MOTHER AND POET.

TURIN, AFTER NEWS FROM GAETA, 1861.

I

DEAD! One of them shot by the sea in the east,
   And one of them shot in the west by the sea.
Dead! both my boys! When you sit at the feast
   And are wanting a great song for Italy free,
       Let none look at me!

II

Yet I was a poetess only last year,
   And good at my art, for a woman, men said;
But this woman, this, who is agonized here,
   —The east sea and west sea rhyme on in her head
       For ever instead.

III

What art can a woman be good at? Oh, vain!
   What art is she good at, but hurting her breast
With the milk-teeth of babes, and a smile at the
   pain?

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Ah boys, how you hurt! you were strong as you pressed,
And I proud, by that test.

IV
What art's for a woman? To hold on her knees
Both darlings! to feel all their arms round her throat,
Cling, strangle a little! to sew by degrees
And 'broider the long-clothes and neat little coat;
To dream and to do.

V
To teach them ... It stings there! I made them indeed
Speak plain the word country. I taught them, no doubt,
That a country's a thing men should die for at need.
I prated of liberty, rights, and about
The tyrant cast out.

VI
And when their eyes flashed ... O my beautiful eyes! ...
I exulted; nay, let them go forth at the wheels
Of the guns, and denied not. But then the surprise
When one sits quite alone! Then one weeps,
then one kneels!
God, how the house feels!

VII
At first, happy news came, in gay letters moiled
With my kisses,—of camp-life and glory, and how
They both loved me; and, soon coming home to be spoiled,
In return would fan off every fly from my brow
With their green laurel-bough.

VIII
Then was triumph at Turin: "Ancona was free!"
And some one came out of the cheers in the street,
With a face pale as stone, to say something to me.
My Guido was dead! I fell down at his feet,
While they cheered in the street.

IX
I bore it; friends soothed me; my grief looked sublime
As the ransom of Italy. One boy remained
To be leant on and walked with, recalling the time
When the first grew immortal, while both of us strained
To the height he had gained.

X
And letters still came, shorter, sadder, more strong,
Writ now but in one hand, "I was not to faint,—
One loved me for two—would be with me ere long:
And Viva l'Italia!—he died for, our saint,
Who forbids our complaint."
NANNI would add, "he was safe, and aware
Of a presence that turned off the balls,—was
impress
It was Guido himself, who knew what I could bear,
And how 'twas impossible, quite dispossessed,
To live on for the rest."

On which, without pause, up the telegraph-line
Swept smoothly the next news from Gaeta:—
_Shot._
_Tell his mother._ Ah, ah, "his," "their," mother,—
not "mine,"
No voice says "My mother" again to me. What!
You think Guido forgot?

Are souls straight so happy that, dizzy with Heaven,
They drop earth's affections, conceive not of woe?
I think not. Themselves were too lately forgiven
Through THAT Love and Sorrow which reconciled so
The Above and Below.

O Christ of the five wounds, who look'dst through
the dark
To the face of Thy mother I consider, I pray,
How we common mothers stand desolate, mark,

Whose sons, not being Christs, die with eyes
turned away,
And no last word to say!

Both boys dead? but that's out of nature. We all
Have been patriots, yet each house must always
keep one.
'Twere imbecile, hewing out roads to a wall;
And, when Italy's made, for what end is it done
If we have not a son?

Ah, ah, ah! when Gaeta's taken, what then?
When the fair wicked queen sits no more at her
sport
Of the fire-balls of death crashing souls out of men?
When the guns of Cavalli with final retort
Have cut the game short?

When Venice and Rome keep their new jubilee,
When your flag takes all heaven for its white,
green and red,
When you have your country from mountain to sea,
When King Victor has Italy's crown on his head
(And I have my Dead),—

What then? Do not mock me. Ah, ring your bells
low,
And burn your lights faintly! My country is there,
MOTHER AND POET.

Above the star pricked by the last peak of snow:
   My Italy's THERE, with my brave civic Pair,
   To disfranchise despair!

XIX
   Forgive me. Some women bear children in strength,
   And bite back the cry of their pain in self-scorn;
   But the birth-pangs of nations will wring us at length
   Into wail such as this—and we sit on forlorn
   When the man-child is born.

XX
   Dead! One of them shot by the sea in the east,
   And one of them shot in the west by the sea.
   Both! both my boys! If in keeping the feast
   You want a great song for your Italy free,
   Let none look at me!

[This was Laura Savio, of Turin, a poetess and patriot,
whose sons were killed at Ancona and Gaeta.]