

**The Complete Poetical Works . Naden, Constance, 1858–1889.**

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**UNDISCERNED PERFECTION .**

BEYOND the realm of dull and slumberous Night  
I long have wandered with unwearied feet;  
The land where Poetry and Science meet  
Streaks the far distance with a magic light:  
Fair visions glide before my dazzled sight,  
And shine, and change, and pass with motion fleet,  
But never clear, and steadfast, and complete  
In one transcendent brilliancy unite.

I know, the seeming discord is but mine;  
The glory is too great for mortal eyes,  
All powerless to discover the divine  
And perfect harmony of earth and skies:  
I know that each confused and tortuous line,  
To fuller sight, in true perspective lies.

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## THE ❏ LADY DOCTOR ❏, Etc.

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## THE ❏ LADY DOCTOR ❏.

SAW ye that spinster gaunt and grey,  
 Whose aspect stern might well dismay  
     A bombardier stout-hearted?  
 The golden hair, the blooming face,  
 And all a maiden's tender grace  
     Long, long from her have parted.

A Doctor she—her sole delight  
 To order draughts as black as night,  
     Powders, and pills, and lotions;  
 Her very glance might cast a spell  
 Transmuting Sherry and Moselle  
     To chill and acrid potions.

Yet if some rash presumptuous man  
 Her early life should dare to scan,  
     Strange things he might discover;  
 For in the bloom of sweet seventeen  
 She wandered through the meadows green  
     To meet a boyish lover.

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She did not give him Jesuit's bark,  
 To brighten up his vital spark,  
     Nor ipecacuanha,  
 Nor chlorodyne, nor camomile,  
 But blushing looks, and many a smile,  
     And kisses sweet as manna.

But ah! the maiden's heart grew cold,  
 Perhaps she thought the youth too bold,  
     Perhaps his views had shocked her;  
 In anger, scorn, caprice, or pride,  
 She left her old companion's side  
     To be a ❏ Lady Doctor ❏.

She threw away the faded flowers,  
 Gathered amid the woodland bowers,  
     Her lover's parting token:  
 If suffering bodies we relieve,  
 What need for wounded souls to grieve?  
     Why mourn, though hearts be broken?

She cared not, though with frequent moan  
 He wandered through the woods alone  
     Dreaming of past affection:

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She valued at the lowest price  
 Men neither patients for advice  
     Nor subjects for dissection.

She studied hard for her degree;  
 At length the coveted M.D.  
     Was to her name appended;  
 Joy to that Doctor, young and fair,  
 With rosy cheeks and golden hair,  
     Learning with beauty blended.

Diseases man can scarce endure  
 A lady's glance may quickly cure,  
     E'en though the pains be chronic;  
 Where'er that maiden bright was seen  
 Her eye surpassed the best quinine,  
     Her smile became a tonic.

But soon, too soon, the hand of care  
 Sprinkled with snow her golden hair,  
     Her face grew worn and jaded;  
 Forgotten was each maiden wile,  
 She scarce remembered how to smile,  
     Her roses all were faded.

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And now, she looks so grim and stern,  
 We wonder any heart could burn  
     For one so uninviting;  
 No gentle sympathy she shows,  
 She seems a man in woman's clothes,  
     All female graces slighting.

Yet blame her not, for she has known  
 The woe of living all alone,  
     In friendless, dreary sadness;  
 She longs for what she once disdained,  
 And sighs to think she might have gained  
     A home of love and gladness.

#### Moral.

Fair maid, if thine unfettered heart  
 Yearn for some busy, toilsome part,  
     Let that engross thee only;  
 But oh! if bound by love's light chain,  
 Leave not thy fond and faithful swain  
     Disconsolate and lonely.

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#### THE OLD LOVE-LETTERS.

TO-DAY I've discovered a treasure  
     Tied up with a ribbon of blue;  
 That record of pain and of pleasure,  
     A packet of old billets-doux.

The note-paper, quite out of fashion,  
     The date of ten summers ago,  
 Recall the unreasoning passion  
     Of juvenile rapture and woe.

