sought the child in vain,
But never saw his little form again.

And that is why the little children weep,
Why, innocent and young, the children weep,
When oft they view the waters dark and deep.

And that is why when full of sad unrest,
The spirit sings its pæan of unrest,
Fond mothers clasp their babes unto their breast,

And sing a gentle, soothing lullaby,
And sing a sweet, reposeful lullaby,
To drown the spirit's singing. That is why!

At break of day the village people go,
At noon and afternoon they pass and go
Along the margin, walking to and fro.

But they will never pass it by at night,
No! never wander by its banks at night,
Because the spirit sits all wild and white.

It is the spirit of the creek, it sings,
With deep unearthly melody, it sings,
As tho' the song wert borne on seraph's wings.

So people know and dread its awful song,
They dread its pitiful, enchanting song,
And pass, at eve, with hurried steps along.

The creek is still and dark and full of rest,
'Tis heavy with its silent weight of rest,
But oh! it hath a spirit in its breast.

The River

The river is cool as it gladdens along,
Gladdens along with a bubbling song;
'Tis dark but its dimples are bright as they mould,
For a shower of sunbeams transforms them to gold;
Transforms them to brilliants that glow, flash, and quiver,
Along in the song of the gladdening river.

There where the oar falls a soft surf of white
Lifts, bursts, and sparkles in opals of light,
Where dips the sea-bird, the volatile spray
Cleaves to its lithe wings, then glimmers away.
Where the swift keel passes glidingly on,
Great lines of amber appear then are gone,
Rise, fall, rise, darkle, rise, sparkle, and fall,
Oh! a bright spell of beauty is over it all.

The river in childhood was ever to me
A mystery whereby no greater could be.
How wild was my joy as the swift current swirled,
'Twixt its own and the wind's power adversely hurled;
While the crest and the hollow of each sporting wave
Seemed a hill curving into a watery cave.
How great was my wonder — how often I'd try
To solve the great puzzle while still flowing by,
The waters would rise, overlap, and then cover,
Like great curls of gold rolling over and over.

To fancy the sky dropping curtains of blue,
Seemed shutting in distance the river from view.
And dreams that defy every measure of truth,
When fairly at play in the green heart of youth,
Would weave beyond there, where the azure was bent,
A heaven of love and a world of content.

Oh! river so rapidly glinting along,
Along in thy rapture of sparkle and song —
Oh! river, far swifter than ever thy tide

Flows out with its waves and its caves flowing wide,
Those dreams have flown outward and left me today,
As barren as yon sterile granite-stone gray;
While I long with a longing, which God only knows,
To have my life flow as thy far water flows,
Beyond the dim curtains that shut from my sight
Those worlds where the duty of life lives in light;
To be spent, and to end all the sighing and grieving
In a land 'yond the blue where no thoughts are deceiving.

The Image

An Allegory

I had a longing in my soul,
 A longing for — I know not what!
But some dear thing which might have been
 A cause of gladness fading not.
And then there came, at dead of night,
 A spirit from the shining land,
And laid an image true and white,
 At rest within my outstretched hand.

He pass'd — and thenceforth day by day,
 I loved the image more and more,
It was as perfect as a ray —
 I'd never seen its like before.
From crown to base imperial art
 Had left its happy impress there,
Exquisite tone in every part:
 And beauty, beauty everywhere.

At morn I gazed upon its grace,
 At eve I set it where the light
Might fall upon the peerless face,
 And touch the dreamy lines of white.
And sleep, wherein the mind repeats
 A hundredfold the joys we know,
Produced a million soft conceits,
 Where, bathed in light, it seemed to glow.

It was to me, what never yet
 An image unto man hath been;
Reflection's theme, devotion's joy,
 Perfection with no flaw between.
Then every dear thing, dearer far,
 Excelling all the heart might own,
More worthy than all joys and sweets,
 And all those sweets and joys in one.

But soon there came another's eye,
 And scanned it over part by part,
And here descried, and there and there,
 And yet again, defects of art.
And little flaws I could not see,
 Clung thick as clinging specks of dust,
And showed it thro' and thro' to be
 Unworthy of such perfect trust.

Ah! God, that seeming should so seem!
 I could not bear its presence more —
For every look, however high
 Its art appeared, those flaws! — they bore
A passion-pain, I know not what;
 A feeling little kin to sense,
A mad indignance at the lot
 Which brought me such sore consequence.

I love it still, for how can we
 Forget what once the heart hath loved?
Ah! no; if ever once we be
 By some dear object sweetly moved
To feelings higher than we know;
 In after years its influence yet
Must rise, and fill and overflow —
 We cannot learn to quite forget.

I love it still — 'tis seeming fair
 As first I saw it on that day:
At morn the light about it dwells,
 And eve's last rays around it play.
But when a moment's perfect love
 Deep-stirred from out the heart would rise,
Another sense of sad defect
 With slow tears veils it from mine eyes.

The Forest-Walk

It is a lone and lovely forest walk,
A very lone and lovely forest walk,
And in the bloomy trees the sweet birds talk;
For birds have language and intelligence,
And feeling, passion, and distinctive sense.
For we are mortal and we love and feel,
And they can love and feel, indeed, the ideal
Of true devotion dwells in finer mould
Within their little breasts of brown and gold.

