



Ralph Waldo Emerson
(1803-1882)

Dirge

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Knows he who tills this lonely field
To reap its scanty corn,
What mystic fruit his acres yield
At midnight and at morn?

In the long sunny afternoon,
The plain was full of ghosts,
I wandered up, I wandered down,
Beset by pensive hosts.

The winding Concord gleamed below,
Pouring as wide a flood
As when my brothers long ago,
Came with me to the wood.

But they are gone,— the holy ones,
Who trod with me this lonely vale,

The strong, star-bright companions
Are silent, low, and pale.

My good, my noble, in their prime,
Who made this world the feast it was,
Who learned with me the lore of time,
Who loved this dwelling-place.

They took this valley for their toy,
They played with it in every mood,
A cell for prayer, a hall for joy,
They treated nature as they would.

They colored the horizon round,
Stars flamed and faded as they bade,
All echoes hearkened for their sound,
They made the woodlands glad or mad.

I touch this flower of silken leaf
Which once our childhood knew
Its soft leaves wound me with a grief
Whose balsam never grew.

Hearken to yon pine warbler
Singing aloft in the tree;
Hearest thou, O traveller!
What he singeth to me?

Not unless God made sharp thine ear
With sorrow such as mine,
Out of that delicate lay couldst thou
The heavy dirge divine.

Go, lonely man, it saith,
They loved thee from their birth,
Their hands were pure, and pure their faith,
There are no such hearts on earth.

Ye drew one mother's milk,
One chamber held ye all;
A very tender history
Did in your childhood fall.

Ye cannot unlock your heart,
The key is gone with them;
The silent organ loudest chants
The master's requiem.



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