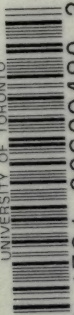


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Buckton, Alice Mary  
Eager Heart

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# EAGER HEART

A CHRISTMAS MYSTERY-PLAY

BY

A. M. BUCKTON

AUTHOR OF

"THE BURDEN OF ENGELA" "BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: A MASQUE"

"THE PASTOR OF WYDON FELL: A BALLAD" ETC.



CHAPPELL AND COMPANY LIMITED

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*The Design for the cover is after* **BLAKE**



*PERSONAGES*

EAGER HEART *and her two Sisters:*

EAGER FAME *and*

EAGER SENSE

*A Poor and Nameless* FAMILY

*Three* SHEPHERDS *and a Young Man*

*Three* KINGS

VISION *of the* HOLY FAMILY, *and* CHOIR OF  
ANGELS

*Unseen* MUSICIANS

PROLOGUE

*Time:* CHRISTMAS EVE

*Place:* EVERYWHERE

*Peculiar conditions attach to the performances of "EAGER  
HEART." (See Articles of Association.)*

*Applications for permission to perform "EAGER HEART" to be made  
to the Secretary of the INCORPORATED COMPANY OF EAGER HEART,  
85 Gracechurch Street, London, E.C., from whom all particulars may  
be obtained.*

## MUSIC REQUIRED FOR THE PLAYING OF "EAGER HEART"

*Invisible choir (S.A.T.B.) and orchestra of strings, oboes, flutes.*  
(See analysis supplied by Secretary.)

OLD CAROL: *God rest you, merry gentlemen!*  
(modified version)

From BACH'S Christmas Oratorio, as follows:—

*Pastoral Symphony . . . . . Orchestra.*

*Gloria in Excelsis . . . . . Choir.*

(Or plain-song Gloria.)

*Slumber, thou heavenly child! Alto voice.*

*Prepare your heart (shortened) Alto voice.*

followed at once by chorale: "*How shall I fitly meet Thee?*"

Four other chorales, viz.:

*Full are the Days . . . to chorale "Dearest Jesus."*

*I am not worthy . . . " " "Beside thy cradle."*

*Behold the King, etc. . . " " "Break forth, O Beauteous."*

*This proud heart . . . " " "This proud heart."*

EAGER HEART'S SONG . . . *Dark is the Night.*

and SHEPHERD'S SONG . . . *Sing we, sing we joyously!*

*to old Manx carol (both to be obtained of Company)*

OLD HYMN . . . . . *O come, O come, Emmanuel!*  
(modified version).

*An alternative Pastoral Symphony by CORELLI, and an alternative Gloria, advisable for country performances, have been prepared for the Company.*

### STAGE NECESSARIES

*An upper, middle, and lower stage, each raised above the other. A fixed dark-blue gauze veil cuts off the upper stage on which appear (see text) illuminated choir of angels, in long white dresses and without wings, with arms upraised in joy. They are revealed by a descending curtain. A curtain dividing to the sides, drawn by invisible cords, rests upon the top of steps ascending to middle stage. Steps go up from floor of auditorium to sides of lower stage.*

*The lighting is from above, and from the wings.*

EAGER HEART  
A CHRISTMAS MYSTERY PLAY

OLD CAROL [*sung by unseen choir*]

GOD rest you, merry gentlemen!

Let nothing you dismay.

Remember, Christ our Saviour

Was born this holy day,

To save us all from woe and sin,

When we were gone astray.

O the tidings of comfort let us sing!

In Bethlehem in Jewry

This blessed Babe was born,

And laid within a manger,

Upon that holy morn,

The which His Mother Mary

Did nothing take in scorn!

O the tidings of comfort let us sing!

## EAGER HEART

And in the heavenly places  
 A blessed Angel stood,  
 And unto certain Shepherds  
 He told the tidings good,  
 How that in Bethlehem was born  
 The Child, the Son of God!  
 O the tidings of comfort let us sing!

PROLOGUE, *an aged man, in black cap and gown, stands before the closed curtains, which represent the doors to the Dwelling of EAGER HEART: he speaks.*

Lo! as Earth, her vigil keeping,  
 Times the year with careful hand,  
 So the watchful Soul, unsleeping,  
 Marks her days by high command.

O'er the world to-night, the nations,  
 Weary, lay their griefs aside,  
 And with sweet and loud laudations  
 Hold the Feast of Christmastide.

Favour, then, our simple story,  
 Picturing here, with gentle art,  
 How the Lord of Life and Glory  
 Comes to honour Eager Heart!

PROLOGUE descends from stage by central steps, and seats himself at their foot, or as part of the audience, attentive to the play. Pastoral symphony is played by invisible orchestra: at its close, the curtains open, discovering EAGER HEART standing near a low white couch (L.). The back of the room is shut off by a dark-blue gauze curtain. Small table (R.), with loaves of bread, a flask and a cup for wine: a pitcher of water and basin stand on floor near: embroidery work in a frame, and a stool: small lighted lamp hanging before a shrine, and picture, in a corner: also cage of doves.

*E. Heart.* To-night the weary world is  
husht and still!