No face was so lovely as Minnie's,  
     I praised it in prose and in verse;  
 Her curls were like piles of new guineas—  
     Alas, she had none in her purse!

I loved her for beauty and kindness,  
     I grieved when I fancied her cold,  
 But Cupid, quite cured of his blindness,  
     Now takes a good aim at the *gold*.

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To fair Lady Flora, the heiress,  
     I've offered my love and my life;  
 Repenting of ancient vagaries,  
     I'll settle to wealth and a wife.

The heat of my boyhood is banished  
     Alike from my heart and my head;  
 The comet for ever has vanished,  
     But fireworks will answer instead.

I've kept all my ardent effusions,  
     Appeal, protestation, and vow:  
 I'm cured of my youthful delusions,  
     And can't write such love-letters now.

The thing was excessively silly,  
     But then we were only eighteen,  
 And she was all rose-bud and lily,

And I was uncommonly green.

I'm happy to say she was fickle,  
 She blighted my love with a frown;  
 It withered, ere Time with his sickle  
 Could cut the first blossoming down.

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We parted—how well I remember  
 That gloomy yet fortunate day!  
 It seemed like the ghost of December,  
 Aroused by the frolics of May.

I shook myself loose from her fetters—  
 (I did not express it so *then*);  
 'Twas well she returned me the letters,  
 For now I can use them again.

I am not afraid of detection,  
 I cast all my scruples away;  
 The embers of former affection  
 Shall kindle the fire of to-day.

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### LOVE VERSUS LEARNING.

ALAS, for the blight of my fancies!  
 Alas, for the fall of my pride!  
 I planned, in my girlish romances,  
 To be a philosopher's bride.

I pictured him learned and witty,  
 The sage and the lover combined,  
 Not scorning to say I was pretty,  
 Nor only adoring my *mind*.

No elderly, spectacled Mentor,  
 But one who would worship and woo;  
 Perhaps I might take an inventor,  
 Or even a poet would do.

And tender and gay and well-favoured,  
 My fate overtook me at last:  
 I saw, and I heard, and I wavered,  
 I smiled, and my freedom was past.

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He promised to love me for ever,  
 He pleaded, and what could I say?  
 I thought he must surely be clever,  
 For he is an Oxford M.A.

But now, I begin to discover  
 My visions are fatally marred;  
 Perfection itself as a lover,  
 He's neither a sage nor a bard.

He's mastered the usual knowledge,  
 And says it's a terrible bore;  
 He formed his opinions at college,  
 Then why should he think any more?

My logic he sets at defiance,  
 Declares that my Latin's no use,  
 And when I begin to talk Science  
 He calls me a dear little goose.

He says that my lips are too rosy  
 To speak in a language that's dead,  
 And all that is dismal and prosy  
 Should fly from so sunny a head.

He scoffs at each grave occupation,  
 Turns everything off with a pun;  
 And says that his sole calculation  
 Is how to make two into one.

He says Mathematics may vary,  
 Geometry cease to be true,  
 But scorning the slightest vagary  
 He still will continue to woo.

He says that the sun may stop action,  
 But he will not swerve from his course;  
 For love is his law of attraction,  
 A smile his centripetal force.

His levity's truly terrific,  
 And often I think we must part,  
 But compliments so scientific  
 Recapture my fluttering heart.

Yet sometimes 'tis very confusing,  
 This conflict of love and of lore—  
 But hark! I must cease from my musing,  
 For that is his knock at the door!

#### MOONLIGHT AND GAS.

THE poet in theory worships the moon,  
 But how can he linger, to gaze on her light?  
 With proof-sheets and copy the table is strewn,  
 A poem lies there, to be finished to-night.  
 He silently watches the queen of the sky,  
 But orbs more prosaic must dawn for him soon—  
 The gas must be lighted; he turns with a sigh,  
 Lets down his venetians and shuts out the moon.

"This is but a symbol," he sadly exclaims,  
 "Heaven's glory must yield to the lustre of earth;  
 More golden, less distant, less pure are the flames  
 That shine for the world over sorrow and mirth.  
 When Wisdom sublime sheds her beams o'er the night,  
 I turn with a sigh from the coveted boon,  
 And choosing instead a more practical light  
 Let down my venetians and shut out the moon."

