MORNING SONGS IN THE NIGHT: POEMS

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MORNING SONGS IN THE NIGHT

Poems

BY

WALTER A. RATCLIFFE

WITH A PREFACE BY

WILLIAM DOUW LIGHTHALL, M.A., F.R.S.L.

MONTREAL

(SECOND EDITION)

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1901

TO THE MEMORY

OF HIS RECENTLY DEPARTED FRIEND

Mrs. R. M. Wilson

OF LISTOWEL, ONT.

WHO FOR MORE THAN THREE YEARS WAS A MOTHER TO THE

AUTHOR, AND UNDER WHOSE ROOF MOST OF

THESE "SONGS" WERE WRITTEN

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY AND REVERENTLY

DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR.

LISTOWEL, *April, 1897.*

PREFACE.

WITHIN these covers is to be found one of the most notable volumes of verse recently published in Canada, because probably no other deals so intensely yet simply with the everyday problems of the soul and of suffering humanity. The author, Walter A. Ratcliffe, of Listowel, Ontario, has for years been cut off from the ordinary pleasures of life by an unusually heavy affliction—having become almost totally blind and deaf. His only communication with his few friends has been through the ear trumpet and the sympathetic touch and treatment. In the sadness of his life his poetry has been to him a solace and an unburdening, and we catch the heart-throbs in the singing of the caged linnet:

> "If I should die to-night
> No terror would affright;
> No quailing at the billows' ceaseless boom,
> No boding fear of boundless, rayless gloom,
> And chill and damp of night.
> But when the last warm light
> Of life, a burned-out candle's glow,
> Shines o'er the fleeted years, what would it show,
> If I should die to-night?"

Brooding such thoughts, he turns with a bond of deep sympathy to the sufferings of the masses of mankind; sees them bear the fetters of ceaseless toil and reap only a fraction of its fruits, while the wealthy revel in vastly disproportionate luxury; sees, in most countries, their poverty made hopeless by great monopolies of land; and he sings of a coming era when these injustices and

monopolies shall disappear, and mankind—and especially the sons and daughters of his country—shall be free:

> "Free from the thraldom of gold,
> Free from the wars of their creeds,
> Free from the terror of want,
> Free with the freedom of Love."

His leanings find a remedy for much in a socialistic order of society—perhaps too much, for how can any legislation from without produce an ideal society without a regeneration from within?

Death and the future life are subjects of intense probing by him; not wild nor fanciful, but the piercings of a thoughtful mind and balanced judgment:

> "Like glow-worms that, in perfume-laden June,
> A moment gleam where vines have hid the moon;
> Or, like the prismic hues on bubbles fair,
> A moment bright,—a touch, a breath, then where?
> Or like the wand'ring stars o'er heaven's face,
> That flit as flits a smile, then melt in space:
> We come and go, we know not whence or why,
> And call it Life, this moment's laugh and sigh.
>
> "The oriole's trilling in the poplar shade,
> The pearly dew-drop on the thirsting blade,
> Yon fairy form, sun-kist at eve and free,
> A snow-drift sailing in an azure sea,—
> If these be vain, if these be worthless quite,
> Then, only then, meseems thou saidst aright.
>
> "Far 'neath the restless wave an insect train,
> Unseen, unheard, doth toil, yet not in vain;
> Each walls its little cell, and roofs it o'er,
> Then others come and find foundation sure
> Whereon to build; and thus tier over tier
> Is rear'd as Time doth add year unto year;
> *But who first wrought his labor hath not done*
> *Till that fair reef looks forth upon the sun.*
> *So we, my friend, do build, or great or small,*
> *Till Error dies and Truth is all in all.*"