Out on the plains the shepherds watch; and  
we,

Dwelling in cities, keep our doors ajar,  
Lest He should come this way, the royal  
Child,

Two thousand years our King! Alas, to  
think

How many highways He must tread to-night,  
Will know Him not, nor see Him as He  
comes!

Yet every year, they say, even at this hour

He makes a sumptuous progress through the  
land,

In lane and town, with guards angelical,  
Mindful of that far night, when, as a Babe,  
He begged an empty manger of the beasts,  
Because no inn, no single roof was found  
To cover Him! So be it not to-day,  
My gracious King! Have Thou to-night  
sweet rest,

Here, on this lowly couch! O deign thereon  
To lay Thine infant head! Mary and Joseph!  
Come but your steps this way, behold the  
meal,

The little frugal meal I saved this morn,  
With joys of fasting! O that I might be  
Worthy, dear Lord, but once to shelter Thee!

*[She looks up to the shrine, trims the  
light, and says, or sings slowly,  
looking before and about her,  
this meditation: then sits at her  
embroidery frame:]*

Dark is the night,  
The starless night,  
The Homeless are abroad:  
O Heart, prepare  
With simple care  
A shelter for thy Lord.

Crowned with power,  
He comes this hour,  
    Remembering the day,  
When, as a child,  
In dwellings wild  
    And poor, He came to stay.

Make thou a bed  
To rest His head ;  
    Its sheet be purity ;  
The pillow light,  
With tears washed white,  
    Be Heart's humility.

Much did it take  
Of thee to make  
    This couch so soft and low !  
Sighs without name,  
And many a shame,  
    And tears that none may know.

And set thy board  
To wait thy Lord  
    With Bread, that He may dine :  
Bring Water sweet  
To wash his Feet—  
    A Cup to mix Him Wine !

## EAGER HEART

This simple Bread,  
 Alas! was made  
     Of harvests thinly sown :  
 The Wine is poor ;  
 But round the door  
     Its purpling grapes were grown.

No jewelled hall  
 This quiet stall,  
     But thatched with simple wit :  
 No monarch rare  
 Has sojourned here,  
     But Love has lived in it.

O Heavenly Child,  
 The night is wild !  
     Come in to me, I pray !  
 Make of this heart—  
 This longing heart—  
     Thy Bethlehem to-day !

*[She continues humming softly to herself.]*

*Enter R. and L., on lower stage, the two Sisters, EAGER SENSE and EAGER FAME, the first in gorgeous apparel, the second in armour and helmet. EAGER SENSE enters the home.*

*E. Sense.* What! sitting late at work, and singing songs ?



*E. Heart.* My hands are busy, for my heart  
is full ;

I sing a song of welcome to the King !

*E. Fame.* But wherefore linger here? Think  
you He deigns

Beneath so small a roof to bend His head?

How should He find this quiet street, where no

Great chariots pass, no victory-pageants roll?

Kings are not wont to come in these our days

To poor and beggared doors! This foolish  
freak

To sit at home, and wait Him in the house,

Is bygone fashion! Come with me, away

Up to the terrace of the capitol,

Where famous deeds are done, and tapestries

Blazon the walls with tales of heroes dead!

There, Fame, her golden trumpet at her  
mouth,

Governs the winds that sweep the echoing  
world:

And men, amazed, bow lowly, worshipping!

*E. Heart* [*doubtfully*]. Nay, Eager Fame!

Think not I ask so much,

Or dare to hope for that I scarce can name!

And yet—a viewless voice whispered—He  
comes!

Close at mine ear! I heard it even now!

[*Looks vaguely round.*]

*E. Sense.* Folly! so wilt thou mope, even  
 unto the end,  
 Fed upon moonlight 'stead of merry flesh,  
 Starving on sickly dreams and phantasies!

[*She goes to the table, and calls mockingly.*  
 Behold the childish meal set bravely here  
 To tempt the Royal train! Water and bread!  
 Ha! ha! and peasant grapes, that scarce  
 have won  
 The faintest flush of crimson [*holds up flask to  
 light*], trained by herself  
 Upon the walls, and pressed with her own  
 small hands! . . .  
 Come to the palace in the orange groves!  
 There the loud viol plays the night away:  
 And none is sick or fasting! Come, poor child!  
 I'll lend thee other garb and jewels! See!

[*Takes EAGER HEART's head in her hands.*  
 This brow should bear a diadem! This breast,  
 Warm with the matchless breath of innocence,  
 Should gleam in vair and velvet, winning with  
 ease  
 Man's open homage! [*Turning to EAGER  
 FAME.*] Never be it said  
 That Eager Sense was not of a generous mind!  
*E. Heart.* Nay, Sister! leave me! I am  
 well content.

Wrapped in your costly robes, I lose myself.  
 Yea, though the King should lodge with you  
 to-night,  
 I could not find the art to please Him there.

[*Under her breath.*

Listen! what voice was that, saying "He  
 comes!"

Close at mine ear? I heard it even now!

*E. Fame.* Nay then, we waste our trouble!

Let us go,

You to the Palace where the Banquet lies,  
 I to the ramparts! There the answering  
 tongues

Of watchmen on the walls shout even now,  
 In token of His coming, ere He come!

