

Classic Poetry Series

**Helen Hunt Jackson**  
**- poems -**

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# Helen Hunt Jackson(18 October 1830 – 12 August 1885)

Helen Maria Hunt Jackson, born Helen Fiske, was a United States writer who became an activist on behalf of improved treatment of Native Americans by the U.S. government. She detailed the adverse effects of government actions in her history *A Century of Dishonor* (1881). Her novel *Ramona* dramatized the federal government's mistreatment of Native Americans in Southern California and attracted considerable attention to her cause, although its popularity was based on its romantic and picturesque qualities rather than its political content. It was estimated to have been reprinted 300 times, and contributed to the growth of tourism in Southern California.

The novel was adapted repeatedly for movies: in 1910 it was produced as a silent film *Ramona*, directed by D. W. Griffith and starring Mary Pickford. Other versions were made in 1928 and 1936.

## **Early Years**

She was born Helen Fiske in Amherst, Massachusetts, the daughter of Nathan Welby Fiske and Deborah Waterman Vinal. She had two brothers, both of whom died after birth, and a sister Anne. Her father was a minister, author, and professor of Latin, Greek, and philosophy at Amherst College.

Her mother died in 1844 when Helen was fourteen, and her father three years later. Her father provided for her education and arranged for an aunt to care for her. Fiske attended Ipswich Female Seminary and the Abbott Institute, a boarding school run by Reverend J.S.C. Abbott in New York City. She was a classmate of the poet [Emily Dickinson](http://www.poemhunter.com/emily-dickinson/), also from Amherst. The two corresponded for the rest of their lives, but few of their letters have survived.

## **Marriage and Family**

In 1852 at age 22, Fiske married U.S. Army Captain Edward Bissell Hunt. They had two sons, one of whom, Murray Hunt, died as an infant in 1854 of a brain disease. In 1863, her husband died in a military accident. Her second son, Rennie Hunt, died of diphtheria in 1865.

About 1873-1874, Hunt met William Sharpless Jackson, a wealthy banker and

railroad executive, while visiting at Colorado Springs, Colorado, at the resort of Seven Falls. They married in 1875 and she took the name Jackson, under which she was best known for her writings. She was a Unitarian.

### <b>Career</b>

Helen Hunt began writing after the deaths of her family members. She published her early work anonymously, usually under the name "H.H." Emerson admired her poetry and used several of her poems in his public readings. He included five of them in his anthology Parnassus.

She traveled widely. In the winter of 1873-1874 she was in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in search of a cure for tuberculosis. Here she met the man who would become her second husband. Over the next two years, she published three novels in the anonymous No Name Series, including Mercy Philbrick's Choice and Hetty's Strange History.

In 1879 her interests turned to Native Americans after hearing a lecture in Boston by the Ponca Chief Standing Bear. He described the forcible removal of the Ponca from their Nebraska reservation and transfer to the Quapaw Reservation in Indian Territory, where they suffered from disease, climate and poor supplies. Upset about the mistreatment of Native Americans by government agents, Jackson became an activist. She started investigating and publicizing government misconduct, circulating petitions, raising money, and writing letters to the New York Times on behalf of the Ponca.

A fiery and prolific writer, Jackson engaged in heated exchanges with federal officials over the injustices committed against American Indians. Among her special targets was U.S. Secretary of Interior Carl Schurz, whom she once called "the most adroit liar I ever knew." She exposed the government's violation of treaties with the American Indian tribes. She documented the corruption of US Indian agents, military officers, and settlers who encroached on and stole Indian lands.

Jackson won the support of several newspaper editors who published her reports. Among her correspondents were editor William Hayes Ward of the New York Independent, Richard Watson Gilder of the Century Magazine, and publisher Whitelaw Reid of the New York Daily Tribune.

Jackson also wrote a book, the first published under her own name, condemning state and federal Indian policy, and detailing the history of broken treaties. A Century of Dishonor (1881) called for significant reform in government policy

toward Native Americans. Jackson sent a copy to every member of Congress with a quote from Benjamin Franklin printed in red on the cover: "Look upon your hands: they are stained with the blood of your relations." The New York Times later wrote that she "soon made enemies at Washington by her often unmeasured attacks, and while on general lines she did some good, her case was weakened by her inability, in some cases, to substantiate the charges she had made; hence many who were at first sympathetic fell away."

Jackson went to southern California for respite. Having been interested in the area's missions and the Mission Indians on an earlier visit, she began an in-depth study. While in Los Angeles, she met Don Antonio Coronel, former mayor of the city and a well-known authority on early California life in the area. He had served as inspector of missions for the Mexican government. Coronel told her about the plight of the Mission Indians after 1833. They were buffeted by the secularization policies of the Mexican government, as well as later U.S. policies, both of which led to their removal from mission lands. Under its original land grants, the Mexican government provided for resident Indians to continue to occupy such lands. After taking control of the territory in 1848, the U.S. generally disregarded such Mission Indian occupancy claims. In 1852, there were an estimated 15,000 Mission Indians in Southern California. By the time of Jackson's visit, they numbered fewer than 4,000.

Coronel's account inspired Jackson to action. The U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Hiram Price, recommended her appointment as an Interior Department agent. Jackson's assignment was to visit the Mission Indians, ascertain the location and condition of various bands, and determine what lands, if any, should be purchased for their use. With the help of the US Indian agent Abbot Kinney, Jackson traveled throughout Southern California and documented conditions. At one point, she hired a law firm to protect the rights of a family of Saboba Indians facing dispossession from their land at the foot of the San Jacinto Mountains.

In 1883, Jackson completed her 56-page report. It recommended extensive government relief for the Mission Indians, including the purchase of new lands for reservations and the establishment of more Indian schools. A bill embodying her recommendations passed the U.S. Senate but died in the House of Representatives.

Jackson decided to write a novel to reach a wider audience. When she wrote Coronel asking for details about early California and any romantic incidents he could remember, she explained her purpose:

"I am going to write a novel, in which will be set forth some Indian experiences

in a way to move people's hearts. People will read a novel when they will not read serious books." She was inspired by her friend <a href="http://www.poemhunter.com/harriet-beecher-stowe/">Harriet Beecher Stowe's </a>Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852). "If I could write a story that would do for the Indian one-hundredth part what Uncle Tom's Cabin did for the Negro, I would be thankful the rest of my life," she wrote.

Although Jackson started an outline in California, she began writing the novel in December 1883 in her New York hotel room, and completed it in about three months. Originally titled *In The Name of the Law*, she published it as *Ramona* (1884). It featured Ramona, an orphan girl who was half Indian and half Scots, raised in Spanish Californio society, and her Indian husband Alessandro, and their struggles for land of their own. The characters were based on people known by Jackson and incidents which she had encountered. The book achieved rapid success among a wide public and was popular for generations; it was estimated to have been reprinted 300 times. Its romantic story also contributed to the growth of tourism to Southern California.

One year after her death the *North American Review* called *Ramona* "unquestionably the best novel yet produced by an American woman" and named it, along with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one of two most ethical novels of the 19th century. Sixty years after its publication, 600,000 copies had been sold. There have been over 300 reissues to date and the book has never been out of print. Encouraged by the popularity of her book, Jackson planned to write a children's story about Indian issues, but did not live to complete it. Her last letter was written to President Grover Cleveland and said:

"<i>From my death bed I send you message of heartfelt thanks for what you have already done for the Indians. I ask you to read my *Century of Dishonor*. I am dying happier for the belief I have that it is your hand that is destined to strike the first steady blow toward lifting this burden of infamy from our country and righting the wrongs of the Indian race.</i>"

Jackson wrote, "My *Century of Dishonor* and *Ramona* are the only things I have done of which I am glad....They will live, and...bear fruit."