It is a lonely, lovely walk; straight down,
The vista deepens into shades of brown,
Where dry leaves strew the lying path below,
And crisp and rustle when the breezes blow.
I can believe that spirits in the night,
When earth is still and stars give out their light,
I can believe that spirits hither hold
Gay revel: Spirits glorious to behold,
I can believe they wander in sweet talk
All up and down the lovely forest walk.

The stars have spirits, and the sky and breeze,
The water and the flowers and the trees,
And they come forth at night and wander near
Wherever woods are thick or streams are clear.
They wander going far and far away,
Until some mortal comes or it is day.
And once a traveller was, at morning, found
Within the wood, quite dead upon the ground.
And someone said — some aged person said,
"The Spirits sang to him and he is dead,"
The spirits found him as he passed along,
And so they lulled him into death with song.

But have you ever heard the spirits sing?
The spirits of the breeze and water sing?
They sadden with their voice each sound they give,
And he who heareth them he cannot live.

Oh! I would like to hear their dying breath,
'Twould be but by sweet sounds to suffer death,
And I would like — so tired I sometimes feel —
To hear the moaning, fatal whisper steal
Upon my heart, upon my soul, my brain,
Until I died upon the deep, sweet strain.

It is a lovely walk, so cool and wide,
So green and beautiful on either side,
So full of some deep power I cannot tell,
A charm, a fascination or a spell.
Yes! 'tis a spell, for if you chanced to sleep
Within this walk, exquisite dreams would steep
The senses and delight the unfettered soul,
For dreams relieve the spirit from control,
And it can wander far to distant places,
Throughout the ether, through infinite spaces,
In worlds which now we reckon holy, viewing
Their natives their blest work and way pursuing.

The forest walk is silent, and I know
That silence awes the mortal. He may go
Untouched, unthinking thro' the busy streets,
But when and where no human form he meets;
It seemeth strange to him and knowing not
The secrets of the silent woodland spot,
He saddens and all through his nature starts
That wistful yearning solitude imparts.
And knowing not what deep emotion steals;
He deeply feels, yet knows not what he feels.

The forest walk buds into bright array,
For wild flowers carpet all the lying way,
Strange forms, strange hues — they sparkle when awake,
They ope and bloom for very nature's sake.
And when the darkness comes and night is deep,
They fold their silken leaves and fall asleep.
I would so like when I am sleeping too,

The last deep sleep with nothing else to do,
That I might lie beneath the forest walk
Where flowers bloom, and birds and breezes talk.
It may be fancy but I deem that rest
In such a happy region would be best.

The Palm-Soul

I claspt my arms around a palm,
 And (surely I could not mistake)
The tree that erewhile was so calm,
 From crown to base began to shake.
Its lofty fronds drooped very low,
 The sunlight, thereby broken, fell;
And every line, as touched with woe,
 Appeared beneath a secret spell.

And then I knew it felt for me,
 For I was weary and cast down,
And my sad soul fell o'er the tree,
 As o'er a visage falls a frown,
And it responded. Nature feels
 From mount to deep one sympathy,
One sense thro' all creation steals,
 One sentiment of unity.

I poured my sorrow to the palm,
 I spoke and told it all my grief;
I claspt it nearer and was calm,
 I clung thereto and found relief.
Oh! call it madness, but I hold
 Since then a love more truly dear
Than is the miser's love for gold,
 For palms that seem to feel and hear.

I claspt it, and it felt for me,
 And if its spirit could have worn
A shape that mortal eye might see,
 Or bear the voice mankind hath borne;
I would have folded all my will
 Around its heart and clinging there,
Have poured my deepest feelings still,
 Into its listening spirit-ear.

But seeing not, but feeling all,
I thrilled at feelings sent and given;
And felt a quiet solace fall
Upon my heart with trial riven.
I claspt its ringed bark and felt
Its trembling spirit answer mine,
And knew that all things made can melt
To cheer us when our hearts repine.

A Shaded Spot

The sunlight fiercely burns
From 'mid the vivid whiteness of our tropic day;
And every flower and leaf its parched bosom turns,
 In languid mood away.
The palm-frond's graceful spray
Droops moveless, ruffled by no breath of air,
There is a sense of rest, but such as flare
In flames that dazzle with a steady glare.

The heavy plantain-leaves,
Broad-fashioned, throw their shadows on the dusty ground,
And from each hanging ridge the rustic cottage eaves
 Also in shade are bound.
No bird voice trills a sound.
Heat; clear white heat, that seems to rest with weight,
Falls on the window panes, upon the roofs of slate,
And sparkles on the low, white palings of each gate.

Here is a shaded spot;
A little calm, cool island in a world of light.
Now may the weary "eyelids close in rest", and blot
 The silent swirl from sight;
 While half a-doze, sweet thoughts in flight
Pass and re-pass, like mental music flowing,
Or echoes that rise and fall, now coming and now going
Over the border-land, between knowing and unknowing.

Serenity

Low droop the trees where waters gleam,
 Their mingled tresses viewing;
And twilight, like a lovely dream,
 Speeds to her far pursuing.

Nor echoes near nor sounds afar
 Disturb the calm prevailing;
But distance shows each golden star,
 Like globes in azure sailing.

How beautiful! how much refined
 Is nature wrapped in slumber,
When fancies spring to meet the mind
 In unregarded number.

It is as if a spirit said
 "Peace — peace!" and at her order,
All nature lay entranced and dead
 Unto the utmost border.

