

MABEL

A STORY OF
TWO WORLDS



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Written for and read before the Occult Club
of Richmond, Indiana, to whose present
members, and to the memory of
those who have passed on, this
little poem is respectfully
dedicated by the author

JAS. McNEILL



To Mary.

*Merry Christmas,
from
Father.*

A. D. 1907

MABEL

Near the banks of the Ohio,
 Flowing southward to the sea,
Parting by its gleaming waters
 Lands of slav'ry from the free,

In a neat but humble cottage,
 Heged around by rose and thorn,
When the peach tree cast its blossoms
 Was my angel, Mabel, born.

Field and garden, lately conquered,
 From the forest dense and wild,
Gently sloping toward the river,
 Held the cottage and the child.

Toward the north sky, upward lifting,
 Bearing still their native wood,
Hills with forests, green, unbroken,
 Cast their shadows in the flood.

Long before our land's misfortune,
Long before the Civil War,
Ere the whistle of the steam-boat
Broke in echoes 'long the shore,

Had my parents, with their first born,
Then a lad of seven years,
To this wilderness, this dream-land,
Come with many doubts and fears.

Just a little up the river,
Half a mile or something more,
From this cottage, stood their outfit,
On the river's hither shore.

In the forest, dark and gloomy,
One could hear the axes ring,
Hear the crash of falling timber,
In the clear, crisp air of spring.

Day by day the clearing widened,
And the sun shone brightly down,
Where for years his rays had scarcely
Touched the cold and sodden ground.

Soon a cottage, neat and cozy,
Reared aloft its shingled dome,
Destined as a place of comfort,
Soon to be a happy home.



Years sped on and forests vanished;
Fields of waving grass and grain
Shimmered in the golden sunshine,
Moistened by the dew and rain.

Day by day new strangers halted,
Stained by travel, browned by sun;
Built a home, enclosed a garden,
Plowed and hoed and wove and spun.

Till the valley, once so lonely,
Haunt of wildman, bird and beast,
From the river to the hill-top,
Far to north and west and east,

Rang with voices all familiar,
 Low of cattle, horses' neigh,
Song of farmer, home returning,
 Shouts of boys and girls at play.

And the farmstead by the river
 Grew in acres, ploughed and tilled,
Something to the cottage added,
 Pastures, barn and gran'ry filled.

Fruit trees flung abroad their fragrance,
 Apple, pear, and peach and plum,
And within the cottage often
 One could hear the spindle hum.

All around were vines and flowers,
 Thrift and neatness everywhere;
Birds of song and gayest plumage
 Loved to spend their summers here.

And within this cottage cozy,
 Surely guided from above,
Smiled the mother of my darling,
 Pure as saint and true as love.

And the host, Parnell, they called him,
 Christened John, beyond the sea,
Was a man of noble bearing,
 Fair of speech, of manner free.

In the years that followed, greatly
 Were this couple honored, blessed,
For their bounty and their kindness
 To the troubled and distressed.

Never from their board in hunger
 Was the trav'ler turned aside,
Never to the poor and needy
 Was substantial aid denied.

God had blessed them with a plenty,
 And their hearts were never closed
To misfortune or oppression
 In behalf of friends or foes.

To the church and school finances
 Gave they freely of their store,
Knowing well, than care of person,
 That man needed something more.

More than shelter, food and raiment,
More than strength of arm can give,
To prepare him for earth's duties,
And to teach him how to live.

Would that earth held more such people,
Casting sunshine everywhere!
Life would then be worth the living,
And our heaven would be here.

O, the selfishness of mortals,
Grinding, cheating whom they can!
Who shall teach them, who convince them,
Though a slave, man's still a man?

But I've wandered from my subject,
By some impulse led astray.
Let's return us to the river
And the home of little May.

Hither in my childish rambles,
Often to her cot I'd stray,
And while playing with my fav'rite,
Hours of time would speed away.

Oft she'd run to meet me coming,
Place her little hand in mine,
Smiling, chide me for my lateness,
And her arms around me twine.

O, the innocence of childhood,
O, the whiteness of the soul!
Ere the selfish and deceitful
Enter there and take control!



