

NOVELLO'S ORIGINAL OCTAVO EDITION.

TO MY WIFE.

THE VEIL

POEM

BY

ROBERT BUCHANAN

SET TO MUSIC

FOR SOLI, CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA

BY

FREDERIC H. COWEN.

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THE VEIL.

“God’s Mystery will I vindicate, the Mystery of the Veil and of the Shadow; yea, also Death and Sorrow, God’s divine angels on all earths; and I will vindicate the Soul, that the Soul may vindicate the Flesh; and all these things shall vindicate Evil, proving God’s mercy to His creatures, great and small.”

INTRODUCTION.

Recit.—Baritone.

O brother, hold me by the hand, and hearken,
For these things I shall phrase are thine and
mine,
And all men’s—all are seeking for a sign.

Part 1.

I.—THE VEIL WOVEN.

“How God in the beginning drew
Over His face the Veil of blue,
Wherefore no soul of mortal race
Hath ever look’d upon the Face.”

Chorus.

In the beginning
Ere Man grew,
The Veil was woven
Bright and blue;
Soft mists and vapours
Gathered and mingled
Over the black world
Stretched below,
While winds of heaven
Blew from all places,
Shining luminous,
A starry snow.

Blindly, dumbly,
Darken’d under
Ocean and river,
Mountain and dale,
While over His features,
Wondrous, terrible,
The beautiful Master
Drew the Veil.

Then starry, luminous,
Rolled the Veil of azure
O’er the first dwellings
Of mortal race;
And since the beginning
No mortal vision,
Pure or sinning,
Hath seen the Face.

Thus it befell to men
Graveward they journeyed,
From waking to sleeping,
In doubt and in fear,
Evermore hoping,
Evermore seeking,
Nevermore guessing
The Master so near.

Recit.—Tenor.

Now an Evangel,
Whom God loved deep,
Said, “See! the mortals
How they weep!
They grope in darkness,
They blunder onward
From race to race,
Were it not better,
Once and for ever,
To unveil the Face?”

Chorus.

God said, “Not yet!
Much is to remember,
Much to forget;
Be thou of comfort!
How should the token
Silence their wail?”
And, with eyes tear-clouded,
He gazed through the luminous,
Star-inwrought, beautiful
Folds of the Veil.

II.—EARTH THE MOTHER.

Solo—Soprano.

Beautiful, beautiful the Mother lay,
Crownèd with silver spray,
The greenness gathering hushfully around
The peace of her great heart, while on her breast
The wayward waters, with a weeping sound,
Were sobbing into rest—
For all day long her face shone merrily,
And at its smile the waves leapt mad and free:

But at the darkening of the Veil, she drew
The wild things to herself, and husht their cries;
And went the old life over in her thought,
Dreamily praying as her memory wrought
The dimly guessed at, never utter'd tale,
While over her dreaming,
Deepen'd the luminous,
Star-inwrought, beautiful
Folds of the wondrous Veil.

Chorus.

The World grew hoary,
The World was weary,
The children cried at
The empty air :
" Father of mortals !
Father ! Father !
Art Thou there ? "
Then the Master answer'd
From the thunder-cloud :
" I am God the Maker !
I am God the Master !
I am God the Father ! "
He cried aloud.
Further the Master
Made sign on sign—
Footprints of His spirit,
Voices divine ;
His breath was a water,
His cry was a wind.

Solo—Soprano.

But the people heard not,
The people saw not—
Earth and her children
Were deaf and blind.
While over them, dreaming,
Deepen'd the luminous,
Star-inwrought, beautiful
Folds of the wondrous Veil.

Part 2.

**I.—THE DREAM OF THE WORLD
WITHOUT DEATH.**

" Songs of corruption, woven thus,
With tender thoughts and tremulous,
Sitting with a solemn face
In an island burying-place,
While weary waves broke sad and slow
O'er weedy wastes of sand below,
And stretch'd on every side of me
The rainy grief of the gray sea."

The Watcher at the Deathbed.—Baritone.

If thou art an angel,
Who hath seen thee,
O Phantasy, brooding
Over my pale one's sleeping ?

In the darkness
I am listening
For the rustle of thy robe ;
Would I might feel thee breathing,
Would I might hear thee speaking,
Would I might only touch thee
By the hand !

The sound of my weeping
Disturbeth her not ;
Thy shadow, O Phantasy
Lieth like moonlight
Upon her features—
What art thou—
Art thou God's angel ?
Or art thou only
The chilly night-wind,
Stealing downward
From the regions where the sun
Dwelleth alone with his shadow
On a waste of snow.
Art thou the water or earth ?
Or art thou the fatal air ?
Or art thou only
An apparition
Made by the mist
Of mine own eyes weeping ?

Recit.—Tenor.

Now, sitting by her side, worn out with weeping,
Behold, he fell to sleep, and had a vision—

Chorus.

