

DE NATURA.

A POEM

ON THE

Religion of Nature, and the
Nature of Religion.

BY

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DE NATURA.

Great Goddess, Nature, or Great Nature, God!
Male, female, dual, all! from star to sod!
I, thy child, and part thyself, fall prostrate
At the shrine that suffers no apostate.
All worship at a common altar here
(Nor can they 'scape from th' universal sphere),
Be they the devotees of love or fear.

The children of the far and mystic East,
Who slay their offspring that the gods may feast;
The worshippers of Brahm the Supreme King;
Of those strange gods the mythic Veddas sing—
Of Christna, Siva, Vishnu, Ganesa;
The six-faced God of war Kartikeya;
Of Kali with her wild dishevelled hair,
Her blood red hands, her eyes of fiendish glare,
Her twice formed arms that bear a giant's skull,
With necklace grim, of human heads in full—
The worshippers of these their homage pay
But to the powers of night, or powers of day—
They at the shrine of Nature, fall and pray.

The sons of Egypt by the mystic Nile
Where mild Osiris wore his summer smile,

And Isis wooed her lover at the dawn
'Till Horus from their love embrace was born,
Knelt but at Nature's shrine, at early morn
Or fading eve, when priest and people torn
From daily cares, unto their God
Offered the first fruits of the fertile sod.
It was to Nature they out-poured their praise—
Nature, revealed in all her won'drous ways.

The sun Osiris with his tender rays,
The strong God Horus with his eye ablaze,
God Ra the parent of the summer days,
Nephthis the goddess of the misty haze,
And Set, the evil one, who nightly plays
The foe of Amon, in the western maze,
Are names that suit the first poetic lays
Of early faith, imbued with Nature's traits.

The Am'rous God of ancient classic Greece,
The King of summer plenty and of peace—
And yet the God of thunder and of war—
Was Zeus, the Theos, travelled from afar,
From still more Ancient times, when 'neath the sky
Of burning India, the sun's bright eye
Was called by name *Dyaus*—worshiped so
As king of brightness—by his sons below.

Apollo was the name for "God of light,"
Who bore aloft the sun to banish night,
Who died, and lived again, and shone on high,
When summer welcomed him to th' Northern sky.

The far famed Romans too, at common shrine
From universal force, made Gods divine.

The charioteer with youthful face, and bright
From whose encircled head twelve rays of light
Resplendant shine to chase the night away
Is Sol—the Sun—the God of our *Sunday*.

Selene, Luna or Diana great,
Are launched upon the self-same stream of fate.
For birth—the mythic minds of Greece and Rome,
For fame—the midnight skies through which they roam,
For deeds—what poets dream about the moon,
Their deaths—that knowledge which is man's best boon.
They are the self-same goddess—queen of night,
The orb, whose silv'ry beams dispensed the light,
To which, in fair Arcadia, the young,
The brave, and fair, to joyful music sung,
Or flowing from the harp in pleasing airs,
Fell gaily to the dance when joy was theirs.

And e'en when we have partial lost the myth,
The primal door of faith was opened with,
Still, chaste Diana, in the midnight sky,
Is full of wonder as in days gone bye.
The ocean tides that follow in her train,
The ebb and flow of all the mighty main,
Responsive to her glance of virgin love,
Make show as tho' they have a conscious move,
Whilst wavelets seem to leap and kiss the beams,
Which e'en, unto the human lover, seems
The tender soul of his most am'rous dreams.

In ages past where frowns the icy North,
There lived a race of valour and of worth ;
Sea Kings, rude teachers of the arts of war,
Who sang the praises of the mighty Thor.
These, too, from Nature had construed their Gods,

And Nature, dreaming, furnished them abodes.
The warmth of summer and the morning light,
The foe of winter and the ban of night,
Was Thor, the chief God of the Norseman bold,
Loved more than all, since he dispelled the cold ;
Tho' he, when anger dwelt within his eye,
Hurled with his hammer, thunder from the sky.
Baldur, the white God, was the gentle sun
Who, after he, his God-like course had run,
Was slain *in winter* by the mistletoe,
The only thing that dwelt in spheres below
That had not sworn it would not harm the God.

When Baldur dreamt that he should suffer harm
He breathed unto the *Æsir* his alarm.
Then Frigga, to prevent an awful fate
To all that was in nature, journeyed straight
And begged that not a single object would
Do ought to harm the Beautiful and good ;
Save that she thought the mistletoe too young,
To have an oath upon its feeble tongue.