Serene and placid now, she seals
 Awhile, her every motion;
Until the soul in rapture feels
 She's rapt in pure devotion.

Most like a virgin bride, who stands
 All veiled in youth and beauty,
With downcast eyes and folded hands,
 In meek submissive duty.

And lovelier far because so still
 And queenly in her gladness;
That none could gaze on her and feel
 No touch of chastened sadness.

'Tis even thus when nature holds
 Her short-lived, silent musing;
And stills her robes erst rustling folds,
 No breath nor sound diffusing —

We feel a calmness over deep,
 To melancholy tending;
Like one 'twixt waking and 'twixt sleep,
 In lowly reverence bending.

Spirit Fulness

In the waning of the day,
Ere the light has slipt away,
And the heavy-crested verdure nods and sighs;
Ere we hear the distant wail
Of the slowly hushing gale
Cease in silence all its quivering replies.
Ere the cloud's reposing breast
Makes a glory in the west,
By the gathered rays of red and crimson light;
Ere the daily labours close
In the sweetness of repose,
And the quiet, soothing sympathy of night;
It is pleasant, Oh! how pleasant,
Just to stand and let the breeze
Play above, beneath, around you,
With its change of softest keys,
It is then that joy is longest,
It is then that thought is strongest,
Then the fancy clearest sees.

It is then the heart expands
To the touch of unseen hands,
And we feel a poem floating thro' the brain;
Nothing orderly and calm,
But a sort of changing psalm,
Like the desultory pattering of rain.
It is then the poet knows
How the fancy burns and glows,
Hot with yearnings to unfold its glorious pow'r;
But the words that falt'ring stray
Do not equally portray
All the buoyant execution of the hour.
For the language cannot, cannot
Tell the feelings' brilliant stress,
Cannot so interpret thinking
In its perfect loveliness,
For we do not choose to utter
One poor sentence, but the flutter
Of the fancy has grown less.

Yet 'tis very sweet to hearken,
Ere the hours of daylight darken,
To the breeze's billows rolling from afar;
And behold the boughs a-nodding
Just as if their arms are plodding
To effect a mimic war.
For the joyance and the sweetness
In the spirit's full completeness,
I uplift the muse's voice
And with glory, glory, glory,
Like a thrice repeated story
In a soul-enraptured ecstasy, rejoice.

The One Power

One day I picked a daisy,
A golden-centred daisy,
And there straightway fell upon my heart a touch of holy fire.
And tho' I watched it deeply,
Long, cunningly and deeply,
I could not tell just what it was that raised my spirit higher.

But at night I spied afar,
The violet-tinted star^o *Sirius*
And there was in it some strange distant likeness to the flow'r,
For with its twinkling light,
There fell in gentle flight
Upon my heart another radiance of the self-same pow'r.

Then upon the Dragon-fly,
With its finely-fashioned eye,
And gauzy wings of fragile make I mused a little time,
And upon my spirit 'rose
The joy that no one knows
To rightly name or weave into the changing sound of rhyme.

But in thought in after days,
I discovered that the rays
From the star were those that glittered on the gauzy dragon-fly,
And the myst'ry of the flow'r
Was the same pervading pow'r
Twinkling brightly in the star upon the velvet dark of sky.

So time taught me and I knew,
That created nature drew
One girdle line of beauty thro' a hundred different ways,
In the rose, the perfume light,
In the star, the gleaming bright,
In the dragon-fly the wondrous structure passing human praise.

The Spirit Stone

A maiden wandering by a river lone,
Beneath soft algae found a smooth grey stone,
She found a smooth, grey, queenly-fashioned stone.

Beyond all pebbles had she known the why,
She would have let that smooth grey pebble lie,
That quaintly shaped, peculiar pebble lie.

For 'twas the stone that called the river sprite,
That called the spirit to the gaze of light,
That brought the river spirit up to light.

But knowing not all carelessly she threw
The stone into the water out of view,
Far in the water where it sank from view.

And scarce could count twice three, ere, cool and fair,
The water spirit with her tangled hair,
Arose and gleamed a dreadful presence there.

Her shining curls were piled dark fold on fold,
Like waves of ebon rolling and unrolled,
An awesome sight most wondrous to behold.

Her eyes were clear as fresh skies after rain,
And in them stars did seem to flash and wane,
To flash and wane and flash and wane again.

Her arms were firm and polished like a pearl,
They gleamed from underneath a mass of curl,
White from beneath an ebon weight of curl.

No mortal form like that could ever beam,
No mortal eyes like those could ever gleam,
No mortal hair fall in such a flowing stream.

No mortal lips could look so ripe and red,
No mortal head poise like that spirit's head,
Ah! dread, most dreadful was the pow'r she shed.

Her ears were pink like tiny shells, or roses,
Like fairy, light-touched leaves when evening closes
Where bud on blooming bud in rest reposes.

I would not for the world have seen her then,
That awful sylvan Circe of the glen,
That dread enchantress of the silent glen.

Upon the maid she fixed her deep, dense eyes,
She fixed her deep, black, awful-seeming eyes,
Ah! me, and as the cooing dovelet dies

Beneath the glassy orbs of some dread snake
That crawls from out a dense East India brake,
So slept that luckless maiden nevermore to wake.

She lay full length upon the flowery marge,
With heavy, rigid limbs and eyeballs large,
Sad, very sad, with eyes spread wide and large.