Time sped on. The forests vanished;
Coal fleets glided down the stream,
And the hills afar resounded
With the steamboat whistle's scream.

Village, church and school were founded,
Built near by my father's farm,
And around from every quarter
Came the strong and willing arm.

Men and women with their children,
Youth and maidens blithe and fair
Hither wander'd from their kindred,
With us lands and homes to share.

Streets were made and lined with dwellings,
Stores and work-shops multiplied;
Men of push and skill were greeted,
None a welcome were denied.

Every steamboat from the south-lands,
Up the broad Ohio bound,
Left supplies for stores and households,
And, returning, freightage found.



Time passed on. A child no longer,
Frequent visits still I paid
To the cottage by the river,
There to, meet my little maid.

Past the age of childish playthings,
Past the wish for dolls and toys,
Mabel, now, and I attended
School with other girls and boys.

I, a youth of sixteen summers,
She must count still two years less;
Still we studied, read, recited,
Played together at recess.

To her teachers and her school-mates
May was ever gentle, kind;
In her lessons, with her duties
She was never known behind.

Always cheerful and obliging,
Making of each girl a friend,
Swift was she to ask for pardon,
If perchance, she should offend.

For the lads who gave her notice,
Naught but kindly words had she;
But her only real, true friendship
Was, I knew, reserved for me.

I had been her first companion,
For a time, her only one,
And, it seems, that I thus early
Her abiding friendship won.

After school hours in the autumn,
When the evenings were fine,
When the blue grapes hung in clusters,
As they ripened on the vine,

I would often stray with Mabel
Through the meadows that we knew,
To the pastures and the dingles
Where the purple asters grew.

Oft we'd talk of men and stories
In the books that we had read;
Oft of cities long, long buried,
And of heroes long since dead.

And we'd wonder why the Father,
Who hath made the world sublime,
In his power and his wisdom,
Should permit of wrong and crime.

Wonder why that man created
Sinless, pure, should ever fall,
Why one thoughtless, human action
Should a curse spread over all.

Oft we'd stroll down by the river,
Gaze in silence on its flood;
Watch its wavelets rolling shoreward,
Up the bank on which we stood.

Then we'd talk about the Red man,
Who once owned this noble stream,
How he must have cherished, loved it,
Woven in each earthly dream.

Yes, we wondered if his spirit
Does not hither oft return,
If his love for this his earth home
Does not still within him burn;

If the curses which he uttered
'Gainst the white man as his foe,
Still commingle with the murmurs
Of its waters as they flow;

If the clouds upon its surface
Are but shadows of the frowns,
Which still gather o'er his features
In his happy hunting grounds,

When he thinks of how unjustly
All his claims were here ignored,
How his streams and lands were stolen,
By a stronger, foreign horde.



O, the happy dreams of boyhood,
Ere the cares of life descend!
And their freshness and their sweetness,
Would that they might never end.

Would that sorrow, care and trouble
Could be driven from this shore!
Would that strife and crime and worry
Could be banished ever more!

Time passed on, and school days ended,
Both for Mabel and for me.
I'd become the village teacher,
She had gone beyond the sea.

Gone abroad with father, mother,
For a season to remain,
In pursuit of useful knowledge,—
Then return to me again.

For we'd long since pledged each other,
Prompted by a love supreme,
That we'd share life's joys and sorrows
In a home built near this stream.

So, I waited, O, how lonely,
Waited for my love to come,
From her rambles in the Old World
To her early friends and home.

O'er and o'er I read her letters,
Couch'd in language pure and sweet,
Telling of the joy that waited,
When we two again should meet;

Telling of the scenes and wonders,
With the soul's delight she'd viewed,
Of the schools of art and music,
Where her studies she'd pursued.

Oft she'd write of noted places,
London, Paris, Naples, Rome,
Glowingly describe their splendor,
Loving only her own home.

Twice the flow'rs of spring had faded
Twice had gone the summer's heat,
Gone the asters in the dingle,
And the winter's snow and sleet.

By and by there came a letter,
Telling that her work was done;
Only rest and recreation
Ere her home trip was begun.