[*Exit R.*

[*EAGER SENSE looks back on EAGER HEART standing in a rapt attitude, and stretches out her hand once more to her.*

*E. Sense.* Come, pretty wilful! Take my  
 hand, be wise!

[*EAGER HEART shakes her head: EAGER SENSE shrugs her shoulders gaily, and goes out (L.).*

*E. Heart* [*alone*]. Now have I lost a chance,  
 but kept my hope,  
 Dearer than present gain, or handled good!  
 I part not with it now till daylight come!

[*Listens.*

'Tis very still. The night is dead asleep;  
 Shut are the streets! [*Leans from the threshold  
 and looks up.*] Only the stars above  
 Seem strangely near, as if they, listening,  
 heard

A far-off music. [*Distant choirs of "Gloria"  
 are heard: first eight bars.*] Hark, what  
 a sudden burst

Of voices from the hills! The simple folk  
 Bring Him upon His way. He comes! He  
 comes!

Sure 'twas the mighty shout of warrior-kings  
 That ride with Him! O let me forth to see,  
 And mix my feet with those that throng His  
 road,

Praying that He will deign to pause Him  
 here

One moment, at my threshold, blessing it,  
 Even with His look. [*Goes to the shrine and  
 picture.*] Forgive me that I take,  
 Sad Face! this little lamp from your dim  
 shrine!

I go to meet you in the flesh! Dear walls,

I leave you husht, expectant of a Guest!  
Keep you all safe and spotless till He come.

[*She descends to second step, softly, lamp in hand, and sees approach from R. a poor road-maker and a woman, travel-stained, in humble garments and with broken shoes. The man bears an old spade and basket over shoulder: the woman bears a little child wrapped in her shawl.*]

*Man.* Maiden! we pray you, of your courtesy,

Give us but shelter for this single night!  
We faint from thirst and hunger by the way:  
And all the folk, it seems, have left! The town  
Is well-nigh empty, and our strength is gone!

*E. Heart* [*wondering*]. These must be  
strangers, else they surely knew  
Why all men are abroad! Their dress is  
old,  
Fashioned in curious guise of other lands.  
Good folk, whence come ye?

*Man.* Tossed on these barren shores  
That are no home, refused by king and slave,  
We wander, seeking shelter; and to-night  
We pray a humble couch that we may sleep!

*E. Heart* [*looking back into her home*]. A  
couch I have, poor friends! 'tis true—and  
yet—

A little bread and wine, and yet—and yet—

*Man* [*lifts his hand*]. Alas, that halting  
word! we know it well!

*E. Heart*. Nay, hear me! These are all I  
have prepared

For other guests; ah, with what joys and fears!

Had you wandered this way but yester-night,

Freely was yours all that I have and hold!

But now—to-night! Ah no, it cannot be

That I should yield my hope so easily!

*Man*. What hope?

*E. Heart*. Perchance to house a  
Royal guest!

The King this hour makes progress through  
the land,

In memory of a night, a far-off night,

When, as a helpless Babe, He found a bed

With beasts—because no roof would cover  
Him!

To-day He comes, the all-acknowledged King!

Saw you no retinue upon the plain,

Flocking from every race, and of every tongue?

*Man*. No kingly train saw we upon the  
track:

But tired shepherds closing up the fold,

Who stooped, and found us milk, and crusts of  
bread.

*E. Heart.* But heard you not the shouting of  
the folk

That went to meet Him? hailing, carolling  
The King that had a manger for His bed?

*Man.* Would that a manger-stall were ours  
to-night!

[EAGER HEART *still looks doubtfully  
at her home. The woman looks  
up at the man, and both with a  
sigh make as though they would  
pass on.*]

*E. Heart* [*stretching out her hand, seeing  
they have passed her*]. Stay! saw ye not a  
palace as ye came,

With gilded chambers, by the orange grove,  
Where lute and viol play the night away?

*Man* [*turning*]. We heard the lute: we  
called beside the gate!

Our voice they could not hear for merriment.

*E. Heart.* Then, passed ye not the capitol,  
the gate

Where sits my Sister, dealing blame and praise,  
Weighing the great and lesser deeds of men?  
What said she to your tale?

*Man.* She spoke a tongue

We could not understand! Her trumpets blew,  
Deafening us as we pleaded! You alone—  
You have we found, knowing our native speech  
As brother knoweth brother's! Yet, let us go:  
Our dusty feet will stain your delicate doors!

*E. Heart* [*eagerly*]. Nay, speak no more!

It shames me! Pray you, come!

Yours is the Bread, the Water, and the Wine,  
The lowly couch on which I thought to lay  
The beauty of my Lord! Enough! enough  
That you have need, and I the hand to give!  
Be you my honoured, welcome guests to-night.  
Forgotten be all else! my foolish dream!

*[She descends to the lowest step, and gives her hand to the woman, helping her up. Man follows her slowly. A fresh burst of the "Gloria" (eight bars) is heard faintly in the distance. EAGER HEART is amazed at the dignity of her guests. They place themselves at the couch, and the man goes to offer the woman wine from the little table, as if he had been long familiar there.]*

*E. Heart.* Pray now forgive me if I leave  
you here



A little space. Prepare yourselves for sleep.  
 Hear you the people shouting on the plains?  
 I would be gone to worship with the rest,  
 Meeting the King, at least, upon His way!