Jackson died of stomach cancer in 1885 in San Francisco, California. Her husband arranged for her burial on a one-acre plot on a high plateau overlooking Colorado Springs, Colorado. Her grave was later moved to Evergreen Cemetery in Colorado Springs. Her estate was valued at \$12,642,

She used her married names, Helen Hunt and Helen Jackson, but scholars now refer to her as Helen Hunt Jackson. The *New York Times* referred to her as Helen Hunt Jackson in 1885, reporting on her final illness, and in 1886, reporting on

visitors to her grave.

Valery Sherer Mathes assessed the writer and her work:

*Ramona may not have been another Uncle Tom's Cabin, but it served, along with Jackson's writings on the Mission Indians of California, as a catalyst for other reformers ....Helen Hunt Jackson cared deeply for the Indians of California. She cared enough to undermine her health while devoting the last few years of her life to bettering their lives. Her enduring writings, therefore, provided a legacy to other reformers, who cherished her work enough to carry on her struggle and at least try to improve the lives of America's first inhabitants.*

Her friend Emily Dickinson once described her limitations: "she has the facts but not the phosphorescence."

Her novel was adapted as a film by the same name, released in 1910. It was directed by D. W. Griffith and starred Mary Pickford. In a review of the film, a journalist wrote about the novel, calling it "the long and lugubrious romance by Helen Hunt Jackson, over which America wept unnumbered gallons in the eighties and nineties," and complained of "the long, uneventful stretches of the novel." In reviewing the history of her publisher, Houghton Mifflin, a 1970 reviewer noted that Jackson typified the house's success: "Middle aged, middle class, middlebrow."The novel was adapted for films by the same name in 1928 and 1936 as well, and starred leading actresses.

### **Legacy**

Jackson's *A Century of Dishonor* remains in print, as does a collection of her poetry.

A New York Times reviewer said of *Ramona* that "by one estimate, the book has been reprinted 300 times." The novel has been adapted for other media, including three films, stage, and television productions.

A portion of Jackson's Colorado home has been reconstructed in the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum and furnished with her possessions.

### **Memorials**

The Helen Hunt Jackson Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library is a Mission/Spanish Revival style-building built in 1925. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The largest collection of the papers of Helen Hunt Jackson is held at Colorado

College.

A high school in Hemet, California, and an elementary school in Temecula were named after her.

Helen Hunt Falls, located in North Cheyenne Canyon in Colorado Springs, was named in her memory.

Helen Hunt Elementary located in Colorado Springs, Colorado was also named after her.

## A Calendar Of Sonnets: April

No days such honored days as these! While yet  
Fair Aphrodite reigned, men seeking wide  
For some fair thing which should forever bide  
On earth, her beauteous memory to set  
In fitting frame that no age could forget,  
Her name in lovely April's name did hide,  
And leave it there, eternally allied  
To all the fairest flowers Spring did beget.  
And when fair Aphrodite passed from earth,  
Her shrines forgotten and her feasts of mirth,  
A holier symbol still in seal and sign,  
Sweet April took, of kingdom most divine,  
When Christ ascended, in the time of birth  
Of spring anemones, in Palestine.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# A Calendar Of Sonnets: August

Silence again. The glorious symphony  
Hath need of pause and interval of peace.  
Some subtle signal bids all sweet sounds cease,  
Save hum of insects' aimless industry.  
Pathetic summer seeks by blazonry  
Of color to conceal her swift decrease.  
Weak subterfuge! Each mocking day doth fleece  
A blossom, and lay bare her poverty.  
Poor middle-aged summer! Vain this show!  
Whole fields of Golden-Rod cannot offset  
One meadow with a single violet;  
And well the singing thrush and lily know,  
Spite of all artifice which her regret  
Can deck in splendid guise, their time to go!

Helen Hunt Jackson

# A Calendar Of Sonnets: December

The lakes of ice gleam bluer than the lakes  
Of water 'neath the summer sunshine gleamed:  
Far fairer than when placidly it streamed,  
The brook its frozen architecture makes,  
And under bridges white its swift way takes.  
Snow comes and goes as messenger who dreamed  
Might linger on the road; or one who deemed  
His message hostile gently for their sakes  
Who listened might reveal it by degrees.  
We gird against the cold of winter wind  
Our loins now with mighty bands of sleep,  
In longest, darkest nights take rest and ease,  
And every shortening day, as shadows creep  
O'er the brief noontide, fresh surprises find.

Helen Hunt Jackson

## A Calendar Of Sonnets: February

Still lie the sheltering snows, undimmed and white;  
And reigns the winter's pregnant silence still;  
No sign of spring, save that the catkins fill,  
And willow stems grow daily red and bright.  
These are days when ancients held a rite  
Of expiation for the old year's ill,  
And prayer to purify the new year's will:  
Fit days, ere yet the spring rains blur the sight,  
Ere yet the bounding blood grows hot with haste,  
And dreaming thoughts grow heavy with a greed  
The ardent summer's joy to have and taste;  
Fit days, to give to last year's losses heed,  
To recon clear the new life's sterner need;  
Fit days, for Feast of Expiation placed!

Helen Hunt Jackson

# A Calendar Of Sonnets: January

O Winter! frozen pulse and heart of fire,  
What loss is theirs who from thy kingdom turn  
Dismayed, and think thy snow a sculptured urn  
Of death! Far sooner in midsummer tire  
The streams than under ice. June could not hire  
Her roses to forego the strength they learn  
In sleeping on thy breast. No fires can burn  
The bridges thou dost lay where men desire  
In vain to build.

O Heart, when Love's sun goes  
To northward, and the sounds of singing cease,  
Keep warm by inner fires, and rest in peace.  
Sleep on content, as sleeps the patient rose.  
Walk boldly on the white untrodden snows,  
The winter is the winter's own release.

Helen Hunt Jackson

## A Calendar Of Sonnets: July

Some flowers are withered and some joys have died;  
The garden reeks with an East Indian scent  
From beds where gillyflowers stand weak and spent;  
The white heat pales the skies from side to side;  
But in still lakes and rivers, cool, content,  
Like starry blooms on a new firmament,  
White lilies float and regally abide.  
In vain the cruel skies their hot rays shed;  
The lily does not feel their brazen glare.  
In vain the pallid clouds refuse to share  
Their dews, the lily feels no thirst, no dread.  
Unharm'd she lifts her queenly face and head;  
She drinks of living waters and keeps fair.

Helen Hunt Jackson

## A Calendar Of Sonnets: June

O month whose promise and fulfilment blend,  
And burst in one! it seems the earth can store  
In all her roomy house no treasure more;  
Of all her wealth no farthing have to spend  
On fruit, when once this stintless flowering end.  
And yet no tiniest flower shall fall before  
It hath made ready at its hidden core  
Its tithe of seed, which we may count and tend  
Till harvest. Joy of blossomed love, for thee  
Seems it no fairer thing can yet have birth?  
No room is left for deeper ecstasy?  
Watch well if seeds grow strong, to scatter free  
Germs for thy future summers on the earth.  
A joy which is but joy soon comes to dearth.

Helen Hunt Jackson

## A Calendar Of Sonnets: March

Month which the warring ancients strangely styled  
The month of war,--as if in their fierce ways  
Were any month of peace!--in thy rough days  
I find no war in Nature, though the wild  
Winds clash and clang, and broken boughs are piled  
As feet of writhing trees. The violets raise  
Their heads without affright, without amaze,  
And sleep through all the din, as sleeps a child.  
And he who watches well may well discern  
Sweet expectation in each living thing.  
Like pregnant mother the sweet earth doth yearn;  
In secret joy makes ready for the spring;  
And hidden, sacred, in her breast doth bear  
Annunciation lilies for the year.