Then, at length, a cable message
Flashed beneath the ocean wide,
Place and date and steamer mentioned,
"Sail to-day at evening tide."

Then a gladness filled my being,
Such as never had been mine,
Since the day she gave her love pledge,
As we sat beneath her vine.

Silently I thanked the Father,
Who resides in heaven above,
For the joy I felt within me
On account of her dear love.

Fervently I prayed His guidance,
For the ship in which she sailed,
Now returning from the Old World,
To the port whence late she'd hailed.

Long I pondered o'er her message,
Let my thoughts run wild and free,
Out into the dark to meet her,
Doubtless now upon the sea.

Late that night I sought my pillow,
Wearied by the mental strain,
Coaxed and wooed the god of slumber,
Until morning came again.

With the sun I rose and sauntered
Down along the river's shore,
Thinking of the distant ocean
And the precious freight it bore.



Days passed on. I grew uneasy,
Restless, sleepless, day and night
Frequently from slumber waking,
Roused as if in sudden fright.

And I dreamed that I was drifting,
Floating out upon the sea,
Where a fearful storm was raging,
And it seemed she called to me.

Called amid the crash of thunder,
And the roar of waves around,
Called my name in tones of anguish
Clear above all other sound.

Suddenly I woke in terror,
Sorely stricken and appalled.
Surely, though I might be dreaming,
That was none but Mabel called.

Can it be that some great danger,
Death's approach, O can it be!
Drawing near my heart's beloved one.
Out upon a storm-tossed sea!

But I tried to put it from me,
Saying, "It is but a dream,
Caused by roar of rushing waters
In Ohio's swollen stream."

But the thought would not be silenced —
"It was Mabel's voice that came,
Out of darkness and confusion
And in trouble spoke my name,

"Calling me in love and anguish,
Heard above the sounding wave,
Warning me (O God forbid it),
She might find an ocean grave!"

Then I rose in fear and trembling,
Dressed and walked the floor till morn,
Searching for a gleam of comfort
In the hope that she was borne

Safely homeward in the Midas,
Staunch and sound as when she sailed,
Soon "In sight" to be reported
Having over waves prevailed.

Morning came, and still another,
And the day toward darkness grew;
Then report read in the Journal—
"Steamer Midas over due."

"Late. From Liverpool, just landed,
Steamer Congress, Captain Free,
Vet'ran in the English service,
Tells of heavy storm at sea."

While I read these fearful headlines,
Everything grew dark around;
And 'tis said I kept repeating—
"Storm at sea, and Mabel drowned."

Time passed on, by me unheeded,
For I took no count of days.
Scenes and sounds were intermingled,
Objects whirled as in a maze.

Now I saw the ocean gleaming,
In the moonlight, bright and clear;
Over billows softly rolling
Ships were sailing here and there.

Stars were shining bright above it,
Stars were dancing on its crest;
Over there there came a steamship,
Moving grandly toward the West.

O, how stately and majestic
Did she mount the rolling tide!
Plowing through the dark blue waters,
Dashing foam on either side!

How self-conscious were her motions,
Like a monstrous thing of life,
Formed to battle with great forces,
Made to overcome in strife.

Suddenly the brightness faded,
Inky darkness hovered round;
Moon and stars had ceased their shining,
And the stillness was profound.

Then the lightning flashed in splendor,
Lighting up the western sky,
And the thunder, low, foreboding,
Told of storm and danger nigh.

In a moment all was chaos,
Winds were howling, thunder crashed,
'Thwart the dome of obscured heavens
Fearfully the lightning flashed.

And the steamship that so lately,
Proudly braved the briny deep
Out amid the turmoil battled,
In the hope her course to keep.

I could feel her great heart throbbing,
Beating fiercely as mine own,
Hear her ship-bell toll the hour
In a faint and muffled tone.

Then a fearful flame leaped upward,
Widely spreading, mounting higher,
Painting red the clouds above it.
Yes, alas, the ship's on fire!

Can it be the noble vessel
Is by raging flames consumed,
And her load of human freightage
One and all to death are doomed?