*[As she looks back, descending the steps,  
 the man lifts his hand to her in  
 peace, and the curtains slowly meet  
 before her gaze, presenting the  
 closed doors, as at first.]*

*E. Heart* *[looking up at the stars]*. O star of  
 heaven, so still, so pure, so high;  
 How art thou near to-night! Is it through pity  
 Thou shinest on me thus? or is it joy?  
 Hark to the voices singing! Let me go!

*[Exit R.]*

*Alto voice (unseen) sings as follows (with  
 symphony following, to the word "fine").*

Slumber, Thou Heavenly Child, and take  
 Thy rest,  
 That with Thy waking, the weary world be  
 blest:  
 On Thy Mother's breast, O take, O take  
 Thy rest,  
 And in all our hearts give Peace!

*Curtain is withdrawn to both sides at its close,  
 discovering the starlit plain, where two*

*shepherds lie on the ground ; strong, bearded men with crooks ; a younger man is feeding a small fire with sticks : an old man with long beard sits on rocks between them, facing audience, with fixed eyes. Back of the plain is shut off (as before) with dark-blue gauze. Frost lies on the ground : starlight comes from above : a fold is on the L. with sheep, and a thorn-bush.*

*Young Man.* Ay, 'tis a cruel night ! A lamb  
this hour

Was born in the fold, a poor and plaintive  
thing,

And yet it seems to suck ! The piteous ewe  
Made bitter bleating at the first—but now  
'Tis still !

*Old Man.* O ay ! the world is still to-night.  
Yonder's the star of hope, that brighter shows  
On Christmas Eve ! Sure it has been the  
same

Since I remember, lads ! and that is nigh  
On seventy year !

[*He looks to a star, R*

*1st Shep.* [*laughing*]. Come, none of your  
old tales !

Old men and children needs must have their  
tales,

Dry teats to dandle at, like thirsty lambs

Feeling their helplessness. Too long have folk  
 Beguiled us all with comfortable milk  
 To keep us patient, lest we should cut our teeth  
 Too soon on wisdom's corn!

*Old Man.* Young man, beware!  
 You too may yet be old! And cavernous dark  
 Will be your world, if, from the shows of things,  
 You gather not a story to remain,  
 And sing itself, on and on, in your ears  
 When sight is darkened!

*Young Man [looking up].* Say they not, this  
 night  
 The King that called Himself a Shepherd  
 comes  
 To visit all the folds, and bless the sheep,  
 Remembering the day when, as a Babe,  
 He begged an empty manger and a stall,  
 Because no roof was found to cover Him?

*2nd Shep.* That, too, is a pretty tale! If once  
 He came,  
 Men never see Him now. Where is the sign,  
 In these dark years, that He remembereth?  
 Once it was said, He never will forsake!  
 Thousands believed on Him, and waiting,  
 died!

We too could worship, had we any sign!

*Old Man.* The sign He gave of old is the  
 sign to-day!

Follow it, lads! with Eager Heart, and find!

*1st Shep.* But whither? Hunger and riches  
everywhere

Divide the land, like great uncleanly birds,  
Gloating on offal! Half the world is full,  
Fat with excess: the other half, naked

As that poor stranger passed us even now,  
Leading the woman with her new-born child,  
Who thanked us for our crusts with tears. The  
world

Grows lawless! If her King dwell anywhere,  
'Tis other-where! He makes no sojourn  
here.

*Old Man.* He sojourns here, my lads! or  
not at all,

As they with Eager Heart shall one day know,  
Finding within their doors a silent Guest!

*Young Man.* But who comes here, bearing  
a slender lamp,

Climbing the perilous way with faltering feet?  
Is it a ghost, or child, or wandering maid?

*E. Heart* [*enters middle stage, R.*]. I heard  
your voices, and I turned aside  
To know what murmuring doubts, what sullen  
words

Did clash upon the world this blessed night.  
Shepherds? Nay, are ye shepherds in very  
truth—

Who ever brought the earliest news of dawn?  
Have ye forgot what hymn is sung to-  
night

Of One the angels in high heaven adore?

*2nd Shep.* Fair maiden, that was long ago.

Our hearts

Are sad, our ears are dull with misery.

Others may catch that far-off song : for us

No burst of music fills the flaming sky,

Waking a rapturous Earth : silent she lies !

Since midnight watch we here, and mark no  
sound.

*E. Heart.* Then, sure ye have not listened !

Hark again !

[*The "Gloria" (eight bars) bursts in full chorus, yet as if far away: and the light, for a moment, increases on the scene.*]

*The three SHEPHERDS start, and look wonderingly at EAGER HEART; she looks towards audience, as one listening. None look in the direction whence the singing comes. The light gradually fades with the song, till it ceases, in a half phrase, as at a great distance.*

*1st Shep.* Can this thing be? our senses all  
are filled

With wonder and amazement! [*Turning to*  
*OLD MAN, who has remained motionless, as*  
*one unmoved. He is seen sitting in the*  
*centre of the scene.*] Hist! old man!

Didst thou not hear that far and heavenly  
strain,

Heart ravishing?

*Old Man.* I've heard it all this night,  
Floating above the cities and the plains,  
Lifting the world-cry from a million throats  
Until it rolled the mighty hymn of Peace!