The Master on His throne
Openeth now the seventh seal of wonder,
And beckoneth back the angel men name Death.
And at His feet the mighty angel kneeleth,
Breathing not ; and the Lord doth look upon
him,
Saying, " Thy wanderings on earth are ended."
A voice arose from out the beauteous earth,
Crying, " I am grievous for my children."
A voice arose from out the hollow ether,
Saying, " The thing ye cursed hath been
abolished—
Corruption, and decay, and dissolution ! "
And the world shrieked, and the summer time
was bitter,
And men and women feared the air behind
them ;
And for lack of its green graves the world was
hateful.
There was no little token of distraction,
There was no visible presence of bereavement,
No comfort in the slow farewell,
Nor gentle shutting of beloved eyes ;
There were no sweet green graves to sit and
muse on,
Till grief should grow a summer meditation,
The shadow of the passing of an angel—
Nothing but sudden parting—and a blankness.

The Mother.—Contralto.

Whither, O Spirit of the Lord, hast thou
conveyed them,
My little ones, my little son and daughter?
For lo! we wandered forth at early morning,
And winds were blowing round us, and their
mouths

Blew rosebuds to the rosebuds, and their eyes
Looked violets at the violets, and their hair
Made sunshine in the sunshine, and their
passing

Left a pleasure in the dewy leaves behind
them;

And suddenly my little son looked upward,
And his eyes were dried like dewdrops; and
his going

Was like a blow of fire upon my face.
And my little son was gone—I knew it
By the sign He gives the stricken, that the
lost one

Lingers nowhere on the earth, on hill or valley,
Neither underneath the grasses nor the tree-
roots.

Then I fled and sought him wildly—
I sought him in the sunlight and the starlight,
I sought him in great forests, and in waters
Where I saw mine own pale image looking at
me.

And I forgot my little bright-haired daughter,
Though her voice was like a wild bird's far
behind me,

Till the voice ceased, and the universe was
silent.

And stilly, in the starlight, came I backward
To the forest where I missed him; and no
voices

Brake the stillness as I stooped down in the
starlight,

And saw two little shoes filled up with dew,
And no mark of little footsteps any farther,
And knew my little daughter had gone also.

Whither, O Spirit of the Lord, hast thou
conveyed them
My little ones, my little son and daughter?

The Watcher.—Baritone.

But I awoke, and lo! the burthen was uplifted,
And I prayed within the chamber where she
slumbered,

And I cried—"O unseen Sender of Corruption,
I bless Thee for the wonder of Thy mercy,
Which softeneth the mystery and the parting."

Chorus.

O unseen Sender of Corruption,
We bless Thee for the wonder of Thy mercy,
Which softeneth the mystery and the parting.

II.—THE SOUL AND THE DWELLING.

"A House miraculous of breath
The royal Soul inhabiteth,
Alone therein for evermore,
It seeks in vain to pass the door,
But through the windows of the eyne
Signalleth to its kin divine."

Duet—Soprano and Tenor.

Come to me! clasp me!
Spirit to spirit!
Tenderly, clingingly,
Mingle to one!
Ours are two dwellings,
Wondrously beautiful,
Made in the darkness
Of soft-tinted flesh:
In the one dwelling,
Prison'd I dwell,
And lo! from the other
Thou beckonest me!
I am a Soul!
Thou art a Soul!
These are our dwellings!
O to be free!
Beauteous, beloved,
Is thy dear dwelling;
All o'er it blowing
The roses of dawn—
Bright is the portal,
The dwelling is scented
Within and without;
Now I approach thee,
Sweetness and odour
Tremble upon me—
Wild is the rapture!
Thick is the perfume!
Sweet bursts of music
Thrill from within!
Come to me! close to me!
Tenderly, clingingly,
Mingle to one!
Wildly within me
Some eager inmate
Rushes and trembles,
Peers from the eyes
And calls in the ears,
Yearns to thee, cries to thee.
Claiming old kinship
In lives far removed!
Pent in its prison
Must each miraculous
Spirit remain—
Yet inarticulate,
Striving to language
Music and memory,
Rapture and dream!
Yea, from my forehead
Kiss the dark fantasy!
Tenderly, clingingly,
Mingle to one!

Is not this language ?
 Music and memory,
 Rapture and dream ?
 O in the dewy-bright
 Day-dawn of love,
 Is it not wondrous,
 Blush-red with roses,
 The beautiful, mystical
 House of the Soul ?

Quartet and Chorus.

My Soul, thou art wed
 To a perishable thing,
 But Death from thy strange mate
 Shall sever thee full soon,
 If thou wilt reap wings
 Take all the Flesh can give :
 The sorrow, the hope, the fear,
 That floweth along the veins :
 Take all, nor be afraid ;
 Cling close to thy mortal Mate !
 So shalt thou duly wring
 Out of thy long embrace
 The hunger and thirst whereof
 The Master maketh thee wings ;—
 Be not afraid, my Soul,
 To leave thy Mate at last,
 But put her gently down
 In the earth beneath thy feet.
 And dry thine eyes and hasten
 To the imperishable springs ;
 And it shall be well for thee
 In the beautiful Master's sight,
 If it be found in the end
 Thou hast used her tenderly.

Part 3.