Then in Asgard, the mansions and abodes
Of Odin, and his peers—twelve other Gods—
Baldur, would be a mark for one and all :
Try wound him as you might—he could not fall.
But Loki, evil one, to Frigga went
Disguised as some old hag, with body bent,
And drew from her the secret that he sought,
And then, the unsworn shrub to Asgard brought.

Whilst all the Gods were happy in the game,
Loki unto the God blind Höder came
And asked him why he naught at Baldur threw ?
Höder replied, " The god is not in view,

“ I have no sight his noble form to see,
“ Such joy of Æsir; it is not for me!
“ Besides, my heart is farther filled with woe
“ Since I have naught, that I could venture throw.”

Loki replied, unto blind Höder, thus:
“ It makes me sad that thou art not with us,
“ But take this little twig within thy hand,
“ And I behind thy god-like form will stand
“ And guide thy arm, and give it gentle aim
“ At happy Baldur with the woundless frame,
“ So that thou may'st with Æsir join the game.”

So did they do, and then the mistletoe
Pierced Baldur's noble heart, and laid him low.

When Baldur fell the Gods stood speechless still,
Amazed with horror at the evil will
Of him, the author of this dreadful deed—
Which made the hearts of Gods to burst and bleed.

When they recovered from their speechless state,
Deep vengeful anger and a bitter hate
Rose up in every heart, and made them swear
Dire vengeance to the slayer of the Fair;
But they were then within the hall of peace,
And so, for some brief time, their ire must cease.
Then tears, and wailing lamentations deep,
Were heard around—for every God did weep.

Frigga, at length, with woe-filled voice, arose
And asked which God among all present chose
To win her love and earn her sweet good will?
“ For this,” said she, “ shall be to him who will
“ Ride fast to Hell and Hela's heart infil

“ With pity for our Baldur. Who will go
“ And offer ransom to the queen below
“ That Baldur may return and end our woe ? ”

Brave Hermod, son of Odin, answered “ I,
“ I to the shades of Death will quickly fly,
“ And if to pity Hela’s heart incline
“ Good Baldur’s hoped return shall be with mine.”

Meanwhile, on a burning ship, put out to sea,
Was borne the corpse of Baldur solemnly !
The Goddess Nanna, when she saw the sight,
With grief o’erwhelmed then joined her husband’s plight,
And at his funeral-pile was burned that night.

Sleipner, the horse of Odin, God Hermod rode,
And was nine days and nights upon the road.
Through dark and lonely glens o’ercast with gloom—
Where naught but dreary shades around him loom—
He journeyed on, till to the bridge he came !
That crosses Gjöll, or Styx—doubtless the same—
And stoppéd there a space to ask the maid
Who kept the bridge, if Baldur thence had strayed ?
The maid replied that Baldur has passed o’er !
So Hermod spurred his horse to speed once more.
At last the gates of Hell burst into view,
With bolt and bar made fast, that none pass through ;
But Sleipner with tremendous leap—their heights
O’ertops, and on the other side alights.

In Hell, in chief of seats of all below,
Loved Baldur sat, to be distinguished so ;
And Hermod with him spake the whole night through,
And such sweet mem’ries so inspired the two
That they, with love and pity, filled each word,
And unto tears each list’ning object stirred.

When morning came, to Hela Hermod went
And told her why by Æsir he was sent,
And asked of her release of Baldur's soul,
O'er which she exercised Supreme control.
"I plead with grief that thou let Baldur go,"
Bespoke the god. "All nature is in woe
"Because of him. There's naught that is but weeps
"Through days and nights; and sorrow sweeps
"Her heavy shadow o'er the Gods above,
"That thou hast charge of him, whom all things love."

"Then I will test thy words," she terse replied,
"Thou back unto high Asgard quick must ride,
"And tell the Gods that I will Baldur keep
"Unless *all* things in nature for him weep.
"Naught, dead or living, must refuse a tear,
"Or Baldur ever hence remaineth here."

Uprose then Hermod, still with heavy heart,
And strode across his steed, to thence depart;
But, ere he went, came Baldur to his side,
And, so 'tis said, Hermod a tear espied:—
"Take this to Odin, 'tis but a simple thing,
"But ask him, for my sake, to wear this ring,
"It may perchance his mem'ry backward wing,
"To think of me; so ask him wear the ring
"As symbol of my love, and think of me."
And Nanna, too, did presents send, for she
To Frigga sent her thimble, made of gold,
In memory of the love they'd shared of old.