*Young Man.* But why stand idle here? O  
let us haste

Whither it went! It goes before us still!  
Deign, gentle maid, to be our guide! It seems  
That thou wert sent to lead in darkness.

Come!

*E. Heart.* My lamp is small, but well the oil  
has served

Thus far. Pray, Shepherds, follow, then, with me,  
Nor doubt that we shall find! [*Goes to L.*

*1st Shep.* [*rising*]. Come, then, old man!  
My step and yours together! . . .

*Old Man.* Nay, my sons,  
Where would ye hasten? Whom go ye to  
meet?

*All.* We go to hail the King upon His way!

*Old Man.* The King has passed already,  
while we sat

And prated of our ills! I saw His Face:

And my soul blessed Him, even as He went!

[*They look at him in amazement, and  
make signs to each other.*]

*Young Man.* Nay, leave him, comrades: urge  
him not: methinks

The eyes of age see things we only dream:

Let us be gone, my spirit burns in me!

[*Exeunt L.*

[*The Angel Choir glows visibly behind  
the veil, singing the chorale:*

Full are the days that should have been!

Accept thine aged servant now,

And bid me part, for I have seen

On Thy sad Earth Thy sweet Face go!

[*The OLD MAN lifts his arms heaven-  
ward, as if he saw before him  
what appears to be behind him.  
His head drops backward, and,  
with his face to the sky, he lies  
dead on the rocks.*

*After the music ceases, enter a KING (R.) in  
the prime of his age, and bearded, wear-  
ing purple robe and cloak, and the gold  
fillet of a mighty ruler.*

1st King. The night is dark : yet this should  
 be the place,  
 The ancient trysting-ground, trodden how oft  
 By the foot of mighty seekers! Hither have  
 come,  
 For nigh two thousand years, the Kings of the  
 Earth,  
 Looking for Him, the Lord of every age,  
 And Answer to the world's great riddle, Man!

[Goes forward.

Is man the King? Is there no mightier?  
 What heavy band is this that binds my brow?  
 Gold! Gold! The living ore the fierce earth  
 yields

To mark her rulers! Men, and tribes of men,  
 Bow down before me; but I thirst to know  
 If any rule be mightier than mine  
 In this dim universe! I cannot sleep!  
 Vast shadows haunt my dreams, portentous  
 things

Known to the Fates and to the solemn stars,  
 Till, from my rest, I start with a piercing cry—  
 Where is the King, that I may worship Him?

[Reaching arms to stars, R. holding  
 out his crown.]

O ye that hold the Night in breathless beauty,  
 Your ways are strong, and life is strong, and  
 death:

But the will of man is stronger! What is this



Dumb giant in us set, ready to rise  
 In one stupendous act, and empty itself  
 Of all it is? Yea, in that only deed  
 Know itself crowned, complete! [*Crowns him-  
 self.*] Woe for the will  
 That hath not found its King! Staggering it  
 goes  
 Like yon wild meteor through th' affrighted  
 night,  
 While all around the heavenly bodies sing  
 The rapture of their great obedience!

*[He turns, and sees 2ND KING approaching from L., an old bearded man in turban, bound with the snake fillet of the philosopher: he bears a casket. They greet each other.]*

*2nd King.* Brother, well met! I thought not  
 here to find

Aught but myself upon this barren hill,  
 So long defaced, o'ergrown with the tangled  
 weeds

Of this dark world!

*1st King.* King of the faithful watch!  
 What dreadful impotence has brought *thee* here,  
 What trouble of the mind?

*2nd King.* These weary eyes  
 Have watched the birth of peoples from the  
 dawn,

And seen them pale o'er yonder farthest  
verge . . .

[*Looks to the horizon.*]

Returning not again! All beasts and birds  
I question of this mystery; yea, and would force  
The innermost secrets of the hollow earth,  
But find no comfort. Yet sometimes comes  
the sense

Of a life beneath the changing show of things;  
A glorious life, hiding itself in these,  
Eluding still my grasp! Could I command  
That changeless substance once within my ken,  
Then should I know the object of my thought,  
And light transfigure all our griefs for ever!  
Great death itself would seem no ill; and life  
Our happy portion in the perfect play  
Of that resplendent Being! See, my friend!

[*Opens box.*]

This precious balm I gathered as I went  
By every stream—the fragrance, bitter-sweet,  
Of a gum's pelucid tears! Within these walls,  
[*Holds up a translucent lump.*]

Behold, embalmed, a perfect creature, winged,  
Lovely as life, encrystalled here for aye!  
[*Passionately*] So would I hold the soul within  
my thought,

Clear imaged, imperishable! This myrrh  
I carry with me for my burial!

*1st King.* But on this night can be no place  
for death!

No lord of death we seek, but the Lord of life!

*2nd King.* Then must He conquer death, or  
lose His kingdom!

*1st King.* But who is this, that comes with  
wandering eyes  
And hands of worship?

*2nd King.* Surely 'tis the King  
Of the lonely Heart, who roams from shore to  
shore!