Helen Hunt Jackson

## A Calendar Of Sonnets: May

O Month when they who love must love and wed!  
Were one to go to worlds where May is naught,  
And seek to tell the memories he had brought  
From earth of thee, what were most fitly said?  
I know not if the rosy showers shed  
From apple-boughs, or if the soft green wrought  
In fields, or if the robin's call be fraught  
The most with thy delight. Perhaps they read  
Thee best who in the ancient time did say  
Thou wert the sacred month unto the old:  
No blossom blooms upon thy brightest day  
So subtly sweet as memories which unfold  
In aged hearts which in thy sunshine lie,  
To sun themselves once more before they die.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# A Calendar Of Sonnets: November

This is the treacherous month when autumn days  
With summer's voice come bearing summer's gifts.  
Beguiled, the pale down-trodden aster lifts  
Her head and blooms again. The soft, warm haze  
Makes moist once more the sere and dusty ways,  
And, creeping through where dead leaves lie in drifts,  
The violet returns. Snow noiseless sifts  
Ere night, an icy shroud, which morning's rays  
Willidly shine upon and slowly melt,  
Too late to bid the violet live again.  
The treachery, at last, too late, is plain;  
Bare are the places where the sweet flowers dwelt.  
What joy sufficient hath November felt?  
What profit from the violet's day of pain?

Helen Hunt Jackson

# A Calendar Of Sonnets: October

The month of carnival of all the year,  
When Nature lets the wild earth go its way,  
And spend whole seasons on a single day.  
The spring-time holds her white and purple dear;  
October, lavish, flaunts them far and near;  
The summer charily her reds doth lay  
Like jewels on her costliest array;  
October, scornful, burns them on a bier.  
The winter hoards his pearls of frost in sign  
Of kingdom: whiter pearls than winter knew,  
Oar empress wore, in Egypt's ancient line,  
October, feasting 'neath her dome of blue,  
Drinks at a single draught, slow filtered through  
Sunshiny air, as in a tingling wine!

Helen Hunt Jackson

## A Calendar Of Sonnets: September

O golden month! How high thy gold is heaped!  
The yellow birch-leaves shine like bright coins strung  
On wands; the chestnut's yellow pennons tongue  
To every wind its harvest challenge. Steeped  
In yellow, still lie fields where wheat was reaped;  
And yellow still the corn sheaves, stacked among  
The yellow gourds, which from the earth have wrung  
Her utmost gold. To highest boughs have leaped  
The purple grape,--last thing to ripen, late  
By very reason of its precious cost.  
O Heart, remember, vintages are lost  
If grapes do not for freezing night-dews wait.  
Think, while thou sunnest thyself in Joy's estate,  
Mayhap thou canst not ripen without frost!

Helen Hunt Jackson

# A Dream

I dreamed that I was dead and crossed the heavens,--  
Heavens after heavens with burning feet and swift,--  
And cried: "O God, where art Thou?" I left one  
On earth, whose burden I would pray Thee lift."

I was so dead I wondered at no thing,--  
Not even that the angels slowly turned  
Their faces, speechless, as I hurried by  
(Beneath my feet the golden pavements burned);

Nor, at the first, that I could not find God,  
Because the heavens stretched endlessly like space.  
At last a terror seized my very soul;  
I seemed alone in all the crowded place.

Then, sudden, one compassionate cried out,  
Though like the rest his face from me he turned,  
As I were one no angel might regard  
(Beneath my feet the golden pavements burned):

"No more in heaven than earth will he find God  
Who does not know his loving mercy swift  
But waits the moment consummate and ripe,  
Each burden, from each human soul to lift."

Though I was dead, I died again for shame;  
Lonely, to flee from heaven again I turned;  
The ranks of angels looked away from me  
(Beneath my feet the golden pavements burned).

Helen Hunt Jackson

# A Last Prayer

FATHER, I scarcely dare to pray,  
So clear I see, now it is done,  
That I have wasted half my day,  
And left my work but just begun;

So clear I see that things I thought  
Were right or harmless were a sin;  
So clear I see that I have sought,  
Unconscious, selfish aims to win;

So clear I see that I have hurt  
The souls I might have helped to save;  
That I have slothful been, inert,  
Deaf to the calls thy leaders gave.

In outskirts of thy kingdoms vast,  
Father, the humblest spot give me;  
Set me the lowliest task thou hast;  
Let me repentant work for thee!

Helen Hunt Jackson

# An Arctic Quest

O proudly name their names who bravely sail  
To seek brave lost in Arctic snows and seas!  
Bring money and bring ships, and on strong knees  
Pray prayers so strong that not one word can fail  
To pierce God's listening heart!  
Rigid and pale,  
The lost men's bodies, waiting, drift and freeze;  
Yet shall their solemn dead lips tell to these  
Who find them secrets mighty to prevail  
On farther, darker, icier seas.

I go  
Alone, unhelped, unprayed-for. Perishing  
For years in realms of more than Arctic snow,  
My heart has lingered.  
Will the poor dead thing  
Be sign to guide past bitter flood and floe,  
To open sea, some strong heart triumphing?

Helen Hunt Jackson

# At Last

O the years I lost before I knew you,  
Love!  
O, the hills I climbed and came not to you,  
Love!  
Ah! who shall render unto us to make  
Us glad  
The things which for and of each other's sake  
We might have had?

If you and I had sat and played together,  
Love,  
Two speechless babes in the summer weather,  
Love,  
By one sweet brook which, though it dried up long  
Ago,  
Still makes for me today a sweeter song  
Than all I know-

If hand-in-hand through the mysterious gateway,  
Love  
Of womanhood, we had first looked and straightway,  
Love,  
Had whispered to each other softly, ere  
It yet  
Was dawn, what now in noonday heat and fear  
We both forget-

If all of this had given its completeness,  
Love,  
To every hour, would it be added sweetness,  
Love?  
Or ill  
With thee? One wish could I more sweetly tell,  
More swift fulfill?

Ah, vainly thus I sit and dream and ponder,  
Love,  
Losing the precious present while I wonder,  
Love,

About the days in which you grew and came  
To be  
So beautiful, and did not know the name  
Or sight of me.

But all lost things are in the angel's keeping,  
Love;  
No past is dead for us, but only sleeping,  
Love;  
The years of heaven will all earth's little pain  
Make good,  
Together there we can begin again,  
In babyhood.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Best

Mother, I see you with your nursery light,  
Leading your babies, all in white,  
To their sweet rest;  
Christ, the Good Shepherd, carries mine tonight,  
And that is best.

I cannot help tears when I see them twine  
Their fingers in yours, and their bright curls shine  
On your warm breast.  
But the Saviour's is purer than yours or mine.  
He can love best.

You tremble each hour because your arms  
Are weak; your heart is wrung with alarms  
And sore opprest:  
My darlings are safe, out of reach of harm  
And that is best.

You know over yours may hang even now  
Pain and disease, whose fulfilling slow,  
Naught can arrest.  
Mine in God's gardens run to and fro,  
And that is best.

You know that of yours, your feeblest one  
And dearest, may live long years alone,  
Unloved, unblest.  
Mine entered spotless on eternal years,  
Oh, how much the best.

