

# CHANT OF A WOODLAND SPIRIT.

## AN INTERPRETATION.

(FROM "A DREAM OF HAPPY DAYS.")

BY ROBERT BURNS WILSON.

IT was the morning of a golden day,  
A mild, sweet morning, early in November;  
One in that time it was  
When through the long still night the white frost falls,  
Which soon the genial sun doth turn to dew.

I walked alone among the falling leaves,  
Along the dry bed of a woodland stream—  
Alone, save Sorrow walked beside me ever,  
And Memory dear, with gentle clasp and sad,  
Her hand still twined in mine.

I, all unworthy, walked betwixt these twain—  
These twain, that have more richer made the soul,  
More fed the mind, more curbed the wayward heart,  
More counselled heedless and unwary feet  
Back to the path of hope, than others, all,  
That ever, on the great round of this world,  
Have sought the poor companionship of men.

Grave ministers are they, from that strange land  
Whose pathless fields the soul doth haunt betimes,  
But with such blundering steps that soon we fall,  
And straight that world hath vanished like a cloud.

Ah! happy he who makes a friend of Sorrow,  
And rests in hope on Memory's thoughtful breast!  
But I, unworthy, walked with these and grieved,  
As one whom God hath made companionless.

To dream of dreams, to find the soul a dwelling,  
Amidst the realm of unsubstantial things;  
To pass life's dangerous limit, yet to keep  
The sense and semblance of mortality;  
To cross the threshold with the heart still warm,  
Touch hands with wonder, and unharmed return—  
For this I sought, and this in part I found.

In part. Therewith our hearts must be content  
Or here or elsewhere, be it heaven or hell.  
But part of all we dream of, we shall find,  
Joy or despair;—we never shall find more.

Vain is the art of ranged words, and vain  
The willing numbers; nothing can enclose  
The visions which the startled soul herself  
But dimly sees, nor fix upon the page  
A record of enchantments in whose thrall  
The heart its fancies and the world forgets.

There was the quiet vale, the towering trees,  
The endless maze of branches, and the gray  
Trend of uneven slopes, sparse-dappled still  
With pale remembrances of the autumn's glory;  
The spice-wood bended by the brook, long dry;

And on the air, trance-like enfolding all,  
The spider's long and filmy threads were floating.

The stream sang not, but from the voiceless bed  
There rose soft music as of waters flowing;  
For there, half seen amidst the lacing twigs,  
A woodland Spirit, leaning on his harp,  
Made song in praise of Nature, while his hands  
Swept answering measures from the thrilling strings.

Half faint with joy I listened, while the fear  
Of worlds untried made all the landscape seem  
A scene dim-pictured on a swaying veil;  
But close I leaned on Memory's tranquil breast,  
And Sorrow nearer to my heart I drew,  
Fain still to be the creature that I am.

Yet so, scarce knowing if I lived, I watched  
That woodland minstrel strike the chords, and heard—  
Sore straitened of my spirit—while he sang,  
In clear, swift-following tones, which rose and fell  
Like jewels tossed by handfuls in the air,  
The praise of things myself had sought to sing.

Forgive, O Spirit, that I envy thee;  
Forgive the hope which bids me seek thee still;  
For oft o' starlit nights my quest me leads  
Across the dewy upland of the wold;  
Or at the blurred close of some winter's day,  
Breasting a snow-storm on the Benson Hills,  
I wend in breathless haste, and fondly dream  
I see thee dimly through the falling flakes.

Forgive the rendering which I here essay  
Of this, a song of thine at autumn-time.

#### THE SONG.

These be the days!  
And like them there be others none on earth,  
Nor in the fancy, neither in the dreams  
Nor pictured visions, of the sons of men;  
Nor do the glimpses of that after-world  
Which longing souls have imaged to their eyes  
Hold, in their gifts of beauty promised, hope  
Of days that are more fair.

These be the days!  
When, pale and wan, among the unseen stars  
The waning moon sinks through the sunlit haze  
That spreads upon the western morning sky,  
Like some celestial urn, divinely wrought,  
Which angel hands let slowly down to earth,  
To lift the soul of Summer back to heaven.

These be the days!  
When that the Wind, that wailing troubadour,  
Whose soul is in his song, comes by the fields  
Of tawny gray which flank the golden hills,  
And by the stream where stand the wistful willows,  
And through the forest, singing as he comes.

Now, sinking low,  
 The long-drawn cadence dips beside the marge  
 Of some dim plain;  
 Now, wild and sweet,  
 The music wakes and lifts the trailing chords,  
 All idly dallying with the whispering reeds,  
 And sweeps the fretwork of the rising ground  
 In long, harmonious swells of melody.  
 Still higher mounts the theme, and up the steep  
 Swift speeds the strident wail among the trees,  
 Till all the forest shouts in ecstasy,  
 And all the moaning aisles are filled with sound.

