

THE CHURCH, WALKING WITH THE WORLD

Matilda C. Edwards

The Church and the World walked far apart on the changing shore of Time; The World was singing a giddy song And the Church a hymn sublime.

"Come, give me your hand," cried the merry World, "And walk with me this way:" But the good Church hid her snowy hands, and solemnly answered, "Nay:

I will not give you my hand at all, and I will not walk with you; your way is the way to endless death; your words are all untrue."

"Nay, walk with me but a little space," Said the World with a kindly air: "The road I walk is a pleasant road, and the sun shines always there.

Your path is thorny, and rough, and rude, and mine is broad and plain; My road is paved with flowers and dews, and yours with tears and pain.

The sky above me is always blue; No want, no toil, I know: The sky above you is always dark. Your lot is a lot of woe.

My path, you see, is a broad, fair one and my gate is high and wide; there is room enough for you and for me to travel side by side."

Half shyly the Church approached the World, and gave him her hand of snow; The old world grasped it and walked along, Saying in accents low:

"Your dress is too simple to please my taste: I will give you pearls to wear, Rich velvets and silks for your graceful form and diamonds to deck your hair."

The Church looked down at her plain white robes and then at the dazzling World. And blushed as she saw his handsome lip with a smile contemptuous curled.

"I will change my dress for a costlier one," Said the Church with a smile of grace: Then the pure white garments drifted away, and the World gave in their place

Beautiful silks and shining satins, and roses, and gems, and pearls, and over her forehead her bright hair fell, crisped in a thousand curls.

"Your house is too plain," said the proud old World; "I'll build you one like mine, carpets of Brussels, and curtains of lace, and furniture ever so fine."

So he built her a costly and beautiful house, splendid it was to behold; Her sons and her beautiful daughters dwelt, gleaming in purple and gold;

And fairs and shows in the halls were held, and the World and his children were there; And laughter and music and feasts were heard in the place that was meant for prayer.

She had cushioned pews for the rich and great to sit in their pomp and pride; While the poor folk, clad in their shabby suits, sat meekly down inside.

The Angel of Mercy flew over the Church, and whispered, "I know thy sin:" Then the Church looked back with a sigh, and longed to gather her children in;

But some were off at the midnight ball, and some were off at the play, and some were drinking in gay saloons, so she quietly went her way.

Then the sly World gallantly said to her: "Your children mean no harm, merely indulging in innocent sports," So she leaned on his proffered arm.

And smiled and chatted and gathered flowers, as she walked along with the World; while millions and millions of sorrowing souls to eternal death were hurled.

"Your preachers are all too old and plain," Said the World to the Church with a sneer. "They frighten my children with dreadful tales, which I like not for them to hear.

They talk of brimstone and fire and pain and the night of endless death; They talk of a place which may only be mentioned with bated breath,

I will send you some of the better stamp, brilliant and gay and fast, who will tell them that people may live as they list and go to heaven at last.

The Father is merciful, great, and good, tender and true and kind; Do you think He would take one child to heaven, and leave the other behind?"

So he filled her house with gay divines, gifted and great and learned, and the plain old men that preached the cross were out of her pulpits turned.

"You give too much to the poor," said the world, "Far more than you ought to do; If the poor need shelter and food and clothes, why need they trouble you?"

Go take your money and buy new robes, and horses and carriages fine, and pearls and jewels and dainty food, and the rarest and costliest wine!

My children, they dote on all such things; and if you their love would win, you must do as they do and walk in the ways that they are walking in."

Then the Church held tightly the strings of her purse and gracefully lowered her head, and simpered, "I've given too much away; I'll do, sir, as you have said."

So the poor were turned from her door in scorn, and she heard not the orphan's cry; And she drew her beautiful robes aside as the widows went weeping by;

And the sons of the World and the sons of the Church walked closely hand and heart, and only the Master who knoweth all could tell the two apart.

Then the Church sat down at her ease, and said, "I am rich, and in goods increased; I have need of nothing, and naught to do but to laugh and dance and feast."

And the sly World heard her and laughed in his sleeve, and mockingly said aside: "The Church is fallen, the beautiful Church, and her shame is her boast and pride."

The Angel drew near to the mercy seat, and whispered in sighs her name, and the angels their anthems of rapture hushed, and covered their heads with shame;

And a voice came down through the hush of heaven from Him who sat on the throne: "I know thy works, and how thou has said, 'I am rich,' and hast not known

That thou art naked, and poor, and blind, and wretched before My face. So from My presence I cast thee out, and blot thy name from its place."