I.—SONGS OF SEEKING.

“Songs of Seeking, day by day,
 Sung while wearying on the way,—
 Feeble cries of one who knows
 Nor whence he comes, nor whither goes.
 Yet of his own free will doth wear
 The bloody Cross of those who fare
 Upward and on, in sad accord,
 The footsore Seekers of the Lord.”

The Seeker.—Baritone.

The World is wondrous round me—God's green
 World—
 A World of gleaming waters and green places.
 Sweet it is to sit in leafy Forests,
 And hear the stirring of strange breaths
 In the branches ;
 And sweet it is to sail on crystal Waters,
 The Hills above me and the Hills beneath me ;
 I love all grand and gentle and strange things
 And unto me all seasons utter pleasure :
 Spring, standing startled, listening to the
 skylark,
 And Summer, in her gorgeous loose apparel,

And Autumn, with her dreamy drooping lashes,
 And Winter, with his white hair blown about
 him.

Yea, everywhere there stirs a deathless beauty,—
 Yet nought endureth ; all the glory fadeth ;
 And power and joy and sorrow are interwoven.

The World is wondrous round me—God's green
 World—

Yet evermore a trouble doth pursue me—
 A hunger for the wherefore of my being,
 A wonder from what regions I have fallen.

As in the snowy stillness,
 Where the stars shine greenly
 In a mirror of ice,
 The Reindeer abideth alone,
 And speedeth swiftly
 From her following shadow
 In the moon,—
 I speed for ever
 From the mystic shape
 That my life projects
 And my soul perceives.—
 Doth Thy wingèd lightning
 Strike, O Master,
 The timid Reindeer
 Flying her shade ?
 Will Thy wrath pursue me,
 Because I cannot
 Escape the shadow
 Of the thing I am ?

I gladden in the glad things of the World,
 Yet crying always, “Wherefore, and Oh,
 wherefore ?

What am I ? Wherefore doth the World seem
 happy ?”

I sadden in the sad things of the World,
 Yet crying, “Wherefore are men bruised and
 beaten ?

Whence do I grieve and gladden to no end ?”

My trouble grows tenfold when I behold
 The agony and burden of my fellows,
 The pains of sick men, and the groans of
 hungry.

The gifts of earth are given to the base ;
 The monster of the Cities spurns the martyr ;
 The martyr dies, denying : and I wonder.

I have pried and pondered,
 I have sought to find Thee,
 Yet still must roam
 Through desolate regions
 Of wondrous thought !

O Spirit of the grand things and the gentle !
 Wherefore, O wherefore art Thou veil'd and
 hidden ?

Wherever men sinned and wept
 I wandered in my quest ;
 At last in a garden of God
 I saw the Flower of the World.

Chorus.

This Flower had human eyes,
Its breath was the breath of the mouth :
Sunlight and starlight came,
And the Flower drank bliss from both.

Whatever was formless and base
Pass'd into fineness and form ;
Whatever was lifeless and mean
Grew into beautiful bloom.

O beautiful Flower of the World,
Miraculous Blossom of things,
Light as a faint wreath of snow
Thou tremblest, to fall in the wind.

O beautiful Flower of the World,
Fall not, nor wither away ;
He is coming—He cannot be far—
The Lord of the Flow'rs and the Stars.

O wonderful Spirit divine !
That walkest the garden unseen,
Come hither, and bless, ere it dies,
The beautiful Flower of the World.

The Seeker.—Baritone.

Then I cried : " O Thou Unseen !
O Spirit of the grand things and the gentle !
Unfold to me the image of Thy features,
Come down upon my heart, that I may know
Thee ! "

II.—THE LIFTING OF THE VEIL.

Chorus.

Then in a vision
The Veil was lifted
And the Face was there !
.

Recit.—Tenor.

All was quiet :
The heart of the City
Stood silently ;
Each man brooded
On the Face alone—

And men no longer
Knew the common sorrow,
The common yearning,
The common love :
A nameless trouble
Was in the air—
The heart of the world
Had no pulsation—
'Twas a piteous Sabbath
Everywhere !

The Seeker.

Then I fell on my knees
And wept, and murmured,
" My Soul, how fares it
This day with thee ? "
And my pale Soul answer'd—
" A terror hath me—
I feel not, stir not—
'Twere surely better
Not to be ! "

.
I awoke—and, rising,
My Soul look'd forth—
The Dawn was glimmering
All silver pale,
And slowly fading
With a mystic tremor,
The Lights gleam'd beautiful
In the wondrous Veil !
.

Solo Soprano and Chorus.

O Shadows, be at peace, for ye shall rest—
Out of your cloudy being springs serene
The Bow of Mystery that spans the globe !
Rainbow of promise ! Colour, Light and Soul !
That lives, that dies—now here, now faded
wholly—
Ever assuring, ever blessing us,
Ever eluding, ever beckoning ;
Touching forlornest places with its tints,
Fringing the clouds with flowers of crimson
fire,
And melting, melting far away,
Yonder ! upon the dimmest peak of Heaven !

Robert Buchanan.

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