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THE WITCH'S DAUGHTER

A CANTATA

FOR SOPRANO AND BARITONE SOLI, CHORUS, AND
ORCHESTRA

ADAPTED FROM

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THE WITCH'S DAUGHTER.

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SCENE I.

CHORUS.

It was the pleasant harvest time,
When cellar-bins are closely stowed,
And garrets bend beneath their load.
On Esek Harden's oaken floor,
With many an autumn threshing worn,
Lay the heaped ears of unhusked corn.
And thither came young men and maids,
Beneath a moon that, large and low,
Lit that sweet eve of long ago.
They took their places: some by chance,
And others by a merry voice
Or sweet smile guided to their choice.
How pleasantly the rising moon,
Beneath the shadow of the mows,
Looked on them through the great elm-boughs!—
On sturdy boyhood sun-embrowned,
On girlhood with its solid curves
Of healthful strength and painless nerves!
And jests went round, and laughs that made
The house-dog answer with his howl,
And kept astir the barn-yard fowl:
And quaint old songs their fathers sung,
In Derby dales and Yorkshire moors,
Ere Norman William trod their shores:
And tales, whose merry licence shook
The fat sides of the Saxon thane,
Forgetful of the hovering Dane!

BARITONE.

But still the sweetest voice was mute
That river-valley ever heard
From lip of maid or throat of bird;
For Mabel Martin sat apart,
And let the hay-mow's shadow fall
Upon the loveliest face of all.
She sat apart, as one forbid,
Who knew that none would condescend
To own the witch-wife's child a friend.

CHORUS.

The seasons scarce had gone their round,
Since curious thousands thronged to see
Her mother on the gallows-tree:
And mocked the palsied limbs of age,
That faltered on the fatal stairs,
And wan lip trembling with its prayers!

BARITONE.

Few questioned of the sorrowing child
Or, when they saw the mother die,
Dreamed of the daughter's agony.
They went up to their homes that day
As men and Christians justified:
God willed it, and the wretch had died!

CHORUS.

God willed it, and the wretch had died!

SOPRANO.

Dear God and Father of us all,
Forgive our faith in cruel lies,—
Forgive the blindness that denies!
Forgive thy creature when he takes,
For the all-perfect love Thou art,
Some grim creation of his heart.

To weary hearts, to mourning homes,
God's meekest Angel gently comes:
No power has he to banish pain,
Or give us back our lost again;
And yet, in tenderest love, our dear
And heavenly Father sends him here.

Angel of Patience! sent to calm
Our feverish brows with cooling palm:
To lay the storms of hope and fear,
And reconcile life's smile and tear;
The throbs of wounded pride to still,
And make our own our Father's will!

CHORUS.

Poor Mabel from her mother's grave
 Crept to her desolate hearth-stone,
 And wrestled with her fate alone :
 With love, and anger, and despair,
 The phantoms of disordered sense,
 The awful doubts of Providence !
 The schoolboys jeered her as they passed,
 And, when she sought the house of prayer,
 Her mother's curse pursued her there.
 And still o'er many a neighbouring door
 She saw the horseshoe's curvèd charm
 To guard against her mother's harm :—

BARITONE.

That mother, poor, and sick, and lame,
 Who daily, by the old arm-chair,
 Folded her withered hands in prayer ;
 Who turned, when cast in dreary jail,
 Her worn old Bible o'er and o'er,
 When her dim eyes could read no more !

CHORUS.

Sore tried and pained, the poor girl kept
 Her faith, and trusted that her way,
 So dark, would somewhere meet the day.
 And still her weary wheel went round,
 Day after day, with no relief :
 Small leisure have the poor for grief.
 So in the shadow Mabel sits ;
 Untouched by mirth she sees and hears,
 Her smile is sadder than her tears.
 But cruel eyes have found her out,
 And cruel lips repeat her name
 And taunt her with her mother's shame.
 She answered not with railing words,
 But drew her apron o'er her face,
 And, sobbing, glided from the place,
 And only pausing at the door,
 Her sad eyes met the troubled gaze
 Of one who, in her better days,
 Had been her warm and steady friend,
 Ere yet her mother's doom had made
 Even Esek Harden half afraid.
 He felt that mute appeal of tears,
 And, starting, with an angry frown
 Hushed all the wicked murmurs down.

BARITONE.

Good neighbours mine !
 This passes harmless mirth or jest :
 I brook no insult to my guest.
 She is indeed her mother's child ;
 But God's sweet pity ministers
 Unto no whiter soul than hers.
 Let Goody Martin rest in peace :
 I never knew her harm a fly,
 And witch or not, God knows,—not I.
 I know who swore her life away ;
 And, as God lives, I'd not condemn
 An Indian dog on word of them !

CHORUS.

The broadest lands in all the town,
 The skill to guide, the power to awe
 Were Harden's ; and his word was law.
 None dared withstand him to his face,
 But one sly maiden spake aside :
 " The little witch is evil-eyed !
 Her mother only killed a cow,
 Or witched a churn or dairy-pan ;
 But she, forsooth, must charm a man ! "

SCENE II.

ORCHESTRAL INTERMEZZO.

CHORUS.

Poor Mabel, in her lonely home,
 Sat by the window's narrow pane,
 White in the moonlight's silver rain.
 The river, on its pebbled rim,
 Made music such as childhood knew :
 The door-yard tree was whispered through
 By voices such as childhood's ear
 Had heard in moonlights long ago :
 And through the willow-boughs below
 She saw the rippled waters shine :
 Beyond, in waves of shade and light
 The hills rolled off into the night.
 Sweet sounds and pictures mocking so
 The sadness of her human lot,
 She saw and heard, but heeded not.
 She strove to drown her sense of wrong,
 And, in her old and simple way,
 To teach her bitter heart to pray.
 Poor child ! The prayer, begun in faith,
 Grew to a low, despairing cry
 Of utter misery :

SOPRANO.