He sits to his desk and he mutters "Alas,  
 My muse will not oaken, and yet I must write!"  
 But great is Diana: venetians and gas  
 Have not been sufficient to banish her quite.  
 She peeps through the blinds and is bright as before,  
 He smiles and he blesses the hint opportune,  
 And feels he can still, when his labour is o'er,  
 Draw up his venetians and welcome the moon.

#### THE TWO ARTISTS.

"EDITH is fair," the painter said,  
 "Her cheek so richly glows,  
 My palette ne'er could match the red  
 Of that pure damask rose.

"Perchance, the evening rain-drops light,  
 Soft sprinkling from above,  
 Have caught the sunset's colour bright,  
 And borne it to my love.

"In distant regions I must seek

For tints before unknown,  
Ere I can paint the brilliant cheek  
That blooms for me alone."

All this his little sister heard,  
Who frolicked by his side;  
To check such theories absurd,  
That gay young sprite replied:

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"Oh, I can tell you where to get  
That pretty crimson bloom,  
For in a bottle it is set  
In Cousin Edith's room.

"I'm sure that I could find the place,  
If you want some to keep;  
I watched her put it on her face—  
She didn't see me peep!

"So nicely she laid on the pink,  
As well as *you* could do,  
And really, I almost think  
*She* is an artist, too."

The maddened painter tore his hair,  
And vowed he ne'er would wed,  
And never since, to maiden fair,  
A tender word has said.

Bright ruby cheeks, and skin of pearl,  
He knows a shower may spoil,  
And when he wants a blooming girl  
Paints one himself in oil.

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#### MAIDEN MEDITATION.

"I'LL don my kerchief blue," she said,  
"And wear my Sunday gown,  
For every morn, with lightsome tread  
A youth goes by to town.

"And ever as he passes by,  
Methinks he walks more slow,  
And glances up, with wistful eye,  
To where I sit and sew.

"And sometimes, with a tender sound  
He whistles soft and low;  
How can that gentle youth have found  
That I love music so?

"His flashing eyes reveal his soul,  
They are so very bright;  
And ever in his button-hole  
He sticks a lily white.

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"He never dons a flaunting rose,  
But always wears the same;  
Perhaps it is because he knows  
That Lily is *my* name!

"I'll wear a wreath of lilies white  
Methinks, when I'm a bride—  
Oh, here he comes, with footstep light—  
But—who walks at his side?

"It's some one in a scarlet shawl;  
Perhaps *he* calls her fair,  
But / don't think she's nice at all:  
I hate that yellow hair!

"How *can* he walk with such a fright?  
 Oh dear, what *shall* I do?  
 He's given her that blossom white!  
 Is *her* name Lily too?

"But now I look at him, he seems  
 Less handsome than before;  
 His eyes have lost their radiant gleams,  
 His voice is sweet no more.

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"His hair, methinks, is getting red,  
 His nose less straight appears:  
 I could not such a creature wed,  
 Though he should sue for years!

"And other youths for me may sigh,  
 And I may love again,  
 But never, never more will I  
 Watch at the window-pane!"

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#### LAMENT OF THE CORK-CELL. \*

FAREWELL oh mocking Wind! No more I mix  
 Thine airy substance with my world, the Tree:  
 Farewell, oh Carbon, that I cannot fix,  
 And Oxygen, that I no more set free!

They tell me I have helped the trunk to grow,  
 The roots to suck the earth, the boughs to fork,  
 The fruits to ripen—well, it may be so,  
 But I am dying, and shall soon be cork.

Dead, sapless cork! yet I remember still  
 My moist and merry life in windy March;  
 How green I was! how full of chlorophyll!  
 But soon it shrivelled, leaving only starch.

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\* Towards the end of summer, the cells immediately beneath the epidermis of a young shoot usually become converted into cork. Their green colour is changed to brown, and the walls are rendered almost impervious to water, so that vital functions are no longer possible.

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Blest epoch! when transparent and elastic,