But grief is selfish; I cannot see  
Always why I should stricken be,  
More than the rest:  
But I know that, as well as for them, for me  
God did the best.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Chance

These things wondering I saw beneath the sun:  
That never yet the race was to the swift,  
The fight unto the mightiest to lift,  
Nor favors unto men whose skill had done  
Great works, nor riches ever unto one  
Wise man of understanding. All is drift  
Of time and chance, and none may stay or sift  
Or know the end of that which is begun.  
Who waits until the wind shall silent keep,  
Will never find the ready hour to sow.  
Who watcheth clouds will have no time to reap.  
At daydawn plant thy seed, and be not slow  
At night. God doth not slumber take nor sleep:  
Which seed shall prosper thou shalt never know.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Coronation

At the king's gate the subtle noon  
Wove filmy yellow nets of sun;  
Into the drowsy snare too soon  
The guards fell one by one.

Through the king's gate, unquestioned then,  
A beggar went and laughed, 'This brings  
Me chance, at last, to see if men  
Fare better being kings.'

The king sat bowed beneath his crown,  
Propping his face with listless hand;  
Watching the hour-glass sifting down  
Too slow its shining sand.

'Poor man, what wouldst thou have of me?'  
The beggar turned, and pitying,  
Replied, like one in dream, 'Of thee,  
Nothing. I want the king.'

Uprose the king, and from his head  
Shook off the crown, and threw it by.  
'O man, thou must have known,' said he,  
'A greater king than I.'

Through all the gates, unquestioned then,  
Went king and beggar hand in hand.  
Whispered the king, 'Shall I know when  
Before  
his  
throne I stand?'

The beggar laughed. Free winds in haste  
Were wiping from the king's hot brow  
The crimson lines the crown had traced.  
'This is his presence now.'

At the king's gate, the crafty noon  
Unwove its yellow nets of sun;

Out of their sleep in terror soon  
The guards waked one by one.

'Ho here! Ho There! Has no man seen  
The king?' The cry ran to and fro;  
Beggar and king, they laughed, I ween,  
The laugh that free men know.

On the king's gate the moss grew gray;  
The king came not. They called him dead;  
And made his eldest son one day  
Slave in his father's stead.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Couleur De Rose

All things to-day 'Couleur de rose,'  
I see,-oh, why?  
I know, and my dear love she knows,  
Why, oh, why!  
On both my eyes her lips she set,  
All red and warm and dewy wet,  
As she passed by.  
The kiss did not my eyelids close,  
But like a rosy vapor goes,  
Where'er I sit, where'er I lie,  
Before my every glance, and shows  
All things to-day 'Couleur de rose.'

Would it last thus? Alas, who knows?  
Men ask and sigh:  
They say it fades, 'Couleur de rose.'  
Why, oh, why?  
Without swift joy and sweet surprise,  
Surely those lips upon my eyes  
Could never lie,  
Though both our heads were white as snows,  
And though the bitterest storm that blows,  
Of trouble and adversity,  
Had bent us low: all life still shows  
To eyes that love 'Couleur de rose.'

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Crossed Threads

The silken threads by viewless spinners spun,  
Which float so idly on the summer air,  
And help to make each summer morning fair,  
Shining like silver in the summer sun,  
Are caught by wayward breezes, one by one,  
Are blown to east and west and fastened there,  
Weaving on all the roads their sudden snare.  
No sign which road doth safest, freest run,  
The wingèd insects know, that soar so gay  
To meet their death upon each summer day.  
How dare we any human deed arraign;  
Attempt to recon any moment's cost;  
Or any pathway trust as safe and plain  
Because we see not where the threads have crossed?

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Danger

With what a childish and short-sighted sense  
Fear seeks for safety; recons up the days  
Of danger and escape, the hours and ways  
Of death; it breathless flies the pestilence;  
It walls itself in towers of defence;  
By land, by sea, against the storm it lays  
Down barriers; then, comforted, it says:  
"This spot, this hour is safe." Oh, vain pretence!  
Man born of man knows nothing when he goes;  
The winds blow where they list, and will disclose  
To no man which brings safety, which brings risk.  
The mighty are brought low by many a thing  
Too small to name. Beneath the daisy's disk  
Lies hid the pebble for the fatal sling.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Death

My body, eh? Friend Death, how now?  
Why all this tedious pomp of writ?  
Thou hast reclaimed it sure and slow  
For half a century bit by bit.

In faith thou knowest more to-day  
Than I do, where it can be found!  
This shrivelled lump of suffering clay,  
To which I am now chained and bound,

Has not of kith or kin a trace  
To the good body once I bore;  
Look at this shrunken, ghastly face:  
Didst ever see that face before?

Ah, well, friend Death, good friend thou art;  
Thy only fault thy lagging gait,  
Mistaken pity in thy heart  
For timorous ones that bid thee wait.

Do quickly all thou hast to do,  
Nor I nor mine will hindrance make;  
I shall be free when thou art through;  
I grudge thee nought that thou must take!

Stay! I have lied; I grudge thee one,  
Yes, two I grudge thee at this last,--  
Two members which have faithful done  
My will and bidding in the past.

I grudge thee this right hand of mine;  
I grudge thee this quick-beating heart;  
They never gave me coward sign,  
Nor played me once the traitor's part.

I see now why in olden days  
Men in barbaric love or hate  
Nailed enemies' hands at wild crossways,  
Shrined leaders' hearts in costly state:

The symbol, sign and instrument  
Of each soul's purpose, passion, strife,  
Of fires in which are poured and spent  
Their all of love, their all of life.

O feeble, mighty human hand!  
O fragile, dauntless human heart!  
The universe holds nothing planned  
With such sublime, transcendent art!

Yes, Death, I own I grudge thee mine  
Poor little hand, so feeble now;  
Its wrinkled palm, its altered line,  
Its veins so pallid and so slow --

Ah, well, friend Death, good friend thou art;  
I shall be free when thou art through.  
Take all there is -- take hand and heart;  
There must be somewhere work to do.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Died

Not by the death that kills the body. Nay,  
By that which even Christ bade us to fear  
Hath died my dead.  
Ah, me! if on a bier  
I could but see him lifeless stretched to-day,  
I 'd bathe his face with tears of joy, and lay  
My cheek to his in anguish which were near  
To ecstasy, if I could hold him dear  
In death as life. Mere separations weigh  
As dust in balances of love. The death  
That kills comes only by dishonor. Vain  
To chide me! vain! And weaker to implore,  
O thou once loved so well, loved now no more!  
There is no resurrection for such slain,  
No miracle of God could give thee breath!

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Doubt

1     They bade me cast the thing away,  
2     They pointed to my hands all bleeding,  
3     They listened not to all my pleading;  
4     The thing I meant I could not say;  
5     I knew that I should rue the day  
6     If once I cast that thing away.

7     I grasped it firm, and bore the pain;  
8     The thorny husks I stripped and scattered;  
9     If I could reach its heart, what mattered  
10    If other men saw not my gain,  
11    Or even if I should be slain?  
12    I knew the risks; I chose the pain.

13    O, had I cast that thing away,  
14    I had not found what most I cherish,  
15    A faith without which I should perish,--  
16    The faith which, like a kernel, lay  
17    Hid in the husks which on that day  
18    My instinct would not throw away!

Helen Hunt Jackson

## Draxy's Hymn

I cannot think but God must know  
About the thing I long for so;  
I know He is so good, so kind,  
I cannot think but He will find  
Some way to help, some way to show  
Me to the thing I long for so.

I stretch my hand-it lies so near:  
It looks so sweet, it looks so dear.  
'Dear Lord,' I pray, 'Oh, let me know  
If it is wrong to want it so?'  
He only smiles-He does not speak:  
My heart grows weaker and more weak,  
With looking at the thing so dear,  
Which lies so far, and yet so near.