When it was told to Æsir what transpired,
While Hermod was in Hell, they straight enquired
The love there was in Nature, for the God
Who once gave love to all, from world to sod?

Then tears of grief from ev'ry object flowed,
All things in Nature wept, and sadly showed
How much they loved good Baldur who was dead.
All things in Nature wept, save one old hag,
Who caused her evil fiendish tongue to wag
In mock'ry of the woe all things displayed,
While she her cavern kept thus undismayed.
It was the Evil Loki, so 'tis said,
Who thus replied, "Let Hela keep her dead."

This story oft unto the Norseman told,
Amid the snows of Winter and its cold
Was but a tale of how the kingly sun
Yields life, in winter, to the Evil one.
The self-same war of darkness and of light,
Of summer and of winter, day and night,
Of evil and of good, that in the East
Was burden thought and theme of ev'ry priest.

That wondrous battle, 'twixt the good and ill,
With all our science is a mystery still.
What constitutes the ill, what makes the good?
Or is there ill at all? These questions would
We ask of science, for we desire to know
If *all* be good, which man, not thinking so,
Has, through his ignorance, conceived as ill,
And thought dependent on some demon's will?

Is it the truth that sin is but the bud
That shall develope in the flower of good?
Is Nature perfect for the lasting hour?
The bud, as such, as perfect as the flower?
Is Nature growing to some higher state,
Or does perfection *now* upon us wait?

That Nature changes, all who list may see,
But can each tireless change perfection be ?
Are we on-rushing to some perfect goal ?
Or did we from some first perfection fall ?
Or yet again, througout the endless range,
Is *relative* perfection in each change ?
'Neath questions such as these there flow the streams
Of Subtle thought and Philosophic dreams,
And clashing waters, seethe and foam with doubt,
Whilst dark contentions brood upon their route.
Hence is it true there dwells a mystery still
In the Eternal fight twixt Good and Ill.

It is the Sabbath day, now see the throng
Wend through the fields, and lanes, and streets along
To city, or to village church, which stands
The fairest edifice in Christian lands.
Hark to the music of the-sweet toned bells—
Music, like to the wave, which falls and swells,
And dying soft has scarcely passed away,
Ere once again the same rich tones will play
Their notes of joy upon the breath of May.
Amid the clusters of the tall beech trees,
Whose whispering leaves responsive to the breeze,
Of Autumn, and of gentle sabbath air,
Seem animated by the soul of prayer,
There stands the lonely church—the house of God !
Birds sing glad songs and happy flowers nod,
And Nature dreams beneath a mystic spell,
Lulled to half-slumber by the sabbath bell
Which, from an ancient Tower, in ivy clad,
Tolls sabbath calls, in music sweetly sad.
Within, the worshippers, on bended knees,
With solemn joy that sabbath grants them ease,

From toils and tumults of a week of care
 Are lip-launched out upon the sea of prayer.
 To whom their prayers? Whom do they worship here?
 Are they devout because of love or fear?
 List, hear them pray! "Oh God, stretch forth thine arm
 " And save us, now and aye, from every harm.
 " From pangs of death, from terrors greater still,
 " Which, after death, the depths of hell infil—
 " Oh save us from the Fiend in darkness cursed,
 " Of all the creatures Hell-born, damned the worst.
 " Oh save us from Eternal Death and Hell;
 " Oh save us from the curse, since Adam fell,
 " The deepest, blackest, ire filled most of all,
 " Which, for a fall, could ere on mortal fall!
 " Oh save us from thy wrath, thy lasting ire,
 " Thy anger, hate, and dread 'consuming fire.'
 " Oh save," and so the prayer goes on, "Oh save—"
 For some salvation do they madly crave;
 'Tis fear, the demon *Fear*, that acts the part,
 And cries so plaintive from the listless heart.

The Christian from the Pagan differs not,
 Their Faith are subject to the common lot.
 'Tis but in *names* that a change is found;
 Like many weeds that on the earth abound—
 All faiths are rooted in the self-same ground.

The deep "unknown" that gives the Pagan dread,
 The home of Fear, the haunt of evil dead—
 The land of ignorance—hence Fear and pain,
 Is also to the Christian dreaded bane.
 What Zoroaster "God Ahriman" names,
 The Christian by the term of "Devil" blames;
 Destroying Siya of the Hindoo race,
 Among ourselves as "Satan" takes his place.

