

**THE SNOW WREATH  
AND OTHER TALES  
AND POEMS**

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The snow wreath and other tales and poems by Gertrude M. Williams

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Tales and Poems.

BY  
GERTRUDE M. WILLIAMS.



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## THE SNOW WREATH.

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"ONCE again comes Christmas Eve, Christmas Eve in a mantle of snow. Unto thee, O Lord, I lift my soul. Blot out the stains, cleanse the impurities; yea, wash Thou me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 'Whiter than snow!' Why is that before me again? Like a dream it comes and goes, and with it the sound of voices, voices of my Past, my past dreams and hopes. The faded years are still wrapped in the mantle of the dreamy past. My God, I thank Thee, I, Everard Mansfield, thank Thee, for all thy mercies, this snow-clothed Christmas Eve!" The wild bells ring out; they ring across the snowy waste, through the withered stems of the poplars, over the frozen stream—deep through the weirdness of the woods. Hush! my soul, I hear: "For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten." The dead forgotten? My heart feels the chords touched with memories of *my* Dead. Oh, dead most sweet! oh, dead of my love! thou art first and highest in the oratory of

my memory ; a halo encircles thy pale calm brow ; a glory clothes thy form so still. The imperishable Past cries out, "Oh, Dreamer of Dreams, who dost stand on the shore of a wrecked life, who art drifting toward the shadows of the great unknown silence, who art still gazing at the mist between the two seas ; thou canst *not* forget !" Nay, I cannot forget. I, Everard Mansfield, am sitting, this snow-clothed eve, looking on depths of snow—pondering on the length of Life, the breadth of after death, standing between the shadows and the dawning, the mist and the daylight. I am thought strange by those who know me : "know me !" I recall those words, for I am known to none, and only by temptation and sorrow, drear and dark, do I know myself. Men tell me I am sad and worn. Well they may. I *am* worn ; worn by my shortcomings, my sins and myself, sadly waiting the end.

It is an awful night, a night when the ocean roars in terrific force, rushing against the calm old rocks, then retreating with hollow moaning, as if sobbing in its great anger, disheartened and weary. Our usually quiet village is wide awake and moving, although such an hour and weather. From my gable I can see the far distance, catching glimpses of the light-house as the huge sheets of water sink to rise every moment, dashing against its sturdy walls, and the booming of the waters comes to me here down my chimney, dying away down the dusky corridors. And this is



Christmas Eve, and the snow is very white. What do I see in the embers? Shall I say? What do I hear in the ocean? Shall I tell you? In the flickering of the pine logs I see "snow," in the moaning of the waves I hear a voice; nothing more, only that. I feel my Past as I look in the firelight, and I *must* draw it. I feel first of all my childhood's days, passed in the old castle of Rubeinstein, on the Rhine. My father died when I was six years old, and left me to the care of my mother, who cared for me on earth three years more, then left to watch for me in heaven. My earliest recollections are of watching the sweet careworn face of my mother in those dim old halls, where the ivy shook and shivered on the moss-grown walls, and the waters glistened in the sun. Her face was an "expression." By that I mean, when gazing at it, you lost sight of the beauty of her features in the endeavour to fathom the mind beneath, which blended her face to a thought. As I sit here, this snow-clothed eve, I thank God for such a mother, with such a face, as remembrance of her face alone would empale a mind with thoughts of purity and love. Then I feel the time I was overlooked by my grandmother. We seldom met, otherwise than when we took our mid-day meal together, which was always taken in the hall overlooking the water. That old room was hung with tapestry, whose colours were faded and gone, but notwithstanding which showed

faint traces of their design, "Judith and Holofernes;" and when in the twilight the folds moved, then the dead head of Holofernes seemed to gaze at me with its death-dim eyes, and Judith, moving on in glory from the camp, caused a chill to run through me. Then I was forced to creep to where my grandmother sat spinning, as she sang to herself soft old airs of the sunny pastures of her native province. She always sat in one spot, with her back to the light, and her long dark robe falling round her in heavy folds. My little world was for a time my all, as to the peasant the murmur of the hamlet is the tide of life which sweeps round the world.

How the ocean roars! My silent yet speaking companion with hollow eyes gazes at me from my side. The never-dying spark is in the eyes, the thin finger of remembrance points at me ever and anon in the shadows of the pine logs. Conscience, the death in life to me, is ever with me, and in the wind, the ocean and snow, the ever-living voice is heard.

## II.

"LET the dead past bury its dead." Nay, I say, "Shade, take me, I am not afraid." Let me look once more on the mark-stones in my journey. Children have very composite thoughts, thoughts which in after life are but transparencies; at least,

my thoughts were so. My spare time as a boy was occupied in rude drawing and colouring, trying my hand on surrounding scenery and the ruined arches of our old home. The poetry of the place infused itself into my spirit, and I despised the dull monotonous life of the antiquated people with whom I lived. Many times as a child have I wept to think that may be for years I should be immured in a living death, for such it was to me, the snows of winter in spring time. In my 16th year came the death of my grandmother. I smothered her furrowed brow, kissed her worn cheek, and my last sight of her was when laid in the tapestried chamber, as the folds flapped in the twilight, and I blessed the sunny nature which had gone to its long home. I was happy during the first year of my independence, my old steward, Jabez, aiding me in regulating my household. After that time I desired to travel—go with a so-called tutor, set out for a lengthened tour, closing my home to all, save Jabez. We wandered about for no less than six years, each place we visited suggesting another, each scene we looked on bringing keen desires for new. "My tutor!" indeed. Here I say calmly, I will be revenged. Hugh Jephson, we shall meet, I know; then I will pay my long-owed debt. Ah, I will pay it well! While away I concentrated all my energies on my art, revelling in the beauties of nature, rejoicing in my power to feebly copy the great masters. I regarded