Yes. I seemed to hear the voices
Of her passengers and crew,
Shouting, shrieking, praying, weeping,
While the flames intenser grew.

Launch the life boats! O, how useless!
Not a minute could they live.
Nothing but Almighty power
Succor to these souls can give.



Then, I started from my slumber,
Cast the stupor from my mind,
Grasped the meaning of this vision,
Sought in prayer to be resigned.

As I prayed a light shone round me
Soft and mellow as the morn,
When the April sky is cloudless,
And the leaves are newly born.

And I heard a voice distinctly,
Heard it mentally, soft and low,
"Dearest, I have kept my promise
Made you many months ago.

"On the fateful day I left you,
Distant lands and scenes to view,
You remember that I promised
If I lived I'd come to you.

"Still I live, but not as when you
Looked upon my features last,
For the fate of all has reached me,
And I've through Death's portals passed.

"By the fire and the storm-cloud
From the mortal I'm released,
Still I live and love you darling,
With a love that's never ceased.

"Though I cannot be your earth-mate,
Wife, companion, comrade dear,
Still I shall be with you always,
And your sad heart try to cheer.

"Life and love are both eternal;
Death is but the opened door
To a world more fair than this one,
Where we live forever more.

"If I cannot share Earth's pleasures,
Or divide its cares with thee,
Be not downcast, time is fleeting,
By and by you'll come to me.

"If we cannot by this river,
Live together as we planned,
Pearly rivers far more lovely
Wander through the spirit's land.

“Here I’ll wait your coming, dearest,
As I waited when a child,
When our lives were pure and simple,
Ere ambition had beguiled.

“Here, unchanged by death, I’ll wait you
Where earth’ storms can never come;
Here I’ll wait with love and longing,
As when in my earthly home.

“Years, perchance, may pass before you
Realize your earth-work done,
Years of loneliness and sadness,
Longing for the absent one.

“Time, however, faileth never
Deepest sorrow, grief to soothe,
And it shall be my endeavor,
Your lone path to render smooth.

“I’ll be with you in life’s battle,
When dread danger hovers near,
You shall know me present, dearest,
You my warning voice shall hear.

“When you’ve passed Death’s fabled river,
And have won the hither side,
I shall meet you then and greet you,
You shall claim your promised bride.

“Mortal life is but an instant,
When compared with endless years,
Cycles of eternal being,
Reaching onward through the spheres.

“But I cannot tarry longer,
I must bid you now adieu,
When I’m stronger, wiser, freer
I’ll return again to you.

“Cease your mourning and your weeping,
Rather be of cheer instead,
I’m not buried in the ocean,
Neither am I with the dead.

“Only that, which you call mortal
Perished in that storm at sea,
Separated from my being,
Let my real self go free.

“Think of me as always with you
Or within your wish’s call,
Free from danger, pain and sorrow
Triumphed over death and all.”

Thus, she left me, having spoken,
Words that I’ve recorded here;
Left my mind restored to reason,
And my heart relieved of fear.

Left me feeling, O how tranquil!
Heaven’s peace was in my soul,
Left me as the fainting pilgrim,
Just arrived at Mecca’s goal.

All was changed from gloom to brightness,
Nature never seemed more fair;
Never sang the birds more sweetly,
Never felt so soft the air.

Changed completely all my being,
From which every cloud had fled,
As I pondered well her language,
Realized what she had said.

So, I had not lost my darling,
After all these doubts and fears;
Since she cannot be my earth-mate,
She’ll be mine in other spheres.



Then a purpose, strong, enduring,
Quickly formed within my mind,
“I will leave this sad repining,
Leave these sighs and tears behind.

“Yes, dear Mabel, I’ll obey thee,
Be of cheer I surely can;
While I still retain this body,
I will try to be a man.

“I will try to do my duty,
Do for others as my own;
Though I’m doomed to tread life’s pathway
Wifeless, childless and alone.

“Yes, I’ll meet you, Mabel darling;
All my mortal days shall be
One continued preparation
For eternal life with thee.

“As you bid me, I’ll be cheerful,
Hide this sorrow in my heart,
And of life’s important duties
Mine shall be a worthy part.”



