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A
CHAUNT OF LIFE,

AND

Other Poems,

WITH

SKETCHES AND ESSAYS.

BY

REV. RALPH HOYT,

IN SIX PARTS.

Part I.

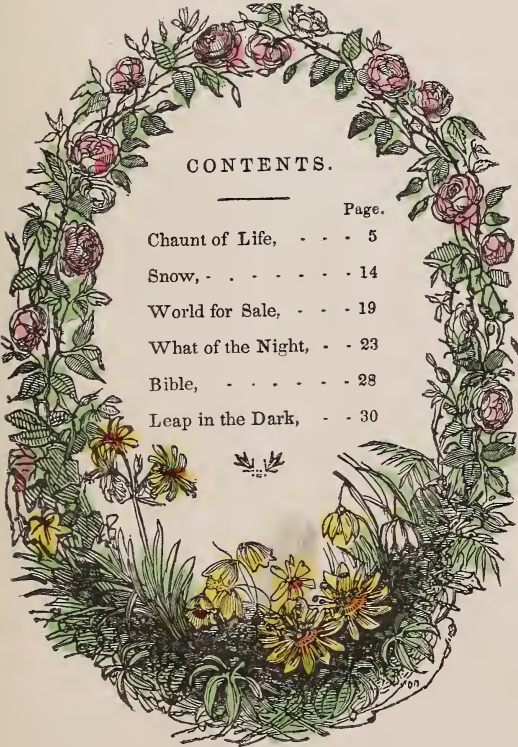


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INTRODUCTION.

These compositions appear in compliance with the wishes of many of the writer's friends, and if in any degree they shall contribute to instruction or entertainment, the end of their mission will be fulfilled. They are but the overflowings of emotions which yearn for sympathy, though too unambitious to contend for fame. The author therefore rejoices for those who run faster or more profitably in the field of literary competition, content if he but effect a lodgement in the affections even of the lowliest mind.

The "Chaunt of Life" is to be continued through the work, a Canto in each part.





THE BIBLE MY RICHEST TREASURE.

A

CHAUNT OF LIFE.

CANTO FIRST.

I.

How changeful and how fleet the things of earth:

But yester' the fair season of sweet flowers,
Breathing its odorous beauties into birth,

With jessamine and roses twined the bowers;
But soon that time of bud and bloom was o'er,

And summer glowed, where spring had smiled before:
Summer! gay, golden summer!—Lo, the fields,

Flushed with the wealth that Industry hath won;—
Blithely the swain his sweeping sickle wields,—

And binds his heavy sheaves.—September's sun
Tinges the clusters on the bending bough,
And Autumn holds a brief dominion now.

II.

And now 'tis Winter!—So the moments roll
That wear out life in fanciful disguise.—
And ah! full oft there's winter in the soul,
 Blight on its blossoms, gloom upon its skies;
The cherished buds of Hope unblown depart,
 And strew their leaves all withered on the heart.—
Nor Flora's beauty, nor her sweet perfume,
 O'er hills, and vales, and woodlands, can restore
The blighted tree of Life its early bloom;
 It cannot see the sun it saw before,
It cannot the decaying stem renew,—
 Dead, in the wintry garden where it grew!

III.

My mournful muse, and thou, neglected Lyre,
 Sisters of my lone spirit, come to me!
My burthened thought, with utterance inspire;—
 Sad harp of mine, thy saddest minstrelsie,
I here would fling upon the chilling wind,
 Chaunting unto the Dead!—Ah, how we bind
The memory of each departed joy
 Close to our bleeding bosoms, till we feel
The past our only good, the earth a toy
 With all its present charms.—O let me steal
From the mad whirl of Life, and pour my breath,
 My heart, my soul, upon the ear of Death!

IV.

Long years have sped since first I learned to sigh
Upon some dear Patroclus' funeral pyre ;
Since sorrow found a channel in mine eye,
And for a buried brother, sister, sire,
Gushed out in bitter torrents, till this heart,
Drained to its depths, no more can feel the smart,
That still unsoothed hath sole dominion there ;—
The busy dream of life but paints it o'er
With evanescent hues as brief as fair ;—
The melancholy groundwork, as before,
Stands out unsoftened, unrelieved by time,—
Drinks up my spirit,—saps my early prime !

