

# Why Don't He Lend a Hand?

AND OTHER AGNOSTIC POEMS.

BY

SAMUEL P. PUTNAM,

Author of "INGERSOLL AND JESUS," "PROMETHEUS," "GOLDEN  
THRONE," "WAIFS AND WANDERINGS," ETC., ETC.



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# POEMS.



## WHY DON'T HE LEND A HAND?

You say there is a God  
Above the boundless sky,  
A wise and wondrous deity  
Whose strength none can defy.  
You say that he is seated  
Upon a throne most grand,  
Millions of angels at his beck—  
Why don't he lend a hand?

See how the earth is groaning,  
What countless tears are shed,  
See how the plague stalks forward  
And brave and sweet lie dead.  
Homes burn and hearts are breaking,  
Grim murder stains the land;  
You say he is omnipotent—  
Why don't he lend a hand?

Behold, injustice conquers;  
Pain curses every hour;  
The good and true and beautiful  
Are trampled like the flower.  
You say he is our father,  
That what he wills doth stand:  
If he is thus almighty  
Why don't he lend a hand?

What is this monarch doing  
 Upon his golden throne,  
 To right the wrong stupendous,  
 Giv' joy instead of moan?  
 With his resistless majesty,  
 Each force at his command,  
 Each law his own creation—  
 Why don't he lend a hand?

Alas! I fear he's sleeping,  
 Or is himself a dream,  
 A bubble on thought's ocean,  
 Our fancy's fading gleam.  
 We look in vain to find him  
 Upon his throne so grand,  
 Then turn your vision earthward—  
 'Tis we must lend a hand.

'Tis we must grasp the lightning,  
 And plow the rugged soil;  
 'Tis we must beat back suffering,  
 And plague and murder foil;  
 'Tis we must build the paradise  
 And bravely right the wrong;  
 The god above us faileth,  
 The god *within* is strong.



## THE GOLDEN AGE.

A happy dream is haunting still the earth—  
 In weary hearts it finds its brightest birth—  
 When all shall be resplendent 'neath the sun,  
 And the fall harvest of man's soul be won;  
 When Freedom on its mountain high shall reign  
 And Wisdom walk upon the laden plain;  
 When every home shall be a gracious rest,  
 And plenty to the lips of toil be pressed;  
 When truth shall be the monarch of the world,  
 Its stainless banners o'er fair lands unfurled.

Not backward o'er the struggling past we gaze  
 To find the human soul's sublimest rays;  
 Not there the picture of the Golden Age,  
 Though many a splendid deed adorns its page;  
 Not there the glad fruition of our dream;  
 We've only glimpses of its bright fore-gleam  
 In souls heroic, lofty, pure, and wise,  
 Whose spirits drank the ardor of the skies.  
 The ever-broadening way of human thought  
 Still stretches to the goal for which they wrought.  
 Like stars they shine upon the night of time,  
 But pour their splendors into day sublime,  
 That surely comes with golden promise wide,  
 Breaking and glittering with full-flowing tide.

Sorrow and pain still linger on our path,  
 War's thunders, with its ghastly train of wrath;  
 Disease and discord sweep the strings of life;  
 Each day we plunge into some fresher strife.  
 Our hearts are aching and our minds are dark,  
 And only in the past we seem to mark  
 The pathway of an angel's flight afar;  
 But Hope, exultant, breaks the iron bar,  
 And the sweet morrow bursts to bloom again,  
 The prophet's soul relumes its fiery ken;  
 And all along from rank to rank we hear  
 The poet's music and the hero's cheer.