In the hearts of loved ones, longing
For their absent ones return
Well I knew that hope still living,
Must itself to ashes burn;

For the ship in which they journeyed
Never more to port shall come,
And of all her human cargo
Not one soul shall reach his home.

None shall ever tell the story
Of their struggle with the waves,
None recount their prayers and pleadings,
Or describe their ocean graves.

In the silence they shall linger
Conscious though of all the fears,
All the waitings and the heartaches,
Days of longing, nights of tears,

Caused by their continued absence,
And the failure to respond
To the wife’s incessant calling
And the mother’s love so fond.

Conscious of the homes made lonely
By that dreadful storm at sea,
Conscious of their own well being
On a plane from danger free.



O, the thought that life is endless,
And that death cannot prevail,
But to bar us from our loved ones,
By a thin and transient veil.

We shall put aside this veiling,
When we've crossed the great Divide
Where we'll find them grandly living,
And again with them reside.



Time passed on, and still no tidings
Of the lost ship ever came;
Of her fate no information
Could her owners ever claim.

Search was made by vessels charted
Of the ocean far around,
But no guerdon came of searching,
Not a trace of her was found.

Then I wandered from the village,
From my home so bright and fair,
Left the school in which I'd labored
With a teacher's earnest care.

In a distant, crowded city,
Purposed I to hide my grief;
From the gloom that sore oppressed me
Find some respite and relief.

And I mingled with the busy,
Kept my hands and brain employed,
Thus to keep the promise made her
And a broken life avoid.

Here I tarried for a season,
Then the guns of Sumpter told,
That the nation's life was threatened,
By the rebel fierce and bold.

Then I laid aside my calling,
Donned the Union's honored blue,
Buckled on the sword of battle,
To the front I swiftly flew.

Followed then four years of struggle,
Such as mortals seldom see,
Years of deprivation, bloodshed,
On the land and on the sea.

Struggle such as any mortal
Should again regret to know;
For the rebel was our kinsman
And no mean and craven foe.

Many brave men from all callings
Rushed into this fearful strife,
Some to battle for disunion,
Some to save the nation's life.

Drums were beating, flags were flying,
Soldiers gath'ring from afar;
Naught was thought of, naught was dreamed of
But the Union and the war.

To the front our armies gathered,
Confident of swift return,
Having overthrown the rebels,
As a thing of light concern.

But the courage and the daring
Of a proud and kindred foe,
Maddened with imagined outrage,
Would not have the war end so.

So, they stood and fought like brave men,
Filled the air with scream and shout,
Overthrew our ranks completely,
Put our army to the rout.

Thus, the nation, plunged in sorrow,
Realized that blood must flow,
Many homes be blighted, ruined,
Many brave men be laid low,

Ere the Rebel's strength be broken,
Ere his murd'rous raids should cease,
And the country all impoverished,
Should again return to peace.

Then a call was made for thousands,
Meeting with a prompt response,
Farmers, merchants and mechanics,
Rose, and volunteered at once.

Then to battle stern men hastened,
With a purpose in their heart,
To restore the country's honor,
And perform a soldier's part.

Thousands left their farms and workshops,
Half a million soldiers brave,
Some to die with fever stricken,
Many filled an honored grave.

Some outlived the storms of battle,
And the hells of war survived,
Few beheld the rebel vanquished,
And the Union's hope revived.



Four years' marching, guarding, fighting,
Years of hunger, bloodshed, strife,
Scarce sufficed to end the horror,
Or to save the nation's life.

Four years waiting, doubting, hoping,
Years of sorrows and of joys,
Wives for husbands praying, longing,
Mothers for their soldier boys.

But it ended, all this horror.
Through the land from sea to sea,
Flashed the tidings of our triumph,
And the end of slavery.

From the first gun's rueful warning,
That the conflict had begun,
Mid the snow and sleet of winter,
'Neath the summer's broiling sun,

Marched I with the Union army,
Met in battle oft this foe,
Knew his courage and his daring,
Saw his bitter overthrow.

I have seen his splendid fighting,
Met and measured by our own;
Ranks on either side depleted,
Gallant armies overthrown.