[Offering incense at the woodland shrine  
Of every god and demon—joining hands  
With them that hate each other, and would tear  
Each other's altars down—not seeing, all,  
The one Form loved of every secret soul,  
That all do homage to—the LORD OF HEARTS !]<sup>1</sup>  
Hail, Friend! How goes it with th' Eternal  
Quest?

**3RD KING** *enters, L. A young man with an  
earnest clean-shaven face, wearing the  
spiked circlet of Inspiration, with jewels on  
the points: his hair is cut to the shoulder:  
he bears a lighted censer.*

*3rd King.* Brothers of Power and Wisdom,  
are ye here,  
Faithful to your high charge? Now let the  
earth

<sup>1</sup> *Omit this passage in performance.*

Have hope, when all her princes vigil keep,  
 Yea, though she lie in darkness, as to-day!  
 Our feet have lost the simple starward path  
 Our fathers knew. Yet on this sacred night  
 Our ways have met once more. Good omen  
 this

For all men's trysting! Listen, Brothers mine!  
 You think to find—each his own answer! I,  
 With secret admonitions from my youth,  
 In every answer, seek, with a passionate hope,  
 The Word that bodies mine and yours in one!  
 No monarch He,—Type of our inmost dream  
 And Moulder of the world,—but One whose  
 soul,

Measuring itself in heaven, and earth, and hell,  
 Utters with every breath the great desire  
 Of all that lives! Such only may I worship!

[*He looks to heaven.*]

Once, in a trance, I saw Him stand, the King,  
 And round His garment ran a living word  
 In the tongue of every land! That Word was  
 Peace!

His look, the very movement of His feet,  
 Was Peace—whose glory 'tis, in a thousand  
 forms,

To rule by yielding—die, to know and love—  
 Within Himself darkness and light dissolving!  
 O worship of my heart, appear! appear!

[*He stretches out his arms heavenwards, and prostrates himself. At his prayer the Angel Choir sings unseen eight bars of the "Gloria," which fade away: all listen and look at each other.*]

1st King. Heard you no sound? Methought  
a shouting came

As of a city welcoming its king?

2nd King. I fain would think it! [*He turns, and sees Shepherd lying.*] See,  
what have we here?

An aged shepherd, frozen at his place!

1st King. How like a king he looks! Nay,  
what calm—

What simple majesty has taken seat

Upon this brow! Nothing can fright him  
more.

How would a crown become him—he, a  
crown!

2nd King [*with his hand half shading his own eyes*]. Those eyes have looked on  
more than I have seen!

O simple shepherd! thou hast entered in

Beyond the door we vainly try to pierce!

Here do I bow before th' initiate Dead!

3rd King [*who has come up slowly, as one in a*

## EAGER HEART

*dream, takes up the Shepherd's hand*]. This hand has toiled its seventy years! these feet Have gone upon the business of the King! Behold the face and form of one who knew And ruled by love! O Man, I worship thee!

*[Swings his censer before him.*

Within this breast the Lord of hearts did make A resting-place! Surely, ye blessed hills, In you the King must dwell, since here indeed His subjects be! O fair unsetting star

*[Looking R.*

Thy burning beauty warns us! Let us go!

*[The 1ST KING casts his mantle over the dead Shepherd, as they leave, and go out, R. Curtains close slowly together, presenting doors to the Dwelling of EAGER HEART, as in first scene, as unseen alto voice is heard singing:*

Prepare your hearts, children, with tenderest worship, the purest, the fairest, this hour to see!

*Answered by full choir:*

How shall I fitly meet Thee?

*Enter EAGER HEART and two SHEPHERDS, and YOUNG MAN, lower stage L. They stand in doubt.*

*E. Heart.* Nay, it is strange! No turning  
did we miss;

The song still guided us! And now, I find  
Myself upon the old familiar street,  
And all is silent!

*1st Shep.* Are we the simple cheats  
Of a too-fond fancy after all?

*E. Heart.* O friend,  
Dare not to doubt after the thing we heard!  
My spirit waits in me, till we be shewn.

*Young Man.* Methought there fell a footstep  
even now

Upon the threshold! Nay, what forms are those  
In jewelled crown and purple? Surely, sirs,  
These be no ordinary men?

*2nd Shep.* Mayhap  
They too are seeking for the royal train,  
And miss their way! See how they stand  
perplexed!

*Enter* KINGS (R.), *lifting their hands, and  
gazing on a star, invisible to audience, over-  
head, which sheds a soft white radiance on  
whole scene.*

*3rd King.* Behold the star that ever goes  
before Him

Stationary! It moves not East nor West!  
That is the pilgrim's Star!

*1st King (coming forward).* See how its ray  
Streams soft upon us now! The King is near!

*E. Heart.* Great Sirs! pardon me that I dare approach!

If ye too seek the King, as by your garb  
And attitude I think ye do,—permit  
Our little company to join you. We  
Have wandered far to find Him, eager to lay  
Our simple homage at His feet.

*2nd King.*

Fair maid!

Whoe'er thou art, thou hast not far to seek.  
What roof is this? Whose are these closed  
doors?

Thou, as a dweller in the place, canst tell!

*E. Heart* [*distressed*]. O Sirs, this is a little  
house and mean;

A poor maid dwelleth here, of no great name.  
The star points other-where, methinks, not here!

*1st King.* Nay, gentle child! we go not from  
this place

Till we have seen the owner of these doors,  
And bid her open!