We are not born to perish like the swine;  
 To breathe and hope along our narrow line;  
 To sink at last into a hopeless grave,  
 And vanish like the glitter of a wave;  
 In living link we struggle, each with all;  
 Bound to the race, with it we rise or fall,  
 And its sublime career is ours to share;  
 We claim the fruitage of its crowning fair.  
 Our life is wrought into the gleaming whole;  
 We touch the glory of the poet's soul;  
 We paint the picture, carve the statue fine,  
 And with the Golden Age our spirits shine.  
 It is a dream; and yet 'tis real, too,

As are the mountains and the bending blue;  
 All nature is alive with its glad hour;  
 The boundless future breathes its ample dower  
 Upon the toil and struggle of to-day;  
 Each duty flings its clear, prophetic ray,  
 And joins us to the highest and the best;  
 We cannot sink—we triumph with the rest.

Weave, then, the golden future of the race  
 With heart, hand, hope, and all your action's grace;  
 In sorrow labor, for the joy will burst;  
 Still bear the burden and endure the worst,  
 For evil passes while the good remains;  
 The seed we plant will laugh along the plains.  
 The Golden Age is more than poet's fire;  
 'Tis more than happy thought or bright desire;  
 It is within the humblest deeds we do;  
 In faithful work the golden strands we view;  
 Day after day we make the beauty vast  
 On farm, in shop, where'er our lot is cast.  
 The iron rail, as well as roses light,  
 The sturdy blow, as well as music's flight,  
 Make beautiful the life of coming years,  
 Give glory to the dawning day that cheers;  
 Our whole humanity, from least to great,  
 With every varied talent and estate,  
 Each hope, each thought, each living heart and brain,  
 Unfold the grandeur of the one vast strain.



## THE IDEAL AND THE REAL

Far off the bright ideal,  
 Through the ages' ebb and flow,  
 Seems like a mocking luster  
 As life's winding way we go;  
 But that luster fadeth never,  
 For its subtle splendor flows

From the inmost of our being;  
 'Tis ourself so distant glows.

'Tis our mind, our soul, our spirit,  
 Touched by divinest thrill,  
 And with electric flashes  
 Throning high our noblest will;  
 And we cannot yield the glory,  
 Though it is so faint and far,  
 For it weaves its radiant promise  
 From what we deeply are.

We toil not for what may be  
 As to life's outward form,  
 But to fulfill the pressure  
 Of thoughts which in us storm;  
 And so the far ideal  
 Becomes a daily zest—  
 A deep and sweet fruition;  
 If we fail, we reach the best.

And thus the checkered real  
 Becomes illumined quite  
 With all we dream and hope for  
 On life's supremest hight;  
 The jewels of the future  
 Flash on our present way;  
 And as we nobly purpose  
 What will be is to-day.



## NOT DEAD, BUT LIVING.

In memory of Campbell Wilson, who died at Paterson, N. J., March  
 9, 1882.

I see thee in the silence of great death,  
 Calm as the eternal hills upon whose front  
 Shines the soft radiance of the pure white day;  
 I see the crystal beauty of thy soul  
 Unclouded in the marble of thy face;

The glowing ardor of thy life full set  
 In diamond stillness, with no flaw to dim;  
 And to my heart I say, He is not dead,  
 But living in the glory of his work,  
 In things accomplished that no fate can kill,  
 Linked with the endless process of the world;  
 For he has lived for truth with manly deed,  
 And grown to heights of virtue through long years,  
 Touched with the spirit of our common weal;  
 And so he passes, not like petal blown,  
 Or like the floating mist on summer's sky,  
 But is immortal in the glorious life  
 That beats from age to age in deathless man.

Ah, memory's halls are beautiful for aye,  
 Crowded with treasures ever sweet and new,  
 Bright as the morning's freshness of heaped gold,  
 In earth and sky, in flower and sailing clouds—  
 In this fair memory he is blazoned now,  
 And cannot fall or fade to nothingness;  
 He is a part of the illustrious past  
 Which naught can change and naught annihilate.

With what a solemn glory over life  
 Death draws its mystic and unfathomed grace!  
 We know it not, nor ever hath the veil  
 From its unsounded deep been put aside;  
 No music from its endless ocean drops  
 In harsh or mellow accents on our way;  
 But 'gainst that awful silence life bursts bright  
 And wonderful, and seems more excellent,  
 More fruitful, for the dark unknown wherein  
 Its wealth appears to perish, but, transformed,  
 Becomes a grander luster, purer stream.