Now, Lord, I leave at thy loved feet  
This thing which looks so near, so sweet;  
I will not seek, I will not long-  
almost fear I have been wrong.  
I'll go, and work the harder, Lord,  
And wait till by some loud, clear word  
Thou callest me to thy loved feet,  
To take this thing so dear, so sweet.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Emigravit

WITH sails full set, the ship her anchor weighs.  
Strange names shine out beneath her figure head.  
What glad farewells with eager eyes are said!  
What cheer for him who goes, and him who stays!  
Fair skies, rich lands, new homes, and untried days  
Some go to seek: the rest but wait instead,  
Watching the way wherein their comrades led,  
Until the next stanch ship her flag doth raise.  
Who knows what myriad colonies there are  
Of fairest fields, and rich, undreamed-of gains  
Thick planted in the distant shining plains  
Which we call sky because they lie so far?  
Oh, write of me, not "Died in bitter pains,"  
But "Emigrated to another star!"

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Faint And Weary Toiled A Pilgrim

'Faint and weary toiled a pilgrim,  
Faint and weary of his load;  
Sudden came a sweet bird winging  
Glad and swift across his road.

"Blessed songster!" cried the pilgrim,  
'Where is now the load I bore?  
I forget it in thy singing;  
Hearing thee, I faint no more,'

'While he spoke the bird went winging  
Higher still, and soared away;  
'Cruel songster!' cried the pilgrim,  
'Cruel songster not to stay!'

'Was the songster cruel? Never!  
High above some other road  
Glad and swift he still was singing,  
Lightening other pilgrims' load!'

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Forgiven

I dreamed so dear a dream of you last night!  
I thought you came. I was so glad, so gay,  
I whispered, 'Those were foolish words to say;  
I meant them not. I cannot bear the sight  
Of our dear face. I cannot meet the light  
Of your dear eyes upon me. Sit, I pray-  
Sit here beside me; turn your look away,  
And lay your cheek on mine,' Till morning bright  
We sat so, and we did not speak. I knew  
All was forgiven, so nestled there  
With your arms round. Swift the sweet hours flew.  
At last I waked, and sought you everywhere.  
How long, dear, think you, that my glad cheek will  
Burn-as it burns with our cheek's pressure still?

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Freedom

What freeman knoweth freedom? Never he  
Whose father's father through long lives have reigned  
O'er kingdoms which mere heritage attained.  
Though from his youth to age he roam as free  
As winds, he dreams not freedom's ecstasy.  
But he whose birth was in a nation chained  
For centuries; where every breath was drained  
From breasts of slaves which knew not there could be  
Such thing as freedom,--he beholds the light  
Burst, dazzling; though the glory blind his sight  
He knows the joy. Fools laugh because he reels  
And weilds confusedly his infant will;  
The wise man watching with a heart that feels  
Says: "Cure for freedom's harms is freedom still."

Helen Hunt Jackson

# God's Light-Houses

1 When night falls on the earth, the sea  
2 From east to west lies twinkling bright  
3 With shining beams from beacons high  
4 Which flash afar a friendly light.

5 The sailor's eyes, like eyes in prayer,  
6 Turn unto them for guiding ray:  
7 If storms obscure their radiance,  
8 The great ships helpless grope their way.

9 When night falls on the earth, the sky  
10 Looks like a wide, a boundless main.  
11 Who knows what voyagers sail there?  
12 Who names the ports they seek and gain?

13 Are not the stars like beacons set  
14 To guide the argosies that go  
15 From universe to universe,  
16 Our little world above, below?--

17 On their great errands solemn bent,  
18 In their vast journeys unaware  
19 Of our small planet's name or place  
20 Revolving in the lower air.

21 O thought too vast! O thought too glad!  
22 An awe most rapturous it stirs.  
23 From world to world God's beacons shine:  
24 God means to save his mariners!

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Habeas Corpus

1 My body, eh? Friend Death, how now?  
2 Why all this tedious pomp of writ?  
3 Thou hast reclaimed it sure and slow  
4 For half a century bit by bit.

5 In faith thou knowest more to-day  
6 Than I do, where it can be found!  
7 This shrivelled lump of suffering clay,  
8 To which I am now chained and bound,

9 Has not of kith or kin a trace  
10 To the good body once I bore;  
11 Look at this shrunken, ghastly face:  
12 Didst ever see that face before?

13 Ah, well, friend Death, good friend thou art;  
14 Thy only fault thy lagging gait,  
15 Mistaken pity in thy heart  
16 For timorous ones that bid thee wait.

17 Do quickly all thou hast to do,  
18 Nor I nor mine will hindrance make;  
19 I shall be free when thou art through;  
20 I grudge thee nought that thou must take!

21 Stay! I have lied; I grudge thee one,  
22 Yes, two I grudge thee at this last,--  
23 Two members which have faithful done  
24 My will and bidding in the past.

25 I grudge thee this right hand of mine;  
26 I grudge thee this quick-beating heart;  
27 They never gave me coward sign,  
28 Nor played me once the traitor's part.

29 I see now why in olden days  
30 Men in barbaric love or hate  
31 Nailed enemies' hands at wild crossways,  
32 Shrined leaders' hearts in costly state:

33 The symbol, sign and instrument  
34 Of each soul's purpose, passion, strife,  
35 Of fires in which are poured and spent  
36 Their all of love, their all of life.

37 O feeble, mighty human hand!  
38 O fragile, dauntless human heart!  
39 The universe holds nothing planned  
40 With such sublime, transcendent art!

41 Yes, Death, I own I grudge thee mine  
42 Poor little hand, so feeble now;  
43 Its wrinkled palm, its altered line,  
44 Its veins so pallid and so slow --

\* \* \* (Unfinished here.)

45 Ah, well, friend Death, good friend thou art;  
46 I shall be free when thou art through.  
47 Take all there is -- take hand and heart;  
48 There must be somewhere work to do.

Helen Hunt Jackson

## How Was It

Why ask, dear one? I think I cannot tell,  
More than I know how clouds so sudden lift  
From mountains, or how snowflakes float and drift,  
Or springs leave hills. One secret and one spell  
All true things have. No sunlight ever fell  
With sound to bid flowers open. Still and swift  
Come sweetest things on earth.  
So comes true gift  
Of Love, and so we know that it is well.  
Sure tokens also, like the cloud, the snow,  
And silent flowing of the mountain-springs,  
The new gift of true loving always brings.  
In clearer light, in purer paths, we go:  
New currents of deep joy in common things  
We find. These are the tokens, dear, we know!

