

PHANTOMS OF LIFE

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Phantoms of Life by Luther Dana Waterman

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LUTHER DANA WATERMAN

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OF LIFE**

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BY

LUTHER DANA WATERMAN

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PHANTOMS OF LIFE.

I.

I: WOULD unclasp a fibre of life's pain
By giving glimpses to the soul beguiled
Of that fair land whose boundaries lie far down
In the wild world that colors all our dreams,
Far-dwelling, fragrant, flowery, and bedewed,
Beyond the ken of day ; but whither yet
The heart will yearn with instinct unappeased
As yearns the child for its dead mother's breast,
And with a faith that's stronger than all sense,
Than reason clearer, longer-lived than will,
Despite the frigid clay that wraps this life
And all the poisoned passions that betray,
The soul sends out frail gossamers of hope
To catch the radiance of that unknown clime
And thrill with the unheard music of its shores.
Oh ! if the autumn bud within its husk
Has felt a prescience of the summer come
And swelled impulsive with a fragrant hope,

Why, why may not the soul, by earth bedimmed,
In inmost centre of its consciousness
Glow with a transient gleam of happier lands
And melt with mellow music heard by hope ?

II.

As soars the summer lark high into heaven
It pours a-down to earth with all its soul
The melody it catches as it goes
Above the din of this discordant world ;
So one as striving up toward truth he goes,
With laboring soul that knows but that it moves
Onward and upward and godward for aye,
Should tell the new stars that his eye can see ;
Should pass the watchword of the sentinel
That ever sings upon the battlements
That look o'er man's existence " all is well " ;
Should with his song tell all who sleep below
That morn is near, and seen from his clear height,
And known by sheen of its ethereal spear ;
And give the music and the morning song
Of his soul's heavenward aspiration pure
To sweetly all the dawn below attune.

III.

Oh ! ever nearer, clearer to the soul
Are heard the harmonies divine of heaven,
And dimmer the infernal discords grow.
New starry truths are visible above ;
Far more unmixed and purer is the song
Creation sings around the central throne ;
And pure its echo from the furthest bound ;
Sweet voice of answer from the outmost thing
That living glows in space's utmost verge.
O'er all the discord of this striving world
Floats higher concord, subtle yet distinct,
Of which earth's murmur makes a faint sweet note.
There comes dim vision of the transformed world
When it and man are sunned with truth's full smile ;
And o'er the conscious soul there gently breathes
The flowing ether that forever bears
All nature, on its bosom, toward its aim.

IV.

The poet makes a world out of the best
Of all the world he lives in ; peoples it
With the best ones of all the souls he loves,
Honors, or worships ; colors it with all
The gathered gleams of earth's dim beauty felt ;
And atmosphered with hope and sunned with love,
In wandering orbit dimly seen of life
He courses the serene of heaven in faith ;
And listens ever far beyond his ear
To catch the harmonies within his soul ;
Himself the sole possessor and the lord
Of golden realms wide-lying in his sight—
The land of poesy, that has not been,
Yet islanded from life but by a thought ;—
The glimpse of life to pure souls possible,
Where hearts that sorrow for the evil growths
That ever spring from the untilled soil of mind,
May enter musing in a robe of thought
Invisible, and hold commune with hope.

V.

Thus every soul an unknown kingdom has,
With magic music heard but by itself ;
And lives thus castled in its phantom world
Of fact and fancy blent and built by hope.
It treads the pastures of its winding vale,
'Neath the blue beauty of the boundless air,
And all the scene is vocal with delight :
The crowded air is swift with forest wings ;
And shapes of fragile beauty hover round ;
All things of beauty blend them in his soul ;
Fruits many-lobed and juicy paint the air ;
And songs that have a forest echo wild
Sounded from leafy thickets joyous hold
The pulsing air in musical suspense.
Quick fancy sees the drapery of fair forms that
 move
In the wild measures of a native dance,
Revealing wanton witchery of shape
To tempted thought but hiding from the eye ;
Out of its world rise dreamful ladders on
Which holy thoughts reach heaven and descend.