Humanity dies not, and in its soul,  
 O noble friend, thou hast thy royal grave;  
 The labor thou hast done is ours, is man's,  
 The dear possession of the race to come;  
 Within our thoughts and zeal thou art alive;  
 Thou has struck hands with generations far  
 In the ennobling purpose of thy work.



The stream dries not; invisible it flows,  
 And makes more swift the upward steps of men.  
 Thou art at rest; no storm can shake thy frame;  
 But the unresting motions of thy soul,  
 Like pulses of the summer air, still touch  
 The world to beauty and our hearts to hope.



## FRUITION.

In memory of Mrs. L. M. Nicholson, of Vincennes, Ind., who lived  
 worked, and died in the Liberal faith.

We know not what the fruit may be;  
 The future hides itself away,  
 And our short life is but the seed,  
 Whose bloom is in some ampler day;  
 The present is not all we hav,  
 Its barren soil contains a gem  
 Unseen, whose luster yet will shine  
 Upon the soul's fair diadem.

Ah, thou hast labored in the dark,  
 And few the reapers by thy side;  
 The golden harvest was not seen,  
 Men fed on husks in blinded pride;  
 Thou sawest the glory far away,  
 And dreamed and toiled as fortune blest,  
 Yet the wide world went rolling by,  
 Seeking, yet knowing not the best.

Was it a failure, life, to thee,  
 Because thy work is yet uncrowned?  
 Because there seems no end to this  
 But thy pale form within the ground?  
 Shall we with hopeless tears bedew  
 The sod that covers thy true breast,  
 Shall we believe that ended here  
 Is all the grandeur of thy quest?

From the dark bosom of the flood  
 The lily blooms with heart of fire,  
 So ever and forever still  
 From hight to hight will worth aspire;  
 It cannot die; through darksome hours,  
 It onward glows to fervent bloom,  
 From chambers of the night it leaps  
 And the long-hidden fires illume.

Our work is not the test of life,  
 So far as outwardly expressed;  
 The measure is the thought within,  
 The glowing purpose of the breast.  
 Through that we touch the endless life  
 Of all the stars and all the years,  
 And from the bosom of the grave  
 The harvest of our life appears.

No failure! the fruition sweet  
 Was in thy life and in thy task;  
 There was a glory none can speak,  
 Which death shall evermore unmask.  
 The crown was with thee, though unseen,  
 In faithful service, day by day;  
 The seed is planted, and from hence  
 Thy rose shall flower to perfect ray.



## HOPE.

[An Answer to Tennyson's poem, "Despair."]

I see no God above me in the calm and happy sky;  
 I see no heaven—no glory where the angels glitter by;  
 I see no Christ effulgent who guides man's devious way;  
 I see no mighty ruler turning darkness into day;

I know not if I live again when I yield this mortal breath;  
 There are no shining portals where life vanishes to death;  
 The spirit is so linked with flesh that it must cease to burn  
 When to the silence of the grave from busy paths we turn.

Is there no hope, then, for the heart because this world is all?  
 Must knowledge bring to us no gain, but only funeral pall?  
 Because our childish faith is gone is our delight, then, dead?  
 Is Nature's feast less lovely because by Truth we're led?

Though heaven's throne fall, the myriad stars shine on in endless space;  
 Their thousand splendors gem the night and greet the upturned face;  
 And morning still comes beautiful, and evening's gold is bright;  
 In each, in all, still throb, still flow, the sparkling founts of light.

Still music haunts the air we breathe and trembles in the soul;  
 Still, with our living thought, we touch the grandeur of the whole;  
 Still knowledge opens spacious ways where beauty walks elate;  
 Each day we seem to tread life's path beneath a jeweled gate.