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Morn

In what a strange bewilderment do we  
Awake each morn from out the brief night's sleep.  
Our struggling consciousness doth grope and creep  
Its slow way back, as if it could not free  
Itself from bonds unseen. Then Memory,  
Like sudden light, outflashes from its deep  
The joy or grief which it had last to keep  
For us; and by the joy or grief we see  
The new day dawneth like the yesterday;  
We are unchanged; our life the same we knew  
Before. I wonder if this is the way  
We wake from death's short sleep, to struggle through  
A brief bewilderment, and in dismay  
Behold our life unto our old life true.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# My Bees: An Allegory

"O bees, sweet bees!" I said, "that nearest field  
Is shining white with fragrant immortelles.  
Fly swiftly there and drain those honey wells."  
Then, spicy pines the sunny hive to shield,  
I set, and patient for the autumn's yield  
Of sweet I waited.  
When the village bells  
Rang frosty clear, and from their satin cells  
The chestnuts leaped, rejoicing, I unsealed  
My hive.  
Alas! no snowy honey there  
Was stored. My wicked bees had borne away  
Their queen and left no trace.  
That very day,  
An idle drone who sauntered through the air  
I tracked and followed, and he led me where  
My truant bees and stolen honey lay.  
Twice faithless bees! They had sought out to eat  
Rank, bitter herbs. The honey was not sweet.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# My Strawberry

O marvel, fruit of fruits, I pause  
To reckon thee. I ask what cause  
Set free so much of red from heats  
At core of earth, and mixed such sweets  
With sour and spice: what was that strength  
Which out of darkness, length by length,  
Spun all thy shining thread of vine,  
Netting the fields in bond as thine.  
I see thy tendrils drink by sips  
From grass and clover's smiling lips;  
I hear thy roots dig down for wells,  
Tapping the meadow's hidden cells.  
Whole generations of green things,  
Descended from long lines of springs,  
I see make room for thee to bide  
A quiet comrade by their side;  
I see the creeping peoples go  
Mysterious journeys to and fro,  
Treading to right and left of thee,  
Doing thee homage wonderingly.  
I see the wild bees as they fare,  
Thy cups of honey drink, but spare.  
I mark thee bathe and bathe again  
In sweet unclaendared spring rain.  
I watch how all May has of sun  
Makes haste to have thy ripeness done,  
While all her nights let dews escape  
To set and cool thy perfect shape.  
Ah, fruit of fruits, no more I pause  
To dream and seek thy hidden laws!  
I stretch my hand and dare to taste,  
In instant of delicious waste  
On single feast, all things that went  
To make the empire thou hast spent.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# My Tenants

I never had a title-deed  
To my estate. But little heed  
Eyes give to me, when I walk by  
My fields, to see who occupy.  
Some clumsy men who lease and hire  
And cut my trees to feed their fire,  
Own all the land that I possess,  
And tax my tenants to distress.  
And if I say I had been first,  
And, reaping, left for them the worst,  
That they were beggars at the hands  
Of dwellers on my royal lands,  
With idle laugh of passing scorn  
As unto words of madness born,  
They would reply  
I do not care;  
They cannot crowd the charmed air;  
They cannot touch the bonds I hold  
On all that they have bought and sold.  
They can waylay my faithful bees,  
Who, lulled to sleep, with fatal ease,  
Are robbed. Is one day's honey sweet  
Thus snatched? All summer round my feet  
In golden drifts from plummy wings,  
In shining drops on fragrant things  
Free gift, it came to me. My corn,  
With burnished banners, morn by morn,  
Comes out to meet and honor me;  
The glittering ranks spread royally  
Far as I walk. When hasty greed  
Tramples it down for food and seed,  
I, with a certain veiled delight,  
Hear half the crop is lost by blight.

Letter of the law these may fulfil,  
Plant where they like, slay what they will,  
Count up their gains and make them great;  
Nevertheless, the whole estate  
Always belongs to me and mine.

We are the only royal line.  
And though I have no title-deed  
My tenants pay me royal heed  
When our sweet fields I wander by  
To see what strangers occupy.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# New Year's Morning

Only a night from old to new!  
Only a night, and so much wrought!  
The Old Year's heart all weary grew,  
But said: The New Year rest has brought."  
The Old Year's hopes its heart laid down,  
As in a grave; but trusting, said:  
"The blossoms of the New Year's crown  
Bloom from the ashes of the dead."  
The Old Year's heart was full of greed;  
With selfishness it longed and ached,  
And cried: "I have not half I need.  
My thirst is bitter and unslaked.  
But to the New Year's generous hand  
All gifts in plenty shall return;  
True love it shall understand;  
By all y failures it shall learn.  
I have been reckless; it shall be  
Quiet and calm and pure of life.  
I was a slave; it shall go free,  
And find sweet pace where I leave strife."

Only a night from old to new!  
Never a night such changes brought.  
The Old Year had its work to do;  
No New Year miracles are wrought.

Always a night from old to new!  
Night and the healing balm of sleep!  
Each morn is New Year's morn come true,  
Morn of a festival to keep.  
All nights are sacred nights to make  
Confession and resolve and prayer;  
All days are sacred days to wake  
New gladness in the sunny air.  
Only a night from old to new;  
Only a sleep from night to morn.  
The new is but the old coem true;  
Each sunrise sees a new year born.



# October's Bright Blue Weather

O suns and skies and clouds of June,  
And flowers of June together,  
Ye cannot rival for one hour  
October's bright blue weather;

When loud the bumblebee makes haste,  
Belated, thriftless vagrant,  
And goldenrod is dying fast,  
And lanes with grapes are fragrant;

When gentians roll their fingers tight  
To save them for the morning,  
And chestnuts fall from satin burrs  
Without a sound of warning;

When on the ground red apples lie  
In piles like jewels shining,  
And redder still on old stone walls  
Are leaves of woodbine twining;

When all the lovely wayside things  
Their white-winged seeds are sowing,  
And in the fields still green and fair,  
Late aftermaths are growing;

When springs run low, and on the brooks,  
In idle golden freighting,  
Bright leaves sink noiseless in the hush  
Of woods, for winter waiting;

When comrades seek sweet country haunts,  
By twos and twos together,  
And count like misers, hour by hour,  
October's bright blue weather.

O sun and skies and flowers of June,  
Count all your boasts together,  
Love loveth best of all the year  
October's bright blue weather.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Opportunity

I do not know if, climbing some steep hill,  
Through fragrant wooded pass, this glimpse I bought,  
Or whether in some mid-day I was caught  
To upper air, where visions of God's will  
In pictures to our quickened sense fulfil  
His word. But this I saw.

A path I sought  
Through wall of rock. No human fingers wrought  
The golden gates which opened sudden, still,  
And wide. My fear was hushed by my delight.  
Surpassing fair the lands; my path lay plain;  
Alas, so spell-bound, feasting on the sight,  
I paused, that I but reached the threshold bright,  
When, swinging swift, the golden gates again  
Were rocky wall, by which I wept in vain.

Helen Hunt Jackson

## Poppies On The Wheat

Along Ancona's hills the shimmering heat,  
A tropic tide of air with ebb and flow  
Bathes all the fields of wheat until they glow  
Like flashing seas of green, which toss and beat  
Around the vines. The poppies lithe and fleet  
Seem running, fiery torchmen, to and fro  
To mark the shore.

The farmer does not know  
That they are there. He walks with heavy feet,  
Counting the bread and wine by autumn's gain,  
But I,--I smile to think that days remain  
Perhaps to me in which, through bread be sweet  
No more, and red wine warm my blood in vain,  
I shall be glad remembering how the fleet,  
Lithe poppies ran like torchmen with the wheat.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Refrain

Of all the songs which poets sing  
The ones which are most sweet  
Are those which at close intervals  
A low refrain repeat;  
Some tender word, some syllable,  
Over and over, ever and ever,  
While the song lasts,  
Altering never,  
Music if sung, music if said,  
Subtle like some golden thread  
A shuttle casts,  
In and out on a fabric red,  
Till it glows all through  
With the golden hue.  
Oh! of all the songs sung,  
No songs are so sweet  
As the songs with refrains,  
Which repeat and repeat.