Then, on the level of the painted wold,  
 That shakes like some wild courser's brindled mane,  
 The puffing Blast wheels on his whistling course,  
 Far through the rocking cedars, dragging forth  
 The heavy tones with strong, resistless hands,  
 Awaking all the thousand voices up  
 Which lurk unheard within that wilderness,  
 To join his mighty avalanche of song.

Loud, long, and clear, the piercing, utmost note  
 Cleaves through the thunder of that song of songs,  
 And scales the crumbling arches of the air.  
 With deep and trundling echoes now it rolls  
 Against the hollow curving of the hills,  
 And whirling round the breathless knolls, it sinks  
 Down, down, the wonder of the gaping vales,  
 To sob, subdued, beside the stream once more;  
 To stir the dead dream of the summer gone  
 With gentle rustlings in the russet corn,  
 And whisper softly, like a lost refrain  
 Recalling sometime sweet remembrances,  
 Among the woven willows, dusk and brown;  
 While, far and faint, a lingering after-tone  
 Hums through the needled branches of the pines,  
 And from the upland distance, rippling, fall  
 Soft, undulating murmurs of applause.

Oh! glorious is the Wind,  
 When he doth rouse his spirit in the clouds,  
 And wakes the north-land trumpet with a blast  
 That drives the flying snows across the world,  
 And piles the white-maned seas in crystal peaks  
 Which echo back the terrors of his voice!

But sweet unspeakably,  
 When, in the spring-time, on the April hills,  
 What time the white-armed Dawn begins to part  
 Night's languid curtains from the morning sky,  
 He dips his shepherd's pipe within the brook,  
 And woos the tender leaves to life once more,  
 And steals the perfume from the bursting buds!

And in the year's full noon,  
 When that the earth is flooded with the sun,  
 All laden with the weight of summer spoils,  
 He wanders slowly down the cloven hills,  
 And by the whispering fields of ripening grain,  
 With lingering steps amidst the fragrant yarrow,  
 And rests at last beneath the spreading trees!

Upon the cool bed of the dappled clover,  
 Wrapped in the shadowy stillness of repose,  
 Lulled by the low voice of the flowing water  
 Which laves the meadow's marge, he sleeps anon;  
 But in his dreams his aimless fingers move  
 With listless touches on his chorded lute,  
 Too faint to fret the slumbering soul of sound,  
 Whose breathings make the silence musical.

But, oh, divine despair!  
 Heart-breaking rapture, ecstasy, and tears!  
 Sweet bitterness of death, and love's dear sorrow,  
 Sad thoughts of loved ones lost, soft gleams of hope,  
 The fading light, the far-off dream of rest!—

All, all, are there,  
 When, in the autumn-time, at even-tide,  
 He draws his harp against his yearning breast,  
 And stretcheth out his hands, full tenderly,  
 Upon the million-toned Æolian strings.

Then bend the grasses where his feet go by,  
 Full fain to follow whither he shall lead;  
 Then from their nests the thistles' downy flocks  
 In happy, shining troops speed by his side;  
 The nodding throngs, flame-tipped and purple-plumed,  
 Which haunt the borders of the changing fields,  
 Strew in his pathway all their gathered wealth;  
 The golden leaves forsake their stems and fly,  
 Far-floating, in the charmed, forgetful dream  
 Which wraps the woodlands, and a blissful swoon  
 Fills all the vales with strange, unearthly peace.

## THE LAST FAUN.

BY LOUISE IMOGEN GUINEY.

**H**OW hath he stumbled hither, in search of love and praise,  
 A tardy comer and goer across the world's highways,  
 A kind shape from the thicket, a wonderer all his days?

He finds a rocky seat where the moiling town recedes;  
 The altered shepherds flout him, but, oh! he hardly heeds;  
 Incredulous he swings there, and drones upon his reeds.

He stamps his cloven heel, and he laughs adown the wind,  
 With eye that wanes and waxes at doings of mankind.  
 Slow, slow creeps the invader upon that happy mind.

The apple breasts his fellow; doves wheel by two and three;  
 And ever dance in circle the shallops on the sea;  
 The goats and deer are many; but playmate none hath he,

Nor nymph nor child to follow upon his signals rude.  
 He smiles—there is no frolic; he snarls—there is no feud.  
 He feels his poor heart sinking at every interlude.

His shaggy ear and freakish resents the wail and din;  
 Earth's rumors chill his veins with their ghostly gliding in;  
 He aches to slip these tethers, and be where he hath been.

Elsewhere is waking glory, and here the dream, the thrall.  
 Hush! hear the sunless waters, the wrestling leaves that call!  
 He lops the grass, and whistles; and while he cheats them all,

Obeys, is gone—gone wholly. From alien air too cold  
 The Faun, with garlands flying, with sylvan ditties trolled,  
 Being homesick, being patient, regains his greenwood old.