V.

Tis midnight now !—Upon the latest guest,
The weary door hath made its final close,
And one sweet hour of deep, oblivious rest,
Shall yield my soul luxurious repose,—
My soul, o'erworn on life's tumultuous sea,
And sighing for that stream where peacefully
The pillowed mariners unconscious glide,
Soothed in a dreamless, care-dispelling sleep :—
O ! let me launch upon that lethean tide,—
Thought shall be rocked a-slumber, and a deep,
Deep plunge of memory beneath its wave
Shall leave my spirit quiet as the grave.

VI.

Illusive hope :—as soon yon gem of night,
 Soft peering through my casement from on high,
 Shall cease its vigilings and quench its light,
 Tired of its toilsome errands up the sky,
 While none but He who lighted up its ray,
 May bid that little twinkler pass away.
 Star of my Life ! Etherial mystic flame,
 Kindled in heaven, yet deigned to me on earth,—
 Know thou thy destiny is e'en the same :—
 Burn 'till He gives thee rest, who gave thee birth :
 From Thought no solitude can set thee free,
 The world shut out, shuts in thyself to thee.

VII.

That spark aloft at midnight brighter glows,
 In silence gleams in its sublimest power ;—
 So thou, my soul, while grief around thee throws
 Its gloomy curtain, let it be the hour
 Thy noblest energies to freely pour,
 Yet not to shine,—but from the earth to soar.
 For what is earth, that Spirit e'er should dwell
 E'en in its sweetest Eden ?—let this Dust
 Cling to its fading kindred,—it is well :—
 The soul hath riches where there is no rust,—
 Afar, in heaven, a paradisial grot,
 Where joy's perfection is, and sorrow cometh not.

VIII.

Now let me call up from the misty Past,
The venerable one 'twas mine to love
Till manhood's years upon my brow had cast
Their boding shadows;—he is now above,—
Nor would I bring him thence,—but oh, to greet
That reverend form once more, how sweet, how sweet.
Father ! I need not haunt thy resting place,
Nor send my thoughts to seek among the blest,
Thy care-worn countenance again to trace :
Here lives thy image in this burning breast !
And here it still shall glow, nor ever fade,
Till low beside thee thy lone child is laid.

IX.

I wot again a flower in life's bright morn,
The solace, and the hope, and ay, the pride
Of its fond, fostering stem,—that flower was torn
By a rude tempest from its parent's side :—
Where are its beauties now ?—Go ask the tomb :
That rosy child,—where now its living bloom ?
I trode his father's hall, and used to hear
His little step light tripping in its glee,—
But now I hear it not,—and lo, a tear
Springs in that eye so gladsome wont to be ;—
Death hath shed mildew on its dearest joy,
Borne to the silent world that prattling boy.

X.

Yet can it be that he no more shall come ?—
See, here are all his pastime toys arranged
As though this moment he had left his home,
The recreative, for the school-hour changed.
There stands his kite against the chamber-wall,
There hangs his garden hat, there lies his ball,
And here, with scientific skill disposed,
His tiny cabinet is ope to view ;
Would he have left the little door unclosed,
Were he to sojourn a long year or two ?—
Ah ! now upon the dusty shelves I see
The sad solution,—Death,—Eternity !

XI.

And where is Ida ?—Answer ye sweet flowers
Here clustering in the path she loved to tread ;
Oft from her hand ye drank the mimic showers ;
Now whither hath the gentle Ida fled.—
Fair stream, along whose margin oft she strayed,
Where wanders now the lovely, lonely maid ?
The lover's bosom heaves the frequent sigh,
The hearts of dear companions inly weep,
The varying seasons drearily roll by,
Yet Ida seems in some enchanted sleep.
Sweet maiden, why so long in slumber bound,—
Ah ! mark yon willow !---Ask the turfy ground !

XII.

