

THE FAMINE YEAR

I.

Weary men, what yeap ye?—Golden corn for the
stranger.
What sow ye?—Human corpses that wait for the avenger.
Fainting forms, hunger-stricken, what see you in the offing?
Stately ships to bear our food away, amid the stranger's
Scoffing.
There's a proud array of soldiers—what do they round
your door?
They guard our masters' granaries from the thin hands of
the poor.
Pale mothers, wherefore weeping?—Would to God that
we are dead—
Our children swoon before us, and we cannot give them
bread.

II.

Little children, tears are strange upon your infant faces,
God meant you but to smile within your mother's soft
embraces.
Oh! we know not what is smiling, and we know not what
is dying;
But we're hungry; very hungry, and we cannot stop our
crying.
And some of us grow cold and white—we know now what
it means;
But, as they lie beside us, we tremble in our dreams.

There's a gaunt crowd on the highway—are ye come to
prayer to man,
With hollow eyes that cannot weep, and for words your
faces wan?

No; the blood is dead within our veins—we care not now
for life;
Let us die hid in the ditches, far from children and from
wife;
We cannot stay and listen to their raving famished cries—
Bread! Bread! Bread! and none to still their agonies.
We left our infants playing with their dead mother's
hand:
We left our maidens maddened by the fever's scorching
brand:
Better, maiden thou were strangled in thy own dark-
twisted tresses—
Better, infant, thou were smothered in thy mother's dark
caresses.

III.

We are fainting in our misery, but God will hear our
groan;
Yet, if fellow-men desert us, will He hearken from His
Throne?
Accursed are we in our land, yet toil we still and
toil;

IV.

But the stranger reaps our harvest—the alien owns our
soil.

O Christ! how we have sinned, that our native plains
We perish houseless, naked, starved, with branded brow,
like Cain's?

Dying, dying wearily, with a torture sure and slow—
Dying, as a dog would die, by the wayside as we go.

V.

One by one they're falling round us, their pale faces to
the sky;

We've no strength left to dig them graves—there let
them lie.

The wild bird, if he's stricken, is mourned by the others,
But we—we die in Christian land—we die amid our
brothers,

In the land which God has given, like a wild beast in his
cave,

Without a tear, a prayer, a shroud, a coffin, or a grave.

Ha! but think ye contortions on each livid face ye
see,

Will not be read on judgment day by eyes of Deity?