BALLADS, LYRICS, AND HYMNS.

BY

ALICE CARY.

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1876.
THE WASHERWOMAN.

At the north end of our village stands,
With gable black and high,
A weather-beaten house,—I've stopt
Often as I went by,

To see the strip of bleaching grass
Slipped brightly in between
The long straight rows of hollyhocks,
And current-bushes green;

The clumsy bench beside the door,
And oaken washing-tub,
Where poor old Rachel used to stand,
And rub, and rub, and rub!

Her blue-checked apron speckled with
The suds, so snowy white;
From morning when I went to school
Till I went home at night,

She never took her sunburnt arms
Out of the steaming tub:
We used to say 't was weary work
Only to hear her rub.
BALLADS.

With sleeves stretched straight upon the grass
The washed shirts used to lie;
By dozens I have counted them
Some days, as I went by.

The burly blacksmith, battering at
His red-hot iron bands,
Would make a joke of wishing that
He had old Rachel's hands!

And when the sharp and ringing strokes
Had doubled up his shoe,
As crooked as old Rachel's back,
He used to say 't would do.

And every village housewife, with
A conscience clear and light,
Would send for her to come and wash
An hour or two at night!

Her hair beneath her cotton cap
Grew silver-white and thin;
And the deep furrows in her face
Ploughed all the roses in.

Yet patiently she kept at work,—
We school-girls used to say
The smile 'about her sunken mouth
Would quite go out some day.
Nobody ever thought the spark
That in her sad eyes shone,
Burned outward from a living soul
Immortal as their own.

And though a tender flush sometimes
Into her cheek would start,
Nobody dreamed old Rachel had
A woman’s loving heart!

At last she left her heaps of clothes
One quiet autumn day,
And stript from off her sunburnt arms
The weary suds away;

That night within her moonlit door
She sat alone,—her chin
Sunk in her hand,—her eyes shut up,
As if to look within.

Her face uplifted to the star
That stood so sweet and low
Against old crazy Peter’s house—
(He loved her long ago!)

Her heart had worn her body to
A handful of poor dust,—
Her soul was gone to be arrayed
In marriage-robcs, I trust.