I fear the forest and its rivers clear,
I fear its loneliness, its depths I fear,
For spirits live and moan and wander there.

The Swallow

Who would not follow thee, swallow, in flight,
On clean, swift wings thro' the opal light,
Away in the purple of setting sun,
With a mad, wild joy till the day is done?
Who would not sweep, like a flash, thro' and thro'
The deep, vast void of the liquid blue,
With never a care but to cut the air,
With never a heed but delirious speed,
And a life — a full life that is life indeed.

Who would not soar ever more and more,
Till the great earth seems but a spectre shore?
Who would not be in a sphere like thee,
Of glorious ether, for ever free?
Who would not mount with a swifter speed
Than the eye can follow or thought can heed;
With never a pause save to gently float,
On the sea of air like a drifting boat,
With a soft, full breast and a curving throat.

Past river and lake, past the hills of white,
Past the houses' tops at a dizzy height,
Past the silent lake thro' whose crystal breast
Thy faint shadow flits like a spiritual guest,
Past the low long lines of the great flat plains
Where eternal silence for ever reigns,
So swiftly you fly now low and now high,
In chase with the clouds that lazily fly,
A voyager, voyaging joyously.

Who would not follow thee, swallow, in flight,
In the cool, sweet air of the early night?
When each star hung high with its cheerful eye,
Drops golden treasure right gloriously,
And the moon high hung, like a censor swung,
Floods a rare light ever fresh and young.
Oh, who would not follow thee, beautiful swallow,
From life and its trials so trying and hollow?
Who would not rise, with a happy surprise
Away and away into happier skies?

The Sorrel-Tree

The sorrel-tree is a graceful tree,
 And its fruit is brightly red;
And its green leaves grow on their stalks below,
 Their stalks with the brightness fled.
For they're paler far than the fruit they bear,
And side by side with the green appear
Like twilight rays thro' an evening pale,
When the sun's last hues begin to fail.

It bears a pale and a fragile flower,
 And it poises from the stem
As yellow and fair as upon the air,
 A butterfly hangs like a gem.
And deep in its cup the fruit lieth low
Like rich, red wines that in beakers flow,
And the petals prest on each glowing breast,
Seem folded for ornament and in rest.

And the sorrel-tree remindeth me
 Of hearts that are highly wrought
With the green of youth and the strength of truth,
 And the love from their vigor caught,
When the graceful leaves of the fancy weaves
The fairy tints which the love-star gives;
And its roots below and its stalks above,
Are fed with the beautiful dews of love.

I've never yet seen a purer green
 Than that of the sorrel-tree,
For it meets the view with a rest so true
 That the eye must with gladness see.
And when with a trill the breezes play
And laughingly puff the stalks away,
They nod and quiver and sweep and shiver,
Like living things that would laugh for ever.

And it seemeth much to belove the touch
 That falls from the Zephyr's lips;
As they idly flee like the wandering bee
 That the flowering sweetness sips.

Like lovers they are, in bowers afar,
That cling to each other beneath the first star;
Of all the trees that I ever did see
There's none with more grace than the green sorrel-tree.

The Old Book

I chanced upon it but to-day;
 While searching in a dusty nook,
And found, tho' long since hid away,
 This old and small moth-eaten book.

A page, discoloured, greyish-brown;
Is pencil-marked and folded down.

And now back, back thro' deeps of blank
 Into a day of happy dreams;
Two humid eyes gaze into mine,
 A sweet face thro' the darkness beams —

And that is all. A ghost of age,
Appearing from a time-worn page.

A Patch Of Cloud

A radiant golden-crimson cloud
 Floats in a waste of silver light;
And gazing idly up I see
 Its beauty gliding o'er my sight;

Until it fades away — away —
Into the dusk of distant day.

Fair, far too fair it shone awhile,
 To melt so soon in empty nought;
How like our hopes that softly smile,
 And are no more than rosy thought.

A crimson cloud! A lovely thought!
Both live in air and die in nought.

Palm Leaves

Half in sunlight, half in shadow,
Here the swinging palm leaves sway;
Making ever-changing carpets
Where their wavering pictures play.

In this countershade and shining,
Thoughts are always intertwining.

Rustic freshness, old-time gladness,
Dreams of faces long-since faded;
Joyous faith that died in sadness,
Hopes that woke with richness laded.

Lives are palm leaves' shadows; lying,
Coming ever, ever flying.

Themes Of Song

Splendour of morning, splendour of even, splendour of night,
Splendour of sun and stars, and splendour of all things bright,
Splendour in deepest deep, and splendour in highest height,
These are the themes of song.

Beauty of ocean, beauty of river, beauty of lake,
Beauty that comes in dreams, and the living hues that awake,
Beauty that gleams and glows for the very beautiful's sake;
These are the themes of song.

Music that floods the soul in waves of delicious sound,
Music that gushes fresh, spontaneously around,
Music in every voice and murmur of nature found,
These are the themes of song.

Life that is stronger than death which o'er our beings doth roll,
Joy that is greater than grief, sphered to a perfect whole,
Happiness wrought in itself, soul of all ecstasy's soul,
These are the themes of song.