Egyptian Typhon is "The Dragon" dire,
And Hades, strange, has now become "Hell-fire."
King Pluto is the type of our Arch Fiend,
Whilst Pan, with horns and hoofs has got him screened,
So that we may not recognise his birth,
Nor think he has his like upon this earth.
These creatures are the wildest shapes of Fear,
Which at the voice of Ignorance appear,
And in the gloom, make stoutest hearts recoil,
Live they on Pagan or on Christian soil.

'Tis thus that fear these common forms creates,
And paints for man the demons which he hates.
Man is but man, and whatso'er his mould,
Fear rules his heart and gives him to behold
Dread Fiends, so long as he is ignorant,
And of the God-born truth in bitter want.

The Christian God on winter's shortest day,
Like Mithra, Bacchus, Sol, and long array
Of other Gods, is born a feeble child,
From his chaste virgin mother, undefiled.
Why is he born, just when the sun is born?
In self-same month and on the very morn?
Why when the sun begins to grow in power,
Should we affix for Christ the natal hour?
Why, too, should Magi from the distant east,
Behold the *Star* of this the highest Priest,
And bring him myrrh and frankincense and gold,
Sacred to the *Sun* in the days of old?
Strange, too, the mystic letters I. H. S.,
Which from the Greek will read as I. E. S.,
The name of Bacchus, the Phœnician, Yes!
Now Bacchus was the sun, and on the day
When Christ was born, he too commenced his sway,

And I.E.S., when put in Latin speech,
Give Jes-us—the God whom Christians beseech !

His harbinger, on longest day of June,—
St. John the Baptist of the Ancient rune—
Was born, when light contracts the lengthened hour,
And when the sun diminishes his power ;
Hence did he cry unto the Prince of Peace,
“Thy days must grow, but mine must now decrease.”

When Christ was born, rose *Virgo* in the sky,
And from that constellation, shone on high
The youthful sun, and on a winter's morn,
From star-robed Virgin, in the sky was born.
Like Christna, sun-god of the Hindoo sage,
At birth, bright angels in sweet songs engage,
And shepherds from their pastures rude and wild,
Give welcome to their sun-god born a child.

When Christna the divine was born on earth,
The cruel Tyrant Cansa learned his birth,
And fearful, it is said, lest he should fall,
To children slaughter took—to one and all !
That Christina might be slain, his dreaded foe,
Who, helpless now, might safe receive the blow.

Likewise, at birth of Christ, King Herod reigned,
And ordered death—for so it has been feigned—
To every child made subject to his rage,
By falling brief of two short years in age.

One Gospel writer has this story told—
The other writers have not made so bold—
Forgetful that, e'en then, his cousin John
Had scarcely yet attained the age of one,

And yet remained where Herod slaughtered *all*
Alive, and ready for his future call !

Ascending slow towards the summer sphere,
The sun in sign of *Aries* does appear,
Called *Lamb* by those who with the stars did plod—
So after Mithra termed "The Lamb of God."

It was the custom in the days of old,
That all the great should have their fates foretold ;
And so the sun, as some great mighty power,
Must know the fortune of his natal hour.
Hence, priests of Mithra (other name for sun),
When he was born would for his image run,
And bring it from a cave and then foretell
What labours he'd perform his fame to swell,
How he should die, and then descend to Hell,
And thence should rise again and shine on high,
As King of Heaven in the summer sky.
So worshippers of Mithra, thus we learn,
Had formed a faith which Christians do not spurn.

Years ere the Saviour of the Christian race
Had 'mong the stars of heaven received a place,
The Incarnation, Resurrection, Fall,
The mystery of the Atonement, all—
All that Christians have preserved in Creeds,
The Persians had to meet their mental needs.
Nay the very forms, e'en the outward show,
We practice now, the Persians practiced so !
The priests of Mithra oft-times would assist
Their followers to take the Eucharist ;
And Baptism, and Penance were in vogue,
To make a Saint of him, erst-while a rogue !

Hence nothing new we find in Christian creeds,
They form a tree full grown from older weeds.

And older than the faith of Persian Kings,
Older than Assyrian bulls with wings,
Older than Avesta the book of lore,
Which tells the stories of our father's fore,
Far older than the faith which Judah saw,
Aye, older than the famed "Mosaic law,"
Was that strange faith of Egypt long ago!
First here the Immortality of man
Received a godly sanction and a plan.
'Twas here Osiris, kingly "Judge of dead,"
Unto immortal realms the Spirit led.