Many a foeman, wounded, dying,
Have I carried from the field,
Many a last word faintly spoken
Has a former friend revealed.

O, the horrors of rebellion!
And the woes of civil strife!
Never any curse more damning,
Falls to man in mortal life.

Bad enough the state of warfare
When two alien armies meet,
But when kinsman wars with kinsman,
Then the horror is complete.



Yes I've been in many battles,
Faced the storms of shell and lead,
Strove with bayonet and saber,
Fought my way o'er piles of dead.

Always in the thick of battle,
Never caring aught for life,
Seeking, courting death and danger,
Was my pastime in this strife.

Yet, except some trifling bruises,
Wounds that scarcely left a scar,
Sound as when I joined the army,
I came through the Civil War.

Conscious always of protection,
Guidance from a source unknown,
Some unseen but friendly safeguard,
Was, I knew, about me thrown.

Often in those midnight watches,
'Neath a moonless, starless sky,
Have I heard my angel calling,
Warning me of danger nigh.

Often on the field of slaughter,
When death seemed my certain fate,
Suddenly I stood in safety,
How I could not then relate.

But I'm wiser now, and clearer
Truths appear unto my mind;
Many things I know and treasure
Whereof I was wholly blind.

Man is not the short lived creature,
As a mortal he appears,
Ending all his joys and sorrows
In a term of fleeting years.

For a germ of greater promise
Deep within his nature lies,
Which the claims of earth outreaches,
And the hand of Death defies.

In another state of being,
Unrestrained by earth and time,
He may reach through manly effort,
Wisdom and a pow'r sublime.

In that higher state of being
Mind its true position holds,
And all forms of earthly matter
By its mighty will controls.

Greater than all forms of matter,
Wonders of the earth combined,
Is that great creating substance,
Known to us as human mind.

Hence, my carelessness of danger,
Hence, my fearlessness in strife,
For I know that over yonder
There is real and lasting life.

This I know is but the shadow
Of the life that is to be,
When we've parted from the mortal,
And from earthly bonds are free.

Has she not, my faithful angel,
Oft returning from above,
Told me of this life eternal,
And the endlessness of love?

Has she not ofttimes repeated,
Soothed my sorrows, cheered my soul;
Has she not with charming wisdom
Pointed me to Heaven's goal?

Were it not for her returning,
And her message to me borne,
Gravest doubts had marred my being,
And my life had been forlorn.

Now I see in life a purpose,
Grand beyond all earthly ken,
Worthy of sublimest Wisdom,
Reaching every grade of men.

Yes, in life I see a purpose,
All creation sings the strain—
Onward, ever moving onward,
Upward to a higher plane.

From the savage to the civil,
From the bondman to the free,
Moving onward, ever mounting,
Higher in Eternity.

Out of selfishness and folly,
Out of ignorance and crime,
Man is reaching out and growing,
Into power and truth sublime.

Think of life that hath no ending,
Sweeping onward, onward still,
When the earth has filled her mission,—
Some great purpose to fulfill.

Sweeping onward through the ages,
Numbered as the stars that shine,
Growing ever broader, wiser,
Purer, nearer the Divine.



Since the war I've traveled, studied,
With whatever means I've had,
Tried to aid the poor and needy,
Raise the fallen, cheer the sad.

Lands throughout the earth I've traversed,
Sailed the seas of every clime,
Sought to teach men ways of virtue,
Lead them out of sin and crime.

In this work I've been assisted,
Guided, comforted and blessed,
By an angel's voice directed,
By an angel's hand caressed.



Now, in age, I wait in patience,
Summons to my home above,
There to meet my friends and kindred,
There to claim my childhood's love.

You may have your land of leisure,
Court and win a golden crown,
Mine must be a Heav'n of Nature,
Wherein human traits abound;

Song and laughter intermingled
With the earnest work of soul,
Aspiration reaching outward,
Upward toward a higher goal;

Laws of Nature, broad, enduring,
Ordered by a God of love,
Reaching from the earthy, mortal,
To the angel spheres above;

Equal rights for all God's children,
Slavish stripes and chains for none;
These I trust to find in Heaven,
When that blissful state is won.



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