After a short sequence of "vignettes" entitled 'The Sketch-Book', consisting largely of five-finger exercises in describing people's faces, from which the previous three pieces are drawn, the remainder of poems come under the heading 'Songs and Ballads'. To the frontispiece for this section Leo affixes two epigraphs:

*All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All are but ministers of Love,
And feed his sacred flame.*
Coleridge

*He sat him down in a lonely place,
And chanted a melody loud and sweet.*
Tennyson, 'The Poet's Song'

The more modest offerings of 'The Sketch-Book' were preceded by a line from Pope:

The lines, though touched but faintly, are drawn right.

The Two Palms

Lying at the rough-ringed trunks
 In the bursting glow of day,
Watching all the idle clouds,
 How they slowly poise away
Down to westward thro' the air,
Till at last they disappear.

Over-shadowed by the limbs,
 Graceful drooping from each palm,
All my spirit is o'erswept
 By a silent tide of calm;
And again those black orbs shine
Large and trustful answ'ring mine.

Oh! sweet memory! Oh! dear day!
 There are pictures in the heart
That will never wear away
 Till the life itself depart.
Palms above! dim shades below!
Sweet the visions that you throw!

Amor

From whence the day fell yesterday,
A murmur comes.
I hear it softly say:
Love is unlike the day just past,
His perfect light will always last;
To him, there is no yesterday, no language for to-morrow;
His realm is vast and holdeth way
Throughout, there is no morrow.

And why, I question musingly,
Comes there regret?

Thus seems it to reply:
Heart-love, soul-born, can never die,
However faint, however far,
Its ruling orb doth quiver;
Once born the perfect, full-orbed star;
Its light must shine forever —
For-ever, and ever, and ever.

Regret

Nay! If you ask me of regret,
 You fain would bid me grieve.
Turn on the glorious west thine eye;
See how, in dying, fair they die,
And fade and languish into shade,
Slow mellowing as the sunbeams fade,
 Those last, fair rays of eve.

Now, still and cold, the fallen night,
 So distant, seems to brood;
The rosy sunset hues are past,
Altho' so fair, they could not last,
Now night is here, and fair, but yet
Who could those sunset hues forget
 Nor wish them once again?

Nay! ask not now the source of that
 Sweet tearful dream of joy.
For all things flow beyond the grasp,
We may not long their beauties clasp.
When dreams shall cease and hearts forget,
Then shall we cease to know regret,
 And whisper what it is.

Had'st Thou But Spoken

Had'st thou but spoken,
 'Twould have been easier far to say adieu,
 Had'st thou but spoken.
But how the chill, sad silence is unbroken,
 The knowledge rests with you —
 But I —
I know not why! I know not why!
 Oh! that thou had'st spoken.

Had'st thou but spoken,
 Tho' bitter, better 'twould have been for me;
 Had'st thou but spoken.
The years to come might then have borne some token
 That silence keeps with thee,
 For I —
I know not why! I know not why!
 Oh! that thou had'st spoken.

Dost Thou Remember

I can't forget
That time and place where first we met;
 Dost thou remember, love?
The tropic moon, scarce six nights old,
Poised like a half-formed ring of gold:
And still that hour about it wore
A charm no hour had worn before,
 And all its sweets around us throve;
 Dost thou remember, love?

Sweet thoughts and light
Followed the heart that tranquil night,
 Fresh blown on every gale,
And thou and I — half-bold, half-shy,
Two thoughtless souls in company,
Whose lightest words embarrassed woke.
We spoke and knew not what we spoke!
 'Twas something of that old, sweet tale,
 Dost thou remember, love?

Grave were thine eyes,
Turned full, then bashful in surprise,
 Thy voice, the sweetest heard.
Had I my then heart's-language spoken,
What gay, wild measures would have broken!
But thou wert modest, calmly so —
And feeling closed and stifled slow,
 So that we scarcely spoke a word;
 Dost thou remember, love?

Oh! Call It By Some Other Name

Oh! call it by some other name,
The passion which I own.
Believe me, dear, it is not love
Or friendship's warmth alone.
'Tis not a passion's fervid glow,
Or friendship's colder glare,
But mildly tempered 'tween the two,
A star 'twixt earth and air.

I would behold thy hand and heart
Some happy lover's prize;
See all thy precious glances start
In gladness to his eyes,
But love is selfish, craving all,
Nor loses one fleet smile;
Ah! no, it is not love's deep thrall
That binds my soul the while.

If sorrow chilled thy tender breast,
And care destroyed repose;
My passion would be then exprest
In more than friendship shows.
But call it by some truer name,
Nor love nor friendship say;
'Tis like a white, pure steadfast flame
That will not die away.

I Can No Longer Hide

(*Song.*)

I can no longer hide the truth
How dear thou art to me,
For to my every thought there comes
A gladness born of thee.
Ah! ne'er I knew until this hour,
How sweet this life might prove,
If thou wouldst breathe the sigh that tells
Not all in vain I love, my love,
Not all in vain I love.

Thy shaded soulfulness of eyes,
Thy brow as morning clear,
Thy simple grace — oh! search my heart,
And find them hidden there,
No Hindoo guards his sacred charm
With half such sleepless care,
My soul's the casket — thou my gem,
Fast locked and treasured there, ah! there,
Fast locked and treasured there.

Matrimony

HE.

I have loved you darling, once; and it shall be ever,
Nothing our welded bond shall dissolve or sever,
Sorrow, anguish, year's decay, these may come and find us,
But they cannot cleave in twain those fond ties which bind us.
 Heart-light glows forever, dear,
 Shadow cannot shade it,
Love is Lord and Ruler where
 Gloom can never fade it.

