

CROMWELL AT THE COFFIN OF CHARLES I.

BY CHARLOTTE CUSHMAN.

I.

OLD Earth hath not a story, with awe more strongly blent
Than the hour when from the brow of CHARLES his crown
was rudely rent,
And the iron men of that iron time, with a bearing proud
and high,
Determined, in their heart of hearts, that their haughty king
must die.

II.

They led him forth to die a death, that to the felon's heart
Makes the deepest tides of human shame to the cheek in
crimson start,
To the block they led him, while around, in warlike pomp,
yet dumb,
The warrior hosts that conquered him to his awful funeral
come.

III.

How sped along the hearts of all who marked the steel's
quick flight,—
A thrill, deep-seated—curdling—keen, as they witnessed
the wild sight,—
When the head, that once gave law to realms, rolled the
scaffold's planks beneath,
And pride-curl'd lip and scornful eye were passionless in
death!

IV.

The spell was broken!—like a whim of woman's feverish
brain,
Had passed the well forged, centuried power of England's
kingly reign,
And freed, as from the captive's limbs fall iron gyves away,
The verdant glades of the Father-land slept, bathed in
Freedom's ray.

V.

A mightier than the sceptered, a stronger than its lord,
Had snatched away the diadem and hacked it with his sword,
And, waking from its slumber deep Old England's lion heart,
Caused its most fiery energies to fiercest action start! . . .

VI.

"STAND, OR WE SHOOT!—STAND, AT THE WORD!" The
matches ruddier flamed,
As the watchers of the kingly corpse their jealous challenge
named.
"STAND!" and each wary guardian's eye glanced to his
neighbor's face,
Anxious to know who sought, thus late, that proud yet
solemn place:

VII.

For on a couch, right royally, in London's lordliest hall,
Rested, beneath Britannia's arms, a dark, funereal pall,—
And still below, in death's last guise, a simpler tale was
read—
An oak-wood coffin picture'd here the presence of the dead.

VIII.

The torches in their regal stands revealed a gorgeous
scene,—
Curtains of rarest crimson hue, and ostrich plumes between,
The spoils that power had gathered were piled profusely
round,
And all that wealth or taste could crave, in that lordly room
was found.

IX.

The scene spoke power, and pomp, and pride—yet silence
brooded there;
Nor swell of mirth, nor burst of song, from manly one or fair,
Parted the almost cloistered gloom—nor e'en the sleeper's
breath
Fell on the ear to tell of life,—while splendor mocked at
death.

X.

WHERE WERE THEY? ALL!—the glittering host, who lately
reveled there,—
The nobles, vowed through weal or wo their prince's fate
to share;
And *they*, the dames of high descent, the mothers of a race
Who recked not aught of danger, save when coupled with
disgrace?

XI.

WHERE WERE THEY NOW?—Go seek along the blood en-
crimsoned sod,
Where the noblest gave their lives to war—their spirits to
their God;
Go where in old ancestral halls clouded is each fair brow,
And tones of wail, and breaking hearts, speak woman's
gathered wo.

XII.

They had battled well—those cavaliers!—And bold their
war notes pealed
In many a fearless, daring charge, on many a well-fought
field;
They had nobly borne—the gentle ones!—who cheered
those warriors on,
And knew—like the Egyptian queen—to die when hope
was gone!

XIII.

And *he!* for whom such service leal, such high emprise
was shown,
Knew not, nor recked, of the dread doom that swept him
from a throne;
Yet—"vanity of vanities"—like a guilty felon thing,
In the halls where all bent low to him, lies what *was* Eng-
land's king.

XIV.

. . . . "STAND, OR WE SHOOT!" again rang out the watch-
ers' warning word,
As from the distant space and gloom the comers' step was
heard,
But heedless all of shot or shout the intruder ventured on,
Until beneath the torches' glare his lineaments were shown.

XV.

They range aside, for well they knew the bearing, stout and stern,
Of *him* whose glance could awe the proud, and battle's current turn ;—
The great Avenger of the wronged—fair England's daring son,
Whose sword had known no sheathed rest till all it claimed was won.