Let me die !
 Oh ! take me from the scornful eyes
 And hide me where the cruel speech
 And mocking finger may not reach !
 I dare not breathe my mother's name ;
 A daughter's right I dare not crave
 To weep above her unblest grave !
 Let me not live until my heart,
 With few to pity, and with none
 To love me, hardens into stone.
 O God ! have mercy on Thy child,
 Whose faith in Thee grows weak and small,
 And take me ere I lose it all !

CHORUS.

A shadow on the moonlight fell,
 And murmuring wind and wave became
 A voice whose burden was her name.
 Had God then heard her ? Had He sent
 His angel down ? In flesh and blood,
 Before her Esek Harden stood !

BARITONE.

Sore-tried one ! this no more shall be :
 Who scoffs at thee must scoff at me.
 Thou know'st rough Esek Harden well ;
 And if he seems no suitor gay,
 And if his hair is touched with grey,
 The maiden grown shall never find
 His heart less warm than when she smiled,
 Upon his knees, a little child !

God's love and peace be with thee, where
 Soe'er this soft autumnal air
 Lifts the fair tresses of thy hair !
 It freshens o'er thy thoughtful face,
 Imparting, in its glad embrace,
 Beauty to beauty, grace to grace !
 Where'er I look, where'er I stray,
 Thy thought goes with me on my way,
 And hence the prayer I breathe to-day.
 Thou lack'st not Friendship's spell-word, nor
 The half-unconscious power to draw
 All hearts to thine by Love's sweet law.
 With these good gifts of God is cast
 Thy lot, and many a charm thou hast
 To hold the love I bear thee fast.
 If, then, a fervent wish for thee
 The gracious heavens will heed from me,
 What should, dear heart, its burden be ?

SOPRANO.

Life's burdens fall, its discords cease,
 I lapse into the glad release
 Of nature's own exceeding peace.
 O, welcome calm of heart and mind !
 As falls yon fir-tree's loosened rind
 To leave a tenderer growth behind,
 So fall the weary years away :
 A child again, my head I lay
 Upon the lap of this sweet day.
 The simple faith remains, that He
 Will do, whatever that may be,
 The best alike for man and tree.
 O truest friend of all !
 God bless you for your loving thought,
 And make me worthy of my lot !

SOLI AND CHORUS.

Immortal Love, for ever full,
 For ever flowing free,
 For ever shared, for ever whole,
 A never-ebbing sea !
 Our outward lips confess the Name
 All other names above ;
 Love only knoweth whence it came,
 And comprehendeth love !
 Blow, winds of God, awake and blow
 The mists of earth away !
 Shine out, O Love Divine, and show
 How wide and far we stray !

SCENE III.

CHORUS.

Her tears of grief were tears of joy,
 As, folded in his strong embrace,
 She looked in Esek Harden's face.
 He led her through his dewy fields,
 To where the swinging lanterns glowed,
 And through the doors the huskers showed.

BARITONE.

Good friends and neighbours !
 I'm weary of this lonely life :
 In Mabel see my chosen wife !
 She greets you kindly, one and all :
 The past is past, and all offence
 Falls harmless from her innocence.
 Henceforth she stands no more alone :
 You know what Esek Harden is :—
 He brooks no wrong to him or his.

CHORUS.

Now let the merriest tales be told,
 And let the sweetest songs be sung
 That ever made the old heart young !
 For now the lost has found a home :
 And a lone hearth shall brighter burn,
 As all the household joys return !

CORN SONG.

BARITONE.

Heap high the farmer's wintry hoard !
 Heap high the golden corn !
 No richer gift has autumn poured
 From out her lavish horn !
 Let other lands, exulting, glean
 The apple from the pine,
 The orange from its glossy green,
 The cluster from the vine :

CHORUS.

We better love the hardy gift
 Our rugged vales bestow,
 To cheer us when the storm shall drift
 Our harvest-fields with snow.
 And let the good old crop adorn
 The hills our fathers trod :
 Still let us, for his golden corn,
 Send up our thanks to God !

SOLO.

And now, with autumn's moonlit eyes,
 Its harvest-time has come,
 We pluck away the frosted leaves,
 And bear the treasure home.
 Where'er the wide old kitchen hearth
 Sends up its smoky curls,
 Who will not thank the kindly earth,
 And bless our farmer girls!

CHORUS.

Then shame on all the proud and vain,
 Whose folly laughs to scorn
 The blessing of our hardy grain,
 Our wealth of golden corn!
 So let the good old crop adorn
 The hills our fathers trod;
 Still let us, for His golden corn
 Send up our thanks to God!

EPILOGUE.

FEMALE CHORUS.

O, pleasantly the harvest-moon,
 Between the shadow of the mows,
 Looked on them through the great elm-boughs!
 On Mabel's curls of golden hair,
 On Esek's manly strength it fell:
 And the wind whispered, "It is well!"

SOLI AND CHORUS.

* Not in the old world's prime
 Was poet's age of gold,
 But wheresoe'er in happy time
 The tale of love is told.

Strong heart to guard the weak,
 True heart to love the strong,
 There is the golden age we seek,
 And there the crown of song.

* The last eight lines have been kindly added by the late JULIAN STURGIS.

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