O dream of Time!—Yet good to ponder o'er
The strange vicissitudes of this low sphere;
To muse how swiftly from its rock-bound shore
Life's voyagers set sail and disappear:
How phantom like the generations pass,
Confessing as they fly, all flesh is grass.
Hope draws the outline,—let the honest hand
Of truth fill up the picture, till we see
Life's lights and shades as they are wont to stand,
On the broad canvass of reality.
Reality,—yet strangely frail as fair;—
Substantial landscape, painted on the air!

XIII.

Mysterious!—It is the hallowed time
When spirits are abroad; and, while I gaze,
My buried bosom ones assume their prime,
And greet me with the smiles of other days;—
And whom I love on earth, a cherished few,
Press with the visioned dead upon my view.
From guileless Infancy, to silvered Age,
They crowd to make the catalogue complete,
As from my heart's imperishable page,
Their deep engraven names my thoughts repeat:—
Be these my pencil's theme, while I portray
Life's budding, blooming, bearing, and decay.

XIV.

Come my Letitia,---mine by that strange tie
Which makes us ever love the artless soul ;
Now let me look into that lustrous eye
And trace the course thy coming years shall roll :
Th' original, for life's first picture be,---
The early stem before the towering tree.
Ha ! there's a change upon that tiny cheek,---
Smile on !---not I thy joy would ever mar,
Though mournfully it makes the Past to speak,
And sorrow's heavy step recalls afar :
Smile on, and claim my pencil's brightest hues,
Life's rainbow tints,---to look upon,---and lose !

XV.

Oh, would I were, my cherub child, like thee,
So newly from the skies, that earth hath gained
No inlet for its deep impurity :
Oh, would I were like thee, so soul-unstained !
Sweet Innocence !--my thought, my hand be still,
The holy theme demands an angel's skill.
Hope of thy mother,---could her mandate stay
The hours that bear thee from a sinless heart,
Full amply would thy lessened pangs repay
The love that dared to keep thee as thou art.
But time's swift tide will ne'er forbear to flow,
The little bark must on,---the bud must blow.

XVI.

The germ from heaven,---but on earth the bloom;
I see the flower with full perfection blest ;---
Alas, there's poison in its sweet perfume,
And spots appear within its snowy breast !---
How could I weep in soothless, ceaseless grief,
That life so soon is sere and yellow leaf.
Perfidious heart !---so subtle, so debased ;
But for the bitterness in thee that springs,
The tearful history were soon erased,
And earthborn man would soar on seraph wings.
Ah, sweet Letitia, when thy noon shall glow,
Beware,---thy bosom cherishes a foe !

XVII.

I can no more ! My struggling pulse beats high,---
Oppressive visions drown my weary sense,
Absorbed in too much grief, I cannot sigh,
Nor vent the agony that too intense
To flow in liquid anguish, doth corrode,
And canker where it hath its seared abode.
Then hush my lyre ;---my mournful muse, adieu !
Day breaks and calls me to its toilsome din ;
Again farewell, ye cherished !--- But for you,---
Spirits of all my Dead ! too deep within
My soul's shut sanctuary ye abide
To be submerged in life's oblivious tide.

SNOW.

The blessed morn is come again ;
 The early gray
Taps at the slumberer's window-pane,
 And seems to say
'Break, break from the enchanter's chain,
 Away,---away !'

'Tis winter, yet there is no sound
 Along the air,
Of winds upon their battle-ground,
 But gently there,
The snow is falling,—all around
 How fair—how fair !

The jocund fields would masquerade ;
 Fantastic scene !
Tree, shrub, and lawn, and lonely glade
 Have cast their green,
And joined the revel, all arrayed
 So white and clean.

E'en the old posts, that hold the bars
 And the old gate,
Forgetful of their wintry wars
 And age sedate,
High capped, and plumed, like white hussars,
 Stand there in state.

The drifts are hanging by the sill,
 The eaves, the door ;
The hay-stack has become a hill ;
 All covered o'er
The wagon, loaded for the mill
 The eve before.

Maria brings the water-pail,—
 But where's the well!
Like magic of a fairy tale,
 Most strange to tell,
All vanished,—curb, and crank, and rail ;—
 How deep it fell!