XVI.

No victor's glance flashed free and full—no rush of triumph's wave,
As he passed to where his victim's form lay shrouded for the grave ;
But ever and anon there swept, as if beyond control,
To the eye's marge the *tides* of thought, that billowed o'er his soul.

XVII.

And bending forward—that strange man ! to high resolvings strung,
From the pale features of the doomed the snowy vestment flung,
Then, waving back the wond'ring guards, bent lower his proud head,—
And thus gave free vent to his mood, o'er the all-unconscious dead :—

1

He sleeps : Life's fitful pageant o'er,
How calmly rests he now ;
No warring passions pour their floods
Along that kingly brow :—
While hushed to their eternal rest,
The eyes flash forth no scorn,
And the heaveless line of the sleeper's breast
By no surging pride is worn.

2

He sleeps—like to some sculptured thing ;—
Where now the voice of pride
That carried fear to timid hearts
And urged the battle's tide ?
Where now the sneer that spoke his hate,
As he trod the *Commons'* aisle,
And he dared in the dream of his high estate
At our just rebuke to smile ?

3

And where the air of graver doubt
With which his doom was heard,
When England's tried, true-hearted men
Their judgment stern preferred ?
Where now that latest steadfast look
With which he searched my soul,
As though he fain would bare each nook
To its wild, yet dread control ?

4

All gone ! the mighty is laid low,
The spoiler's power is o'er,
And the cottage-homes of a weary land,—
He shall slay their youth no more !

No longer by mount, plain and glen
Shall the stricken sink to die,
Or the blood of leal and saintly men
Pale the overarching sky.

5

Like a troubled dream he has passed away,
And men still stand aghast
As their minds brood o'er the wondrous scene,
Of a KING to judgment passed ;—
Of a throne whose props are bent to earth,
A sceptre snapped in twain ;—
Of a diadem that is nothing worth,
Of old England's riven chain.

6

But over all—beyond all this,
A grander change appears ;
It floods my soul, as to the seer
Come trooping future years ;
And, like a giant slumbering long,
My country's genius starts,
And the echo of her ransom-song
Is the gush of humble hearts !

7

And who, when all these things are known,
Will then denounce a deed
Through which, with God our trust and guide,
Our native land we've freed ?
Who brand us other than we are,—
The van of patriots yet to be,—
Men who will every peril dare
For *Freedom* and the *Free* !

8

And will men so record our act,
When coming years shall span
The nations by our code, and form
A brotherhood of man ;—
When peer and vassal shall be known,
As legend *name* of olden time,
And man shall fill no more a throne
Or climb to it by crime ?

9

It matters not—one heart at least,
Although it mourned its doom,
Bears that within its inmost core,
Yielding Remorse no room ;—
He died, that freedom might be given
To groaning realms, too long oppress ;
And now that Slavery's yoke is riven,
King !—*tyrant* !—*victim* !—rest

XVIII.

The noiseless wing of morning swept to where the speaker stood,
And the torches paled and died as there it poured a radiant flood !—
One look—a lingering, wistful look,—to the dead man is thrown,
And CROMWELL, from his victim's side, in musing mood, is gone !

Graham's magazine.

[Philadelphia : G.R. Graham, 1840-1856.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044092703305>

HathiTrust



www.hathitrust.org

Public Domain, Google-digitized

http://www.hathitrust.org/access_use#pd-google

We have determined this work to be in the public domain, meaning that it is not subject to copyright. Users are free to copy, use, and redistribute the work in part or in whole. It is possible that current copyright holders, heirs or the estate of the authors of individual portions of the work, such as illustrations or photographs, assert copyrights over these portions. Depending on the nature of subsequent use that is made, additional rights may need to be obtained independently of anything we can address. The digital images and OCR of this work were produced by Google, Inc. (indicated by a watermark on each page in the PageTurner). Google requests that the images and OCR not be re-hosted, redistributed or used commercially. The images are provided for educational, scholarly, non-commercial purposes.