And is there nothing here to love because the Christ is gone?  
 Nothing to worship and adore from rosy dawn to dawn?  
 Because in dim religious light we no more kneel and pray,  
 Is there no sunshine flooding earth in which to work and play?

Are there not men and women noble, pure, and royal crowned,  
 With gracious face and generous hand in every station found?  
 Are there not splendid virtues shining like stars o'er time?  
 Are there not heroes struggling in every age and clime?

Oh, the things we have to honor and the things we have to love!—

This world is million-gloried beneath, around, above;  
 While 'gainst the dark of unknown fate we put our fiery soul,  
 And conquer as the freighted ship conquers the ocean's roll.

No hope is lost—we still aspire—for life is still as great  
 As when men thought the risen Christ had burst death's iron gate;

That thought is gone—the fairy-tale has vanished like a dream,  
 And what is left—a blank? Ah, no!—but countless worlds that gleam,

And send into our daily lot a thrill, a power, more sweet  
 Than ever yet within the glows of ancient visions beat;  
 Our manhood is to-day the source of every joy we feel;  
 We grow in Hope because we bend to simple Truth's appeal.



## THOMAS PAINE.

Crown him who crowned the world  
 With light from Reason's sphere,  
 Who made the path we tread  
 Free from the mists of fear;

Who touched the founts of Truth  
 With quick and fearless hand—  
 And lo! the morning came,  
 Two continents it spanned.

Forever at the front,  
 Unresting his great soul,  
 One mighty triumph won,  
 He sought another goal.

His spirit, like a flame,  
 Reached to the future's glow;  
 The best that was achieved  
 Still onward bade him go.

He was no age's slave  
 To voice what coward's think;  
 Not from the least of truth  
 Nor throned lie did he shrink.

Hero and sage in one,  
 Not yet the pean sweet  
 Of his fair fame rolls on—  
 Where truth and justice meet.

Not yet the clouds depart—  
 The breath of error still

Pours its dark pall and hides  
The beams it cannot kill.

But the blue sky shall burn  
These shadows from its way;  
Each glory man hath wrought  
Shall blend in perfect day.

When sum of all is blazed  
On Truth's triumphant crest;  
When worth receives its due,  
This life shall then be blest.

The long acclaim of joy,  
Which Liberty makes great  
In human hearts, shall bear  
His name to cloudless state.

Renown awaits on him  
Amid those temples vast,  
Where man shall worship free  
His own enduring past.



## NATURE'S GOSPEL.

[Written in the woods near Seymour, April 26, 1880.]

To-day I wandered, in fair nature's church,  
Amid the beauteous groves, where thousand flowers  
Sprinkle the verdant earth with starry blooms  
Of gold and purple—royal garniture—  
Spun in the chambers of the rain-beat sod;  
Woven by light where darkness seems to reign;  
While over in the arching canopies  
A million leaves, with tremulous dance and swift,  
Play with soft music to the sweeping wind.  
And birds sing with far mingling melodies,  
As if some viewless organ in the air  
Were touched by angel fingers, and its keys  
Vibrated with immeasurable delight.

The insects flutter like resplendent flames  
 From the warm bosom of the panting earth;  
 The faded leaves of the dead autumn shine  
 With a new luster 'mid the flowing green,  
 And wind and sun dance with the shadows bright;  
 While, o'er the bosom of the luminous sky,  
 The black crow circling glides, as if bold night  
 Would revel in the splendor of the day  
 And bathe its plumage in the dazzling joy.  
 All, all is beautiful; the note divine  
 Of perfect life is struck, and the rare thrill  
 Of truth's unclouded majesty is felt.  
 What is the gospel of poor human lips,  
 Of Bibles, churches, altars dim and cold,  
 Of image, crucifix, and painted wand,  
 To this divinest effluence of the spring—  
 This wave of joy on nature's gleaming breast?  
 Away, O man, with manufactured creeds,  
 And stupid mumblings of the pulpit-box,  
 Where only fools will show their brazen front,  
 And mutter spells as if that little space  
 Were all the universe of truth and fact.  
 I choose the valid glory of the sky—  
 The beauty of the sod. Why, e'en the worm  
 Is a better prophet of the beautiful  
 Than the gold-bound scriptures of the pompous priest.