The wood-pile too is playing hide ;
 The axe—the log—
The kennel of that friend so tried—
 (The old watch-dog.)
The grindstone standing by its side,
 All now *incog*.

The bustling cock looks out aghast
From his high shed ;
No spot to scratch him a repast,
Up curves his head,
Starts the dull hamlet with a blast,
And back to bed.

The barn-yard gentry, musing, chime
Their morning moan ;
Like Memnon's music of old time—
That voice of stone !
So marbled they—and so sublime
Their solemn tone.

Good Ruth has called the younker folk
To dress below ;
Full welcome was the word she spoke,
Down, down they go,
The cottage quietude is broke,—
The snow !—the snow !

Now rises from around the fire
A pleasant strain ;
Ye giddy sons of mirth, retire !
And ye profane !—
A hymn to the Eternal Sire
Goes up again.

The patriarchal Book divine,
 Upon the knee,
Opes where the gems of Judah shine,—
 (Sweet minstrelsie !)
How soars each heart with each fair line,
 Oh God ! to Thee !

Around the altar low they bend,
 Devout in prayer ;
As snows upon the roof descend,
 So angels there
Guard o'er that household, to defend
 With gentle care.

Now sings the kettle o'er the blaze ;
 The buckwheat heaps ;
Rare Mocha, worth an Arab's praise,
 Sweet Susan steeps ;
The old round stand her nod obeys,
 And out it leaps.

Unerring presages declare
 The banquet near ;
Soon, busy appetites are there ;
 And disappear
The glories of the ample fare,
 With thanks sincere.

Now let the busy day begin :—
 Out rolls the churn ;
Forth hastes the farm-boy, and brings in
 The brush to burn ;—
Sweep, shovel, scour, sew, knit, and spin,
 'Till night's return.

To delve his threshing John must hie ;
 His sturdy shoe
Can all the subtle damp defy :
 How wades he through !
While dainty milkmaids, slow and shy,
 His track pursue.

Each to the hour's allotted care :
 To shell the corn ;
The broken harness to repair ;
 The sleigh t'adorn :
So cheerful—tranquil---snowy---fair,
 The WINTER MORN.

WORLD FOR SALE.

THE WORLD FOR SALE!—Hang out the sign;
Call every traveller here to me;
Who'll buy this brave estate of mine,
And set me from earth's bondage free :—
'Tis going!—Yes, I mean to fling
The bauble from my soul away;
I'll sell it, whatsoe'er it bring;—
The World at Auction here to-day!

It is a glorious thing to see,—
Ah, it has cheated me so sore!
It is not what it seems to be:
For sale! It shall be mine no more.
Come, turn it o'er and view it well ;—
I would not have you purchase dear ;
'Tis going—going !—I must sell !
Who bids ?—Who'll buy the Splendid Tear !

Here's WEALTH in glittering heaps of gold,—
 Who bids?—But let me tell you fair,
 A baser lot was never sold;—
 Who'll buy the heavy heaps of care!
 And here, spread out in broad domain,
 A goodly landscape all may trace;
 Hall—cottage—tree—field—hill and plain;
 Who'll buy himself a burial place!

Here's LOVE, the dreamy potent spell
 That beauty flings around the heart;
 I know its power, alas! too well;—
 'Tis going!—Love and I must part!
 Must part!—What can I more with Love!
 All over the enchanter's reign;
 Who'll buy the plumeless, dying dove,—
 An hour of bliss,—an age of pain!

And FRIENDSHIP,—rarest gem of earth,—
 (Who e'er hath found the jewel his?)
 Frail, fickle, false and little worth,—
 Who bids for Friendship—as it is!
 'Tis going—going!—Hear the call:
 Once, twice, and thrice!—'Tis very low!
 'Twas once my hope, my stay, my all,—
 But now the broken staff must go!

FAME ! hold the brilliant meteor high ;
How dazzling every gilded name !
Ye millions, now's the time to buy !—
How much for Fame ! How much for Fame !
Hear how it thunders !—Would you stand
On high Olympus, far renowned,—
Now purchase, and a world command !—
And be with a world's curses crowned !