'T was here the Resurrection first was taught.
'T was here that the Atonement was out-wrought.
'T was here the "Judgment day" was first assigned
To judge the dead whom evil had maligned.
'T was here that Gods first walked upon the Earth,
And entered human form by human birth.
'T was here that the immortal bad and good
First 'fore the judges of the dead had stood
To give account of what their days had been—
Whether good or ill, bountiful or mean—
And so to judgment gain and thence depart
To meet the fate most suited to the heart.
In fact, 't was here when Judah was unknown,
Whilst Jews were savages in deserts lone,
Two thousand years ere so-called Moses wrote
The so-called "laws"—which he from Egypt brought,
That the Egyptian priests along the Nile
Were teaching to their followers the while,
The faiths of Christendom and doctrines all
From the Atonement, e'en unto the Fall!

What then is Christianity but this :—
A Faith, out-growth of all the rest that is,
Blending of all that ere its day had been,
Commingled streamlets, as one river seen ?
A tree in flower that ere its time had been
Long growing through the bud and vernal green ?

Nor think at time of Christ, the growing ceased,
For since his day the tree has much increased,
And twig and branch from Pagan Rome has won
Till Pagan faith and Christian are but one.

The mind once habited to certain ways
To keeping festivals, observing days,
Is oft-times like a rock on mountain sides,
That started once fast to the valley glides,
And gathers speed as it falls rolling o'er ;
So habit gains as it repeats the more.

In those brave days of old when Rome was great,
Their Festivals were kept by all the State,
In honour of the Gods that Rome adored—
In gratitude for aid the Gods afford.
Time honoured were these customs to the mind,
And high the place tradition has assigned
To their observance at the stated time,
When seasons brought again the days sublime.

When that base Emperor, vile Constantine,
Broke the succession of the Pagan line,
And with a cruelty both mean and coarse,
Would make men Christians by the rule of force.
The Pagans with a faith of Pagan mould,
Were servile to the force of custom's old,
And so, compelled to change, changed but the name,

And left the faith and habits still the same.
Hence Pagan faith the Christian calend taints,
And Pagan Gods are lost in Christian Saints !
The ancient Faith of Rome in currents strong,
Yet bears the ship of Christendom along.

But what of Jesus, if these facts be true ?
Is he a myth lost henceforth to our view ?
We think him to have been the " Nazarene,"
A member of the brotherhood Essene,
A brave reformer throughout Palestine !
On him a superstitious race of men
Have pinned their myths to worship o'er again.
'Tis thus this gentle, lowly, humble man,
Formed the foundation of a priestly plan,
To keep intact the myths of bygone days,
And to preserve the tenets and the ways
Of many worships blended all in one,
Till Jesus has become our " God the Sun."
So e'en the Christian bends at common shrine
And worships Nature as a God, divine !

Oh, goddess, Nature, ruler of my heart,
What is't we know that thou dost not impart ?
'Tis thee in us that worships, and yet we
While we do worship, do but worship thee !
We are thy children nurséd in thy lap,
And thankful unto thee for what may hap ;
Thou givest all and takest all away,
Both life and death do but thy will obey !

Where'er we look 'tis only thee we view !
The mighty star, the crystal drop of dew ;
The ocean with its flow of ebb and tide,
O'er whose broad bosom, storm built Titan's ride,

Or gentle zephyrs blow, or broods the calm,
Or wave-girt islands breathe a spicy balm ;
The rock-built mountain towering to the sky,
Where birds of highest flight ne'er deign to fly,
Capped by a mantle of eternal snow,
That feeds the Crystal spring with gentle flow,
Warbling as it falls to the vale below ;
The forest wild where lurks the beast of prey,
'Mid tangled thickets, dark, at high noon-day,
Since to their depths there steals no sunny ray ;
The rivers broad, that channel out the earth
With solem dirge, or flow with rippled mirth ;
The woodlands merry with their thousand hues,
That glitter in the sun 'neath morning dews ;
The sandy desert, and the lifeless plain ;
The smiling valley and the sacred fane,
The depths of space where rolls our planet on,
Where star encircles star, sun circles sun ;
The tiny drop of water from the sea,
A living world of animalculæ !
All, great or small ; oh, Nature ! is but thee
From atom small to deep infinity.