I will love you always, love; always! now and ever,
Love in stream shall rise and flow till love rolls a river;
All my heart-life shall expand till its tendrils waken
Into rapture like a harp with sweet voices shaken.
 Melody, as sunlight clear,
 Struck in chords of gladness,
Drowning with its triumph cheer,
 Every moan of sadness.

When within the spirit land love must hence inherit,
Throbbing soul to soul we stand, spirit bare with spirit;
I will glad the widening day, saying once and ever:
Nothing our welded bond did or shall dis sever.
 Infinite — unbounded where,
 Time and worlds compelling,
Love will be the spirit's care
 Evermore excelling.

SHE.

Hold me nearer to thy heart, ever near and nearer,
Let the years flow swiftly by, they but make us dearer,
As the lichen to the tree, I to thee am clinging,
Farther round and round thy heart clasping, folding, springing,
 Always thus forever, love,
 Always thus forever.
Nothing can untwine the heart,
 Or its tendrils sever.

Time, indeed, may dry its leaves, make them sear and colder,
But the nearer it will cling, heavier and bolder.
Tho' the blast may howl around, toil and ravage bringing,
When it ceases it shall leave still the torn vine clinging.
 Ever near and nearer, dear,
 Ever near and nearer.
Dearer love, because more near,
 Nearer, because dearer.

Fold me round thy heart of hearts, love me as I'm loving;
Keep me with thy greater strength, prove me as I'm proving;
Future worlds may give us light, give us knowledge clearer,
But not give us greater love or entwine us nearer.
 Thine the mould of passion, love,
 Mine by thy love fashioned,
It will always live, but oh!
 Not the more impassioned.

The Lost For Ever

Eheu fugaces anni labuntur, Postume, Postume.

Barham quoting Horace

It is irrevocably lost to me,
It pass'd, as shadows pass above the sea;
It sank, as wrecks that break and swirl below
The wild sea-waves that ever fret and flow;
Lost! ever lost to me.

And at times its wan, white spirit
Murmurs — but I cannot hear it,
And from round its form comes falling
Sweet, and far, and all enthralling,
Shadow-fashioned — intercessant,
Fading, brightening, evanescent
Glories of the lost forever.

Sometimes in a song of sadness,
Sometimes in a glee of gladness,
Or in dusky dimness looming
Gigantesque-immeasured: glooming
Like a tow'r that throws its shadow
Four-fold o'er a twilight meadow,
Comes the lost forever.

Or perchance when midnight weareth
Into morn, it then appeareth
Like a faint, fair spectral vision,
Full of penitent contrition
Which it struggles to deliver,
All with tearful lids that quiver.
Thus it comes, the lost forever,
Lost forever, lost forever.

A Dream Of Angels

Paradise hath streets of gold,
It hath gates that oft unfold —
 Lo! an angel flight.
Thro' the topaz gates they stream,
Beam of sunlight after beam,
Dream of joy on joyous dream,
 Wings of living white.

Oh! how swift their pinions glance
Thro' the measureless expanse,
 Under, over, under:
Hither! thither! all about,
Now within and now without,
Mimic stars in revel rout,
 Forms of very wonder,

Seas of blue-bright waters blown
Into feathers soft as down,
 Would declare their flight,
Or gold-crimson clouds of eve,
Ere the twilight takes its leave,
Shattered — as none could conceive —
 Into shreds of light.

Lapsingly and thrillingly,
Swiftly, brightly, willingly,
 Here and there they gleam;
Beautiful and mystical,
Now they rise and now they fall,
Chassé, croizé, all with all,
 Gorgeous as a dream.

On The River

Down the river flowing wide,
Floating out upon the tide,
Lifts and drifts our skiff along,
While thus dwells the maiden's song —
 "On the slow tide,
 Further we glide.
Dreamily over the river.
 'Twere sweet to float,
 Voicing our note,
Dreamily drifting for ever."

Heavy-leaved the bushes sway,
All along on either way;
And a-far a dim, blue light
Glimmers on a surf of white.
 "Hearts that are caught,
 Loves that are sought,
Pleasantly drift o'er life's river;
 Onward they go,
 Ever they flow,
Pleasantly drifting for ever."

Voices from the shore afar,
Die beneath the love-queen star,
Vesper bells in sweet chimes flowing,
Sound beyond us outward going.
 "Let the night fall,
 Over us all,
Over the landscape and river;
 What do we heed
 If we indeed
Drift on for ever and ever."

Writ In Tears

They tell us, those that are so wise,
That change lives despot of the earth,
That virtue, grown old-fashioned, dies;
And every feeling, having birth
To-day will, ere to-morrow's sun,
Be cold as dropping dews at morn,
When night's appointed course is run,
And in the grey the light is born.

Now I who feel, in heart and brain,
A ceaseless mem'ry tolling slow,
Set measures to one sad refrain
Whose theme fell out some years ago —
I, who have held as 'twere full-claspt,
A dream I cherished, to my breast,
Have felt, and feel, regret can last
Too deeply for the spirit's rest.

The seasons vary zone to zone,
And many changes time the wind;
But who hath deeply felt and known
Complete oblivion steep the mind?
'Tis here the pangs of life are found,
Not that we do not gain at all,
But that we gain and lose, — the mound
Remaining where our treasures fall.