*E. Heart.*

Then, O gracious King,  
Must I confess! These humble doors are mine!  
And nothing there-within is worth your glance!

[*The Kings look at one another.*]

*2nd King.* Dear maid, think us not harsh  
that we persist:

In the name of Wisdom be those doors flung  
wide!

*E. Heart.* [*at his feet, and taking the hem*



*of his robe*]. Then must I tell you all!  
Therein doth sit

A Stranger, with a Mother and her Child.  
Three souls, upon this bitter night they stood  
Begging of me, for the sake of Him who lay  
In a manger-stall in far-off Bethlehem,  
A little food and shelter! All my feast  
Lay ready for the King! O spurn me not,  
That even I prepared a little place,  
Hoping to house Him! But these needy ones  
I could not leave unfed . . . I took them in. . . .

[KINGS *lift their hands, and look again  
at each other.*

3rd King [*turns to EAGER HEART with a look  
of awe and great joy. He raises her.*] Then,  
blessed maid! we are thy suppliants! Say,  
What is thy name?

*E. Heart.* They call me Eager Heart!

3rd King. Eager Heart! gladdest of maiden  
names!

'Tis LOVE commands thee open wide thy door,  
And let the pomp and glory of the world  
Go in to worship; for the King is here!

[EAGER HEART *stands trembling,  
wavers, goes slowly up to the top  
step, touches the curtains, that part  
before her. She sinks on her knees,*

## EAGER HEART

*her whole figure bowed, and her face hidden in her hands, as she sees Mary and the Child, in the same position in which she left the strangers. They are in white, and suffused with light, which issues in a glory from the hidden Child sleeping on the Mother's lap. Joseph stands behind, holding forth his right hand, half hushing, half welcoming the worshippers.*

*A single voice unseen sings :*

I am not worthy! Can it be  
That thou wilt stoop to dwell with me?  
That, leaving fame and joys apart,  
Thou com'st, the Guest of Eager Heart?

*Invisible choir answers :*

O simple souls, obeying Heaven  
Unknowing, unto you is given  
The King in all His joy to see!

*As EAGER HEART remains kneeling in middle of bottom-step, the KINGS and SHEPHERDS go up, one by one, from the groups standing at either side. 1ST KING lifts off his crown, and offers it before him, as chorale is sung by choir invisible :*

Behold the King of all the Earth,  
In mortal likeness of a Son,

Whose perfect glory rules in this—  
 Father of all, Thy will be done!  
 The gift, O God, Thou gavest me,  
 My spirit first receives to-day ;  
 I take possession of my crown,  
 Which at thy helpless feet I lay!

*[He stands beside the couch-head, L.*

2ND KING *goes up with tottering steps, bearing his box of myrrh before him, as unseen choir sings chorale :*

Behold th' immortal foe of Death  
 In one that is content to die,  
 In Life the heir of yielded life,  
 Foreshadowed in the family !  
 The prison-house of Time dissolves,  
 The inner dwelling Soul is free,  
 Learning itself, in narrow walls,  
 Essence of Life and Love as Thee !

*[He stands beside 1ST KING.*

3RD KING *goes up, bearing his censer in his left hand, his right hand raised : he looks on the Child with a smile of inexpressible sweetness, as unseen choir sings :*

Behold the Peace of all the world  
 In tender likeness of a Child !  
 The gentle sufferers of the Earth  
 Have tamed at last her passions wild

## EAGER HEART

In looks that supplicate, in tears,  
 In weary, dark desires that rove—  
 Behold the gateway into bliss,  
 Th' Eternal call and cry of Love!

[*He rises and stands beside* 2ND  
 KING. JOSEPH *beckons* 1ST SHEP-  
 HERD *to come.*]

## SHEPHERD'S SONG.

Sing we, sing we joyously!  
 Here we see,  
 Man may be  
 Free from offerings of blood!  
 Life of pain  
 Is life of gain,  
 To the strong and high of mood!  
 Sing we, sing we joyously!  
 [*He kisses robe and stands at foot of couch, L.*]

2ND SHEPHERD *goes up and kneels.*

Now no more  
 Need bitter war  
 Sunder king and serf and beast;  
 Bid them all,  
 Great and small,  
 To Earth and Heaven's high Birthday feast!  
 Sing we, sing we joyously!  
 [*He stands beside* 1ST SHEPHERD.]

YOUNG MAN *goes up and kneels.*

See to-day

Soul and clay

Perfect from the house of strife!

Eager Heart

Here apart

Sheltereth the Form of Life!

Sing we, sing we joyously!

[*He stands.*]

*The* KINGS *and* SHEPHERDS *look back to* EAGER HEART. *The* 3RD KING *and* YOUNG MAN *return and lift her from her position, with one hand pointing her to the Holy Family. The others descend to the second and third steps below her. MARY looks towards her with a smile of welcome and encouragement. As* EAGER HEART *goes forward, her two hands before her, outstretched in wonder and love, the Angel Choir glows visibly in the background through the veil, with their arms upraised, as the last sixteen bars of the Pastoral symphony are heard. For the first time, EAGER HEART, the* KINGS *and* SHEPHERDS, *see this vision with amazement and joy.*

*The* curtains *slowly close upon* EAGER HEART *kneeling before the* CHILD *with her arms outstretched. The* SHEPHERDS *and* KINGS

*gaze after her as men entranced, the closing doors leaving them outside on the steps. The music grows fainter to the close. The men with a sigh begin to descend the steps. As they touch the street pavement, enter, R. and L., EAGER FAME and EAGER SENSE, who start back, beholding the Kings. EAGER SENSE seeks to enter the closed doors, and is debarred by the raised arms of the 3RD KING and YOUNG MAN.*

*Kings.* What seek you, noble ladies?