Sweet star of HOPE ! with ray to shine
In every sad foreboding breast,
Save this desponding one of mine,—
Who bids for man's last friend and best !
Ah, were not mine a bankrupt life,
This treasure should my soul sustain ;
But Hope and I are now at strife,
Nor ever may unite again.

And SONG !—For sale my tuneless lute ;
Sweet solace, mine no more to hold ;
The chords that charmed my soul are mute,
I cannot wake the notes of old !
Or e'en were mine a wizard shell,
Could chain a world in raptures high ;
Yet now a sad farewell !—farewell !—
Must on its last faint echoes die.

Ambition, fashion, show, and pride,—
I part from all for ever now ;
Grief, in an overwhelming tide,
Has taught my haughty heart to bow.
Poor heart! distracted, ah, so long,—
And still its aching throb to bear;—
How broken, that was once so strong;
How heavy, once so free from care.

No more for me life's fitful dream;—
Bright vision, vanishing away!
My bark requires a deeper stream;
My sinking soul a surer stay.
By Death, stern sheriff! all bereft,
I weep, yet humbly kiss the rod;
The best of all I still have left,—
My Faith, my Bible, and my God.

“ WHAT OF THE NIGHT. ”

I.

CHURCH OF THE CROSS, rejoice!—The hour
That breaks the sway of heathen power,
Chimes from the Clock of Ages!—Hark!—
How must that peal upon the dark
Receding centuries, appal!—
The Watchmen each to other call,—
And lo! the shrines of Moloch fall!

II.

Rejoice! There dawns a glorious day!
The Sun of Truth with flashing ray,
Chases the shades of error far;—
And millions hail the Morning Star
That brings the mental jubilee;—
The groping soul begins to see,
And Universal Mind is free!

III.

Where Don and Danube roar along,
Goes up the all inspiring song ;
Far Guadalquiver's plains reply,
And Ural thunders back the cry,
High Altay gives an answering nod,
And Indus breaks the pagan rod,
For Light, and Liberty, and God !

IV.

The Lord hath put forth his hand,
He hath spoken the word of might,
And every heathen land,
Hath seen the ineffable light !
The glorious beaming,
That long hath been gleaming
From Calvary's blood-stained height,
Hath pierced the partition
Of dark superstition,
And vanquished idolatry's night.

V.

Where the captive's breast was bared
To the sacrificial knife,
The Christian's sign is reared,
And the doomed are shouting LIFE !
Life, light, and salvation ;—
To every nation,
The tidings have freely flown :—

From Greenland's bleak mountains ;
To Africa's fountains,
Hath the silver trump been blown.

VI.

Afar, on the golden shore
Of India, it rends the air,
And JUGGERNAUTH'S reign is o'er,
For the cross is planted there.
And there it will flourish,
For heaven will nourish
And water it as a tree,
Till its branches shall cover
The spacious earth over,
And all shall its excellence see.

VII.

The glory of Islam fails !
Over mosque, over minaret,
The word of the Lord prevails,
For the sun of their day is set.
Mohammed's delusion
Is set in confusion ;
Vain, vain is the mussulman's prayer,
And vain his dissembling,
His empire is trembling,
For the finger of doom is there.

VIII.

And Judah hath heard the call:
 He wakes from his long, long sleep,
 The scales from his eyelids fall,
 And he turns him away to weep;
 To weep his delaying,
 His erring and straying,
 So long from the chosen ONE;
 The Saviour receiving,
 The Gospel believing,
 He yields ! and the work is done.

IX.

The billow-tossed mariner now,
 Sees Jesus upon the main,
 And shouts from his gallant prow,
 Over earth, over ocean reign !
 Come, Lord, and deliver
 The sea and the river
 And the port from sin's control ;
 Let sailors' rough voices
 Cry, Zion rejoices !
 From south, to the northern pole.

X.

The forest gives back the sound :
 The red man's rapture bursts,

And reverberates around—

Ho! every one that thirsts,
Come! come to the waters!
His sons and his daughters
Are hastening to drink and live;
The wilderness ringing,
Replies to their singing,
Forgiven! and we forgive.