Of all the lives lived,  
No life is so sweet,  
As the life where one thought,  
In refrain doth repeat,  
Over and over, ever and ever,  
Till the life ends,  
Altering never,  
Joy which is felt, but is not said,  
Subtler than any golden thread  
Which the shuttle sends  
In and out in a fabric red,  
Till it glows all through  
With a golden hue.  
Oh! of all the lives lived,  
Can be no life so sweet,  
As the life where one thought  
In refrain doth repeat,

"Now name for me a thought  
To make life so sweet,

A thought of such joy  
Its refrain to repeat."  
Oh! foolish to ask me. Ever, ever  
Who loveth believes,  
But telleth never.  
It might be a name, just a name not said,  
But in every thought; like a golden thread  
Which the shuttle weaves  
In and out on a fabric red,  
Till it glows all through  
With a golden hue.  
Oh! of all sweet lives,  
Who can tell how sweet  
Is the life which one name  
In refrain doth repeat?

Helen Hunt Jackson

# September

- 1 The golden-rod is yellow;  
2 The corn is turning brown;  
3 The trees in apple orchards  
4 With fruit are bending down.
- 5 The gentian's bluest fringes  
6 Are curling in the sun;  
7 In dusty pods the milkweed  
8 Its hidden silk has spun.
- 9 The sedges flaunt their harvest,  
10 In every meadow nook;  
11 And asters by the brook-side  
12 Make asters in the brook,
- 13 From dewy lanes at morning  
14 The grapes' sweet odors rise;  
15 At noon the roads all flutter  
16 With yellow butterflies.
- 17 By all these lovely tokens  
18 September days are here,  
19 With summer's best of weather,  
20 And autumn's best of cheer.
- 21 But none of all this beauty  
22 Which floods the earth and air  
23 Is unto me the secret  
24 Which makes September fair.
- 25 'T is a thing which I remember;  
26 To name it thrills me yet:  
27 One day of one September  
28 I never can forget.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Silence Again

Silence again. The glorious symphony  
Hath need of pause and interval of peace.  
Some subtle signal bids all sweet sounds cease,  
Save hum of insects' aimless industry.  
Pathetic summer seeks by blazonry  
Of color to conceal her swift decrease.  
Weak subterfuge! Each mocking day doth fleece  
A blossom, and lay bare her poverty.  
Poor middle-aged summer! Vain this show!  
Whole fields of Golden-Rod cannot offset  
One meadow with a single violet;  
And well the singing thrush and lily know,  
Spite of all artifice which her regret  
Can deck in splendid guise, their time to go!

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Songs Of Battle

Old as the world--no other things so old;  
Nay, older than the world, else, how had sprung  
Such lusty strength in them when earth was young?--  
Stand valor and its passion hot and bold,  
Insatiate of battle. How, else, told  
Blind men, born blind, that red was fitting tongue  
Mute, eloquent, to show how trumpets rung  
When armies charged adn battle-flags unfurled?  
Who sings of valor speaks for life, for death,  
Beyond all death, and long as life is life,  
in rippled waves the eternal air hs breath  
Eternal bears to stir all noble strife.  
Dead Homer from his lost and vanished grave  
Keeps battle glorious still and soldiers brave.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Spinning

Like a blind spinner in the sun,  
I tread my days;  
I know that all the threads will run  
Appointed ways;  
I know each day will bring its task,  
And, being blind, no more I ask.

I do not know the use or name  
Of that I spin:  
I only know that some one came,  
And laid within  
My hand the thread, and said, 'Since you  
Are blind, but one thing you can do.'

Sometimes the threads so rough and fast  
And tangled fly,  
I know wild storms are sweeping past,  
And fear that I  
Shall fall; but dare not try to find  
A safer place, since I am blind.

I know not why, but I am sure  
That tint and place,  
In some great fabric to endure  
Past time and race,  
My threads will have; so from the first,  
Though blind, I never felt accurst.

I think, perhaps. this trust has sprung  
From one short word  
Said over me when I was young,--  
So young, I heard  
It, knowing not that God's name signed  
My brow, and sealed me His, though blind.

But whether this be seal or sign  
Within, without,  
It matters not. The bond divine  
I never doubt.

I know He set me here, and still,  
And glad, and blind, I wait His will;

But listen, listen, day by day,  
To hear their tread  
Who bear the finished web away,  
And cut the thread,  
And bring God's message in the sun,  
'Thou poor blind spinner, work is done.'

Helen Hunt Jackson

# The Angel Of Pain

Angel of Pain, I think thy face  
Will be, in all the heavenly place,  
The sweetest face that I shall see,  
The swiftest face to smile on me.  
All other angels faint and tire;  
Joy wearies, and forsakes desire;  
Hope falters, face to face with Fate,  
And dies because it cannot wait;  
And Love cuts short each loving day,  
Because fond hearts cannot obey  
That subtlest law which measures bliss  
By what it is content to miss.  
But thou, O loving, faithful Pain-  
Hated, reproached, rejected, slain-  
Dost only closer cling and bless  
In sweeter, stronger steadfastness.  
Dear, patient angel, to thine own  
Thou comest, and art never known  
Till late, in some lone twilight place  
The light of thy transfigured face  
Sudden shines out, and, speechless, they  
Know they have walked with Christ all day.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# The End Of Harvest

'O Love, who walkest slow among my sheaves,  
Smiling at tint and shape, thy smile of peace,  
But whispering of the next sweet year's increase,-  
O tender Love, thy loving hope but grieves  
My heart! I rue my harvest, if it leaves  
Thee vainly waiting after harvests cease,  
Like one who has been mocked by title lease  
To barren fields.

Dear one, my word deceives  
Thee never. Hearts one summer have. Their grain  
'Is sown not that which shall be!'

Can new pain  
Teach me of pain? Or any ecstasy  
Be new, that I should speak its name again?  
My darling, all there was or is of me  
Is harvested for thine Eternity!

Helen Hunt Jackson

# The Fir-Tree And The Brook

The Fir-Tree looked on stars, but loved the Brook!

"O silver-voiced! if thou wouldst wait,  
My love can bravely woo." All smiles forsook  
The brook's white face. "Too late!  
Too late! I go to wed the sea.  
I know not if my love would curse or bless thee.  
I may not, dare not, tarry to caress thee,  
Oh, do not follow me!

The Fir-Tree moaned and moaned till spring;  
Then laughed in manic joy to feel  
Early one day, the woodsmen of the King  
Sign him with a sign of burning steel,  
The first to fall. "Now flee  
Thy swiftest, Brook! Thy love may curse or bless me,  
I care not, if but once thou dost caress me,  
O Brook, I follow thee!

All torn and bruised with mark of adze and chain,  
Hurled down the dizzy slide of sand,  
Tossed by great waves in ecstacy of pain,  
And rudely thrown at last to land,  
The Fir-Tree heard: "Oh, see  
With what fierce love it is I must caress thee!  
I warned thee I might curse, and never bless thee,  
Why didst thou follow me?

All stately set with spar and brace and rope,  
The Fir-Tree stood and sailed and sailed.  
In wildest storm when all the ship lost hope,  
The Fir-Tree never shook nor quailed,  
Nor ceased from saying, "Free  
Art thou, O Brook! But once thou hast caressed me;  
For life, for death, thy love has cursed or blessed me;  
Behold, I follow thee!"

Lost in a night, and no man left to tell,  
Crushed in the giant iceberg's play,  
The ship went down without a song, a knell.

Still drifts the Fir-Tree night and day,  
Still moans along the sea  
A voice: "O Fir-Tree! thus must I possess thee;  
Eternally, brave love, will I caress thee,  
Dead for the love of me!"

