

JUDAS.

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But mention that harsh name, "Iscariot",
And all the skies of thought are overcast
As if on distant hill-tops demon priests
Burn incense vile against the face of heav'n.
Grey grows the landscape: Vision is confused:
Dark problems, imp-like, dance: Fast fades the hope
That universal man may better prove
Than beasts which creep and leap and then devour
And are themselves destroyed.

His form, his bulk,
Proportions, features we know not, nor that
Most subtle blend of curve and line and light
Which—wordless, voiceless—tells to other souls
Full oft the ruling qualities within.
None save the Teacher knew his name should mean
Ingrate and thief and coward, hypocrite,
Aye, traitor, devil, too. 'Twas better so—
'Twas better, say we now, his comrades' eyes
Were holden that they might not fear nor scorn
The touch or sight of him, nor feel forth flung
Against occasion sharp to doubt their Lord.

What were the scenes and sounds, the atmosphere
And light of his now unknown childhood's days?
Did then the plastic soul by circumstance
Receive impression deep, enduring, base?
Was then the tender twig, by coarse, adverse
Conditions, forced the wrong and fatal way
To bend? Go further back: Ask if some fell
Prenatal taint—some virus in his blood—
Some dark, ancestral, fiendish habit—wrapped

His mind about with fold on fold of thought
 So deadly. Or, still further, ask if some
 O'erlording prince of powers of evil may,
 Perchance, have driven him, in spite of all
 The better motions, headlong down the hard
 And rugged ways of death.

But, list ye now:
 His conscience never died. It only slept.
 'Twas drugged and pressed and soothed to silence deep.
 He knew the diff'rence vast 'twixt right and wrong.
 He knew his crimes and sordid guilt—himself
 Condemned. And, in the light of Jesus' life
 The best within himself should strong have grown
 To choke, uproot, o'ermaster all
 The worst, within him or without, and bring
 His manhood up to stature full and free.

But, was not Judas' deed of darkest shame
 One step in execution of the plan
 Of grace? Was he not chosen, foreordained,
 Unto this end? Our logic thus might find
 Us less than justice in our God, or soon
 Acquit all sinners, whatso'er their sins,
 Or force us on to say that all, whate'er
 Their deeds, shall somehow, somewhere, come again
 And stand among God's own, restored and blest.
 No soul is mere machine. Who falls hath willed
 His way. Volition essence is of all
 Obedience and of all transgression too.
 No choice—no virtue then, or vice. When God
 In man did place the right and power to choose
 'Twixt moral good and ill, He thus did fix
 The border line Himself will never pass
 Nor suffer to be moved. Such freedom here
 Is root of all responsibility.

In prophet, Old or New, a "must" or "shall"
Need not affirm the sov'reign Father's plan—
It may instead announce a fact, event,
Or sequence, sure, adverse to Him, and wrought
Through some perversion and abuse of will.

But, why was Judas—known of Him—so placed,
Just where occasion meant such plunge into
Black depths of horrid night? We have not here
An instance lone, uniquely tragic. Its
Companion shames abound. In any place
He would have done, forsooth, as here he did—
The best refused, the worst pursuing—thus
Revealing master preference of his
Own mind. Environment doth bring us test—
Its utmost value this. Not where he is
But what he wills to be determines up
Or down for every one. 'Tis plain, I trow,
The Master wrought with Judas as with all
The rest:—Gave opportunity, success,
And yearning love, and patient care no less
Than to the nobler James or John. What made
These "nobler"? Their own volition. Once more,
Their own free choice. This freedom is a fact
Immutable—essential moral right.
As Eve and Adam fell through un-compelled
Abuse of liberty, so fell this man.
'Tis thus, and only thus, that any fall.

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