They have not told us true, the wise,
Rough stoics calming care by will;
My heart has taught me it defies
The power of time to keep it still.
Fly moments lightly — speed the hours,
Speed, swiftly speed, the coming years —
Would ye might bear on your swift wings,
That one sad mem'ry writ in tears.

Trade

Some talk of trade as low and mean,
 Believing worth the patent right
Of him who guides the pen or e'en
 Of him who glasses nature's light.
While art and written language tell
 The spirit-portion of God's earth,
The tradesman hath his task as well,
 As noble and as full of worth.

The flaccid coxcomb we behold
 Like some abortive work of fate;
In unctuous folds of fashion rolled:
 Can he, with truth, be titled *great*?
Can he whose heart hath never thrilled
 One moment at another's pain;
One kindly action never willed,
 Can *he* deserve the poet's strain?

And yet, with empty gaze and mien,
 A blushless cheek and voidless head,
Such will despise the tradesman seen
 Hard toiling for his daily bread.
Look! if you would behold the man,
 Whom God and nature crown a king,
A wide-earth noble would you scan?
 Behold him in some better thing.

Bold front whose eyes give way to none,
 Clean, honest hands tho' hard and black;
Kind voice and free, tho' harsh of tone,
 Of ill, a share; of joy, no lack.
If such be found, to him all praise;
 Be he the lowest, vilest clown;
All honor, homage, reverence raise,
 With words of light his manhood crown.

Patria Mea Te Amo

My own land, tho' all despise thee,
Still my soul, with fast-locked arms,
Clings to thee, by thee upholden,
Conscious of thy native charms.

Others boast of lands of grandeur,
Hills upborne and valleys deep,
Where, in beauty, laughing waters
Woo the perfumed air to sleep.

If, for these, to them, they're dearest,
For thy faults I love thee best;
Thy defects to me are rarest,
In thy sorrows I am blest.

Here, my childhood, rough and cheerless,
Has, with thee, been passed away;
Now, in manhood's sober morning,
Closer to thy side I lay.

And I know thy grieving breezes,
Will attune their saddest breath,
When, within thine arms, oh! mother,
I am gathered into death.

Demerara! dearest country,
Thou art dearest unto me, —
Tales of hills and streams of beauty
Cannot steal my love from thee.

Others have their pleasant changes,
Gush of stream and purl of rill;
Others boast their genial climates,
Let them have them, boast them still.

But, as long as life is present,
While my faintest breath can cry;
I will lift the note unfailing,
Thee, but thee to glorify!

I will own that many fairer,
I will own that greater lands,
In old ocean's wider spaces,
Lie, like zones of emerald strands;

I will own that many greater,
To *their* sons are true and blest;
But to *me* THOU art above them,
Chiefest — rarest — sweetest — best.

The Locust Tree

When the heart of the locust tree fails in decaying,
Or insects destroy its vitality there;
It sheds, like a human in agony praying,
At each fresh eruption, bright tear after tear.

And never is known the great grief which it carried,
Till age or misfortune discovers it so;
When someone finds out, tho' it seemed to have tarried
In music and sunshine, its life was in woe.

And is it not thus with some hearts, happy seeming,
Whose secret emotions shed tear after tear;
Tho' others believe that all joyance is beaming
About them, they know but a hidden despair.

Some secret unkindness the bosom decaying,
Some worm of misfortune hid deep in the breast;
Each happy resolve with its agony slaying,
Forbidding all comfort — disturbing all rest;

Till death or some other divine liberation
Unburdens its fetters and bids it go free;
And others in pity and deep consternation
The secret, at last, in reality, see.

Oh! tree, with thy tender heart wounded and bleeding,
So much like a mortal! so human in grief!
You seem to declare that, some sorrows, no pleading
Can ever control them, or foster relief.

That, hid from the search of all gazers around us,
We only can know it, and knowing it bear,
By shedding, at each fresh unkindness that wound us,
The heart-dropping tear after heart-dropping tear.

Sing, Bird

Sing, bird, thy rippling melody sweet and clear,
Tho' all is dark and still about thee,
I am by to hear.

Thou art like a poet who is all alone,
Tho' no other listens, still, his songs
Flow with sweetest tone.

Rare is thy gurgling, unpremeditate lay,
Gushing, happy, now finely upborne,
Then dying away.

Now softly recitative, sweetly exprest,
Breaks thy mimic fury, just as lief
Thou would'st rend thy breast.

Sing, for soon thy song will end and thou wilt die,
Uncared, unwept, unmissed by any heart.
How like to thee am I!

Oh! Say Not

Oh! say not that with death
Will end all things we love and cherish here!
In those large otherworlds shall not some breath
Of this life's finer feelings reach us there?

Shall we not call to mind
Those things we love and would not all forget;
Shall some keen memory not ever bind
Unto that time the chains that link us yet?

Oh! for but one token!
Some swift prescience of the life to be —
When these deep hungers of the heart unspoken,
Will burst their chilling cerements^o and be free. *graveclothes*

To know that longed-for hope
It is impossible to gather now;
The perfect trust — the love's infinite scope;
The aim fulfilled, — the deed-requited vow;

The healing of the heart,
Almost, by doubt and cruel coldness, riven;
The proving of its nature's better part
To truth, thro' every disappointment given.

When some voice will express
In warmth of language earth can never hear;
Thou hast partaken of the bitterness,
Take, now, of joy thy full and perfect share.