## ADDRESS TO DEITY.

I find thee not, designer of the skies—  
 Shaper of worlds—the mind that planned the scheme  
 By which the universe is smoothly run—  
 The wisdom that from nothing made the whole  
 And crowned the blank of space with perfect stars;  
 Though search I everywhere from point to point,  
 From sparkling sun to sun, from void to zone  
 Packed with the glittering dust of million spheres

I spy no throne for thee—no palace bright—  
 No dazzling heaven—no holy dwelling-place—  
 Whence thy great mandates drive the wheels of time;  
 I see no angels hovering round thy car;  
 No faintest motion of that car I catch  
 Making new music in the fields of space;  
 I only find the sweep of mighty Law,  
 Unending, unbeginning, needing thee  
 No more than tossing billow needs the leaf  
 That drops upon its bounding bosom swift.  
 Outside of law thou art not, and in law  
 What more is working than pure life itself?  
 The atoms are eternal, uncreate;  
 They speed forever on their circling way,  
 Make and unmake the forms that flash and fade,  
 Now congregate in splendor like the suns,  
 Then separate in fierce, diffusive fire,  
 And with new motion whirl new heavens again.  
 The world itself is infinite—in the past  
 And in the future meets no shining bound,  
 And throughout space no wall to hedge it in.

It needs no deity; itself so strong—  
 So beautiful—so orderly—so sure—  
 No touch of thine is traced along its course;  
 E'en if thou wert, thou wert a useless thing—  
 A hanger-on to law, a shadow vast,  
 Out of whose empty breast no force is felt.

Before the wondrous Universe I bow;  
 Before its awful glooms and glories vast;  
 Before its regal sweep of beauteous law;  
 Above, beyond, no mortal mind can reach,  
 There is no more—for these are infinite.

But as I look within my soul's wide realm,  
 Its thoughts, emotions, feelings, vague and dim,  
 And the deep sense of an eternal right,  
 There is a ray ineffable—a flame  
 Tender and mighty—a glory marvelous—  
 A mystic and unfathomable light—  
 The rich effulgence of a stainless fire

Burning upon our being's utmost highs—  
 And to this perfectness of Nature's zest—  
 The blaze of virtue—excellence of self—  
 The grandeur of the ever-beaming truth  
 That bursts athwart the dome of inward life—  
 To this I give the gracious name of God—  
 This is the deity alone I find,  
 To which I bow with utter reverence.

I scorn the outward deity of men,  
 The sovereign of the skies—the image cold  
 Of a dull terror and barbaric thought;  
 But to the infinite sublime within—  
 The essence of the human soul I have—  
 The deity that honest manhood makes—  
 To this I yield with ready heart and hand.



## GIVE US LIGHT.

[As many desire to see in print this noble Secular hymn, recited by Mr. Charles Watts at the conclusion of some of his lectures, it is included in this collection.]

God of Nature ! give us light;  
 We are struggling through the night—  
 Through the clouds of crimes and creeds,  
 Lofty words and guilty deeds—  
 Honored not, nor understood,  
 Workers for the common good.  
 Father, by the public scorn,  
 By the ties in anguish torn,  
 By the sad and ceaseless strife,  
 By the cross we bear through life,  
 Do us justice; be our view  
 Truth or falsehood, we are true!  
 True to manhood's mission grave,  
 To the task that nature gave.  
 Ours the free and fearless thought,  
 Ours the honest, earnest doubt;  
 Not the cringing of the knee,  
 Not the impious mockery,  
 Of the prayers that rise to thee  
 Through a life of blasphemy.  
 Though our hearts be racked and riven,  
 Though the clouds enwrap thy heaven,  
 We are battling for the right.  
 God of Nature ! give us light.

—Holdreth.



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