*E. Fame* [*hurriedly*].           Sirs, we heard—  
'Twas a wild rumour at the city gates—  
The King had passed this way. . . . Two  
    beggars came,  
And asked an audience of our presence; but—  
None understood their speech! Within their  
    arms

They bore a Child; and on its infant head  
Men said there was a crown! What may this  
    mean?

*E. Sense* [*dishevelled*]. And, at the banquet  
    under the orange groves,  
The ruddy fruit grew pale, the candles dim,  
As suddenly stood the porter there, and said  
A bitter wailing had he heard, without—  
From two poor beggars, limping into the night,

Bearing a Child—and, on the Child's young  
head

He saw a living flame!

*E. Fame.*

O tell us, Sirs,

If He have passed this way?

*E. Sense.*

That we may go

And kneel before His feet and worship Him!

*Kings.* "Too late! too late! ye cannot enter  
now":

The doors are shut: the hour of grace is past.

The King that pleaded vainly at your gates

This night, hath entered in to Eager Heart!

THE SISTERS *gaze on each other with dismay.*

*E. Fame.* Woe for the blindness, then, of  
Eager Fame—

That set her thoughts too high to know the look  
Of Him that cometh in simplicity!

Here let me weep my guilty life away.

[*Crosses L., leans aside and weeps.*

*E. Sense.* Woe for the folly, then, of Eager  
Sense,

That set her lutes too ravishingly sweet

To catch the true and tender voice of truth!

Here let me weep my guilty life away!

[*Falls down on steps weeping.*

## EAGER HEART

CHORALE [*sung unseen*].

This proud heart within me swelling  
 Is no palace rich and fair ;  
 But a dark and gloomy dwelling,  
 Till Thou deign to enter there !  
 Ah, how often have I turned me  
 From Thy helplessness and spurned Thee !

KINGS *and* SHEPHERDS *look on the two with pity.*

*3rd King.* Nay, Sister, come ! no tempest-  
 rain of tears

Can wash the heart without the toil of deeds.  
 Return, and build in thy gates a humbler throne  
 Meet for the Lord of wisdom and of love !

1ST SHEPHERD *approaching* EAGER SENSE :

And come with us, dear Eager Sense, to learn,  
 'Mid suffering, and the hardness of the world,  
 That sweetest vineyards drink the sweat of man,  
 And royal bread is kneaded best with pain !  
 Thou in thy palace other joys must make,  
 If thou, one day, wilt welcome there thy Lord !

*The "Gloria" is sung unseen, beginning faintly,  
 as the following words are spoken by*

3RD KING *and* 1ST SHEPHERD, *raising their hands:*

Hark to the heavenly voices, yet again,  
 That wake the rising world ! Let us begone ;  
 So the great Sun, the Keeper of our Day,



May find *us* at our doings, even in toil  
Singing with happy hearts the glad Noël!

[*Exeunt all: the KINGS following  
EAGER FAME, L. ; the SHEPHERDS  
following EAGER SENSE, R.  
The "Gloria in Excelsis" swells  
with a sudden burst, as they go  
out, seeming to welcome them:  
they all hear it with joy on their  
faces: it continues to its end,  
fading at last into the distance.*]

## SILENCE

*The PROLOGUE goes up from audience with solemn  
steps, and addresses all present.*

The play is out ; the faithful feed in bliss ;  
The foolish turn to find true nobleness :  
Say, gentle listener, at this Christmas tide,  
Is *your* hearth ready? are your doors flung wide?  
Hath He come in with you to make His stay,  
Or hath He passed already on his way?

Nay, let us enter in, before we part,  
And pray together here with Eager Heart,  
That never, O thou Son of Man! may we  
Weary of search, or miss of seeing Thee  
In every human form, and human dress—  
The Homeless Child of Peace and Righteous-  
ness!

## EAGER HEART

*To be sung in unison by audience standing :*  
*“ Veni Emmanuel.”*

O come, O come, Emmanuel !  
 And dwell with us, thy Israel,  
 That mourn in grief and darkness here,  
 Until the reign of God appear.

*Answer :* Rejoice ! Rejoice ! Emmanuel  
*(By choir) :* Is come to thee, O Israel !

O come, thou Dayspring from on high,  
 With healing and with purity :  
 Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
 And death's dark shadow put to flight.

*Answer :* Rejoice ! Rejoice ! Emmanuel  
 Is come to thee, O Israel !

O come again, thou heavenly Might,  
 That once did shew on Sinai's height  
 Thy righteousness, and changeless Law :  
 O teach us now by love and awe !

*Answer :* Rejoice ! Rejoice ! Emmanuel  
 Is come to thee, O Israel !









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