XI.

The combat yell hath ceased :—

Where the belted warrior stood,
Stands now the Christian priest,
With the battle-axe of God.
The triumph is urging!
The Indian, emerging
From dark superstition's sway,
Upraises the banner
And joins the hosannah,
That ushers the Gospel-day.

B I B L E .

BIBLE !—Blessed Bible !
Treasure of the heart !
What sweet consolation,
Doth thy page impart ;
In the fiercest trial,
In the deepest grief,
Strength, and hope, and comfort,
In each holy leaf.

Bible,—let me clasp thee,—
Anchor of the soul !—
When the storm is raging,
When the waters roll,
When the frowning heavens
Darken every star,
And no hopeful beacon,
Glimmereth afar,
Be my refuge, Bible !
Then be thou my stay,
Guide me on life's billow,
Light the dreary way.
Tell me of the morrow,
When a sun shall rise,
That shall glow forever,
In unclouded skies,—

Tell me of that haven
In the climes above,
Where the bark rides safely
In a sea of love.

Bible,—let me clasp thee !
Chronicle divine,
Of a world's redemption,
Of a Saviour, mine !
Wisdom for the simple,
Riches for the poor,
Hope for the desponding,
For the sick, a cure.
Rest for all the weary,
Ransom for the slave,
Courage for the fearful,—
Life beyond the grave !

Bible !—Blessed Bible !
Treasure of the heart,
What sweet consolation
Doth thy page impart ;—
In the fiercest trial,
In the deepest grief,
Strength, and hope, and comfort
In each holy leaf.

“ LEAP IN THE DARK .”

Dread hour of fate ! The touchstone of all faith
I now must grapple, and abide that test
Which, distant, I derided ; but, come near,
Is wondrous fearsome and discomforting.
My recreant philosophy hath turned the heel,
And left my soul unarmed and desolate.—
Soul, did I say ?—ha ! how the giddy brain
Is prone to muster up its old conceits,
And make me rave of things that never were.
There is a mystery within, I know,
That doth exalt this clod to man’s estate,
And gives him empire over all things else :
But “ life eternal ” is a crafty tale,
Which my dissolving nature now belies.
And what is death ?—yet sooth I hate that word,
It hath a meaning that doth fellowship
With such unwelcome thought.—To be pent up

In an unwindowed cell, and there, forgot,
Go mouldering down to nothing! yielding forth
My substance to enrich a churchyard soil!—
I do abhor the doom, yet must not shrink,
And dastardly for vain existence strive:—
Speed, speed your utmost now, ye dwindling sands;
Death,—Grave,—Eternity,—I dare them all!

Hail, land of shadows!—ye dead myriads, hail!
Make room adown your chambers for a guest!
Right valorous I'll tread,—but oh! 'tis black—
Black as primeval night, and foul as hell!
Would but some friendly spirit now, unask'd,
Flit hither with a light to guide me through!
I even would accept the Christian's hope,
Though all fallacious—Hist! I hear a step,—
Who comes?—Come on!—for I must speak it out,—
Though all fallacious, it would be a staff
To stay me while the agony goes o'er.

Now horrid fancies thicken on my sense,
I hear that step again in close pursuit,
I see, or deem I see, the uncouth forms
Of fabled fiends stalk out,—and there's a voice
Deep muttering from beneath!--prepare!--prepare!
And from above there thunders in mine ear,
The hour,--the hour is come!--wide yawn, thou depth!
Perdition's portal,—take the unwash'd soul!

Now light unearthly offers to mine eye
A blazing brink ; misshapen beings thence
Fly up, and screaming, skim the dusky air,
Vultures, impatient for a coming feast !—
While pendant from on high, adown the gulf
Hangs the dire catalogue of all my guilt,
My summons now to everlasting death.

Beyond the cavern's nether verge remote,
Ten thousand midnights roll their mingled gloom
In sullen pomp along a starless sky ;
I cannot flee ; these palsied, tottering limbs
Can succor me no more ; this faltering tongue
Can call no rescue,—life and time are o'er,—
I touch the precipice,—and leap the Dark !



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