

1233

Had I not seen the Sun
I could have borne the shade
But Light a newer Wilderness
My Wilderness has made —

c. 1872

1945

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
 The Stillness in the Room
 Was like the Stillness in the Air –
 Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
 And Breaths were gathering firm

[223]

For that last Onset – when the King
 Be witnessed – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away
 What portion of me be
 Assignable – and then it was
 There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain stumbling Buzz –
 Between the light – and me –
 And then the Windows failed – and then
 I could not see to see –

I many times thought Peace had come
When Peace was far away –
As Wrecked Men – deem they sight the Land –
At Centre of the Sea –

And struggle slacker – but to prove
As hopelessly as I –
How many the fictitious Shores –
Before the Harbor be –

I took one Draught of Life –
I'll tell you what I paid –
Precisely an existence –
The market price, they said.

They weighed me, Dust by Dust –
They balanced Film with Film,
Then handed me my Being's worth –
A single Dram of Heaven!

My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –
 In Corners – till a Day
 The Owner passed – identified –
 And carried Me away –

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods –
 And now We hunt the Doe –
 And every time I speak for Him –
 The Mountains straight reply –

And do I smile, such cordial light
 Upon the Valley glow –
 It is as a Vesuvian face
 Had let its pleasure through –

And when at Night – Our good Day done –
 I guard My Master's Head –
 'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's
 Deep Pillow – to have shared –

To foe of His – I'm deadly foe –
 None stir the second time –
 On whom I lay a Yellow Eye –
 Or an emphatic Thumb –

Though I than He – may longer live
 He longer must – than I –

[369]

For I have but the power to kill,
 Without – the power to die –

Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple Host
Who took the Flag today
Can tell the definition
So clear of Victory

As he defeated – dying –
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear!

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise

[506]

As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind –

The Morning after Woe –
 'Tis frequently the Way –
 Surpasses all that rose before –
 For utter Jubilee –

As Nature did not care –
 And piled her Blossoms on –
 And further to parade a Joy
 Her Victim stared upon –

The Birds declaim their Tunes –
 Pronouncing every word
 Like Hammers – Did they know they fell
 Like Litanies of Lead –

[172]

On here and there – a creature –
 They'd modify the Glee
 To fit some Crucifixal Clef –
 Some Key of Calvary –

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons –
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –
'Tis the Seal Despair –
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –
Shadows – hold their breath –
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death –

c. 1861

1890