Helen Hunt Jackson

# The Fountain Leaps As If Its Nearest Goal

The fountain leaps as if its nearest goal  
Were sky, and shines as if its life were light.  
No crystal prism flashes on our sight  
Such radiant splendor of the rainbow's whole  
Of color. Who would dream the fountain stole  
Its tints, and if the sun no more were bright  
Would instant fade to its own pallid white?  
Who dream that never higher than the dole  
Of its own source, its stream may rise?  
Thus we  
See often hearts of men that by love's glow  
Are sudden lighted, lifted till they show  
All semblances of true nobility;  
The passion spent, they tire of purity,  
And sink again to their own levels low!

Helen Hunt Jackson

# The Gospel Of Mystery

Good tidings every day,  
God's messengers ride fast.  
We do not hear one half they say,  
There is such noise on the highway,  
Where we must wait while they ride past.

Their banners blaze and shine  
With Jesus Christ's dear name,  
And story, how by God's design  
He saves us, in His love divine,  
And lifts us from our sin and shame.

Their music fills the air,  
Their songs sing all of Heaven;  
Their ringing trumpet peals declare  
What crowns to souls who fight and dare,  
And win, shall presently be given.

Their hands throw treasures round  
Among the multitude.  
No pause, no choice, no count, no bound,  
No questioning how men are found,  
If they be evil or be good.

But all the banners bear  
Some words we cannot read;  
And mystic echoes in the air,  
Which borrow from the songs no share,  
In sweetness all the songs exceed.

And of the multitude,  
No man but in his hand  
Holds some great gift misunderstood,  
Some treasure, for whose use or good  
His ignorance sees no demand.

These are the tokens lent  
By immortality;  
Birth-marks of our divine descent;

Sureties of ultimate intent,  
God's Gospel of Eternity.

Good tidings every day.  
The messengers ride fast;  
Thanks be to God for all they say;  
There is such noise on the highway,  
Let us keep still while they ride past.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# The Poet's Forge

He lies on his back, the idling smith,  
A lazy, dreaming fellow is he;  
The sky is blue, or the sky is gray,  
He lies on his back the livelong day,  
Not a tool in sight, say what they may,  
A curious sort of smith is he.

The powers of the air are in league with him;  
The country around believes it well;  
The wondering folk draw spying near;  
Never sight nor sound do they see or hear;  
No wonder they feel a little fear;  
When is it his work is done so well?

Never sight nor sound to see or hear;  
The powers of the air are in league with him;  
High over his head his metals swing,  
Fine gold and silver to shame the king;  
We might distinguish their glittering,  
If once we could get in league with him.

High over his head his metals swing;  
He hammers them idly year by year,  
Hammers and chuckles a low refrain:  
"A bench and a book are a ball and a chain,  
The adze is a better tool than the plane;  
What's the odds between now and next year?"

Hammers and chuckles his low refrain,  
A lazy, dreaming fellow is he:  
When sudden, some day, his bells peal out,  
And men, at the sound, for gladness shout;  
He laughs and asks what it's all about;  
Oh, a curious sort of smith is he.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# The Victory Of Patience

Armed of the gods! Divinest conqueror!  
What soundless hosts are thine! Nor pomp, nor state,  
Nor token, to betray where thou dost wait.  
All Nature stands, for thee, ambassador;  
Her forces all thy serfs, for peace or war.  
greatest and least alike, thou rul'st their fate,--  
The avalanch chained until its century's date,  
The mulberry leaf made robe for emperor!  
Shall man alone thy law deny? --refuse  
Thy healing for his blunders and his sins?  
Oh, make us thine! Teach us who waits best sues;  
Who longest waits of all most surely wins.  
When Time is spent, Eternity begins.  
To doubt, to chafe, to haste, doth God accuse.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Tides

O patient shore, thou canst not go to meet  
Thy love, the restless sea, how comfortest  
Thou all thy loneliness? Art thou at rest,  
When, loosing his strong arms from round thy feet,  
He turns away? Know'st thou, however sweet  
That other shore may be, that to thy breast  
He must return? And when in sterner test  
He folds thee to a heart which does not beat,  
Wraps thee in ice, and gives no smile, no kiss,  
To break long wintry days, still dost thou miss  
Naught from thy trust? Still wait, unfaltering,  
The higher, warmer waves which leap in spring?  
O sweet, wise shore, to be so satisfied!  
O heart, learn from the shore! Love has a tide!

Helen Hunt Jackson

## To An Absent Lover

That so much change should come when thou dost go,  
Is mystery that I cannot ravel quite.  
The very house seems dark as when the light  
Of lamps goes out. Each wanted thing doth grow  
So altered, that I wander to and fro  
Bewildered by the most familiar sight,  
And feel like one who rouses in the night  
From dream of ecstasy, and cannot know  
At first if he be sleeping or awake.  
My foolish heart so foolish for thy sake  
Hath grown, dear one!  
Teach me to be more wise.  
I blush for all my foolishness doth lack;  
I fear to seem a coward in thine eyes.  
Teach me, dear one,--but first thou must come back!

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Tryst

Somewhere thou awaitest,  
And I, with lips unkissed,  
Weep that thus to latest  
Thou putttest off our tryst!

The golden bowls are broken,  
The silver cords untwine;  
Almond flowers in token  
Have bloomed,---that I am thine!

Others who would fly thee  
In cowardly alarms,  
Who hate thee and deny thee,  
Thou foldest in thine arms!

How shall I entreat thee  
No longer to withhold?  
I dare not go to meet thee,  
O lover, far and cold!

O lover, whose lips chilling  
So many lips have kissed,  
Come, even if unwilling,  
And keep thy solemn tryst!

Helen Hunt Jackson

## Two Truths

Darling,' he said, 'I never meant  
To hurt you;' and his eyes were wet.  
'I would not hurt you for the world:  
Am I to blame if I forget?'

'Forgive my selfish tears!' she cried,  
'Forgive! I knew that it was not  
Because you meant to hurt me, sweet-  
I knew it was that you forgot!'

But all the same, deep in her heart  
Rankled this thought, and rankles yet,-  
'When love is at its best, one loves  
So much that he cannot forget.'

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Unto One Who Lies At Rest

Unto one who lies at rest  
'Neath the sunset, in the West,  
Clover-blossoms on her breast.

Lover of each gracious thing  
Which makes glad the summer-tide,  
From the daisies clustering  
And the violets purple-eyed,  
To those shy and hidden blooms  
Which in forest coverts stay,  
Sending wandering perfumes  
Out as guide to show the way,  
All she knew, to all was kind;  
None so humble or so small  
That she did not seek and find  
Silent friendship from them all.  
Moss-cups, tiarella leaves,  
Dappled like the adder's skin,  
Fungus huts with ivory eaves  
Which the fairies harbor in,  
Regiments of fronded ferns,  
Golden-rod and asters frail,  
Every flaming leaf that burns  
Red against the autumn pale,  
Every pink-cupped wayside rose,--  
All to her were dear and known;  
But above them all she chose  
Clover-blossoms for her own.

So they laid her to her rest  
In the sun-warmed, bounteous West,  
Clover-blossoms on her breast.

Helen Hunt Jackson

# Where?

My snowy eupatorium has dropped  
Its silver threads of petals in the night;  
No signal told its blossoming had stopped;  
Its seed-films flutter silent, ghostly white:  
No answer stirs the shining air,  
As I ask, "Where?"

Beneath the glossy leaves of winter-green  
Dead lilly-bells lie low, and in their place  
A rounded disk of pearly pink is seen,  
Which tells not of the lily's fragrant grace:  
No answer stirs the shining air,  
As I ask, "Where?"

This morning's sunrise does not show to me  
Seed-film or fruit of my sweet yesterday;  
Like falling flowers, to realms I cannot see  
Its moments floated silently away:  
No answer stirs the shining air,  
As I ask, "Where?"

Helen Hunt Jackson