What Is The Good?

Some may say we have the masters
Born to every noble art,
What is then the good to follow,
With a feeble pow'r and heart
All the grand, deep-impressed footsteps
Stretching thro' the fields of time,
Can you ever hope to compass
Any great thing by thy rhyme?

No! we answer, we are conscious
That our words and deeds are small,
But the life that burns within us,
Bids us lose no deed at all.
Howe'er simple — howe'er feeble,
So its object be the right;
We will onward, striking ever,
Tho' the strokes be low and light.

Then, there is a local mission
Given unto each to do;
That no other's heart and labour
Can devise and carry thro'.
There is some dry, arid corner,
Left for our subduing rain:
Courage, then, and pour the sweetness
In a full unsullied strain.

With the pen, or tool of labor,
Art or industry, — whate'er
Comes into our lives as duty
Do it — heedless of the care.
If we scan the nobler issues,
Balancing our task to these,
Surely nought can be effective
But the loss of will and ease.

Questionings will rise in terror
Whether we run well or ill;
Here's the secret of advancement:
Do *your* work and do it still.

Tho' a hundred other fingers
Seem to twine the threads you twine,
Tho' a hundred voices clamor
Asking if the task be thine,
Be assured, the force of merit
Lies in proving you can do
Something — whatsoe'er it may be —
Something! so that it is true.

There is good in bare persistence,
For it trains a hardy will.
Genius, the power so called,
Lies in doing something still.
Not lamenting, tho' this passion
Hath its flitting time and need;
But in pressing boldly forward
To some higher life and deed.

APPENDIX

The Two Prefaces

The difference between the 1883 Preface and that of 1886 is striking. Martin's intellectual position regarding his poetical style moves, in the light of criticism of the earlier volume, from a traditional expression of desire that his writing should outlive him (echoed in the sentiments of the first poem in *Leo's Poetical Works*, 'Inscription'), to a more cynical, aggressively "native" approach which, as noted in our 'Introduction', prefigures the struggles of twentieth century West Indian poets to write the local landscape and its peoples. The possibilities for postcolonial literary criticism of Martin's self-consciously refashioning his poetic persona in this way are fascinating, and we reproduce the two pieces here.

Preface to *Leo's Poetical Works*

Success is the ultimate object of every endeavour, and in placing this collection of Poems before the public, the Author does not pretend that he entertains *no hope of success* — were such the case, these pages would not have passed through the press. It must, however, be borne in mind that there are many kinds of success, any of which may be the prime object sought in an undertaking; and therefore a word as to that which is anticipated in the publication of this little volume cannot be out of place.

Pecuniary success, whilst a very possible object, is nevertheless outside the Author's anticipations; and fame, the idol of so many, for him has so little attraction that he cares not so much as to couple his name with his works. What, then, is his "object"? Simply and purely a radiant hope, an earnest desire, that the words of his mouth, and the meditations of his heart, may reach the outward ears and sink deeply into the

hearts of some of his fellow-pilgrims through this “valley of tears”, carrying comfort to the sorrowful and oppressed; hope to the languid and desponding; strength to the weak and weary; light to those who sit in darkness; and cheerful encouragement to the “weary in well-doing”. Such, and such only, is the object sought in the publication of these poems, an earnest hope for the attainment of which has alone induced the writer to consent to their being placed before the public.

Their composition has been an unailing source of solace, comfort, and strength in many a weary hour; they have indeed proved “Wells of Baca” to his soul in its exhausting journey through a severely tried, though thus far hopeful, life.

In conclusion, the Author would only ask one favour of his readers — that they may be judged by their own merits.

“Leo”

Demerara, October, 1883

Preface to *Leo's Local Lyrics*

A few of the Poems in this volume have already appeared in print, but the major number is new and more in accordance — at least I hope so — with public taste. Some opinions, and not an inconsiderable number either, held that my book of poems published in 1883 contained too much “goody-goodness”, and I must confess that I have deliberately searched through at least two dictionaries without being able to discover such a word. I, however, know full well what it means, and at this time I am free to acknowledge that the opinions were not without foundation. A poet friend of mine whose opinion I value very highly, told me that if we write for the public at all we must write with a broad catholicity of spirit, as impartial of tints as a July sunset. This was anent the critique of *The Saturday Review*! I took the lesson to heart with the result of which the present volume is witness. If the public be in love with simple measure tuned to the one engrossing passion, then they will have nothing of which to complain in the present work.

Anyone at all familiar with current Creole superstitions and the peculiar beliefs of Indian animism, must have noticed that a childishly simple credulity in the universal existence of spirits characterizes them all. Not only that, but the possible influences of these unseen existences on their lives, actions, dreams, etc.,

are all taken into account. As education advances, these beliefs, of course, give way; although they still exist to a very appreciable extent.

I have tried to weave this dim, far-off, intangible — call it — *spirituality* into a few of the tropical studies, notably *The Creek*, *The Forest Walk*, *The Palm-soul*, *The Spirit-stone*, etc., with what success — if any — I leave it for my readers to say.

I may mention that, so far as I am aware, this is the very first volume that has been alike written, illustrated and published in Demerara, and it only remains for me to register my obligations and sincerest thanks to Mr. CHAS STEPHENS for the simple though effective wood-cuts with which the volume is embellished.

LEO.

Georgetown, February 1886