

THE TREE OF LIFE

Broad daylight, with a sense of weariness!
Mine eyes were closed, but I was not asleep,
My hand was in my father's, and I felt
His presence near me. Thus we often past
5 In silence, hour by hour. What was the need
Of interchanging words when every thought
That in our hearts arose, was known to each,
And every pulse kept time? Suddenly there shone
A strange light, and the scene as sudden changed.
10 I was awake:—It was an open plain
Illimitable,—stretching, stretching—oh, so far!
And o'er it that strange light,—a glorious light
Like that the stars shed over fields of snow
In a clear, cloudless, frosty winter night,
15 Only intenser in its brilliance calm.
And in the midst of that vast plain, I saw,
For I was wide awake,—it was no dream,
A tree with spreading branches and with leaves
Of divers kinds,—dead silver and live gold,
20 Shimmering in radiance that no words may tell!
Beside the tree an Angel stood; he plucked
A few small sprays, and bound them round my head.
Oh, the delicious touch of those strange leaves!
No longer throbbed my brows, no more I felt
25 The fever in my limbs—“And oh,” I cried,
“Bind too my father's forehead with these leaves.”
One leaf the Angel took and therewith touched
His forehead, and then gently whispered “Nay!”
Never, oh never had I seen a face
30 More beautiful than that Angel's, or more full
Of holy pity and of love divine.
Wondering I looked awhile,—then, all at once
Opened my tear-dimmed eyes—When lo! the light
Was gone—the light as of the stars when snow
35 Lies deep upon the ground. No more, no more,
Was seen the Angel's face. I only found
My father watching patient by my bed,
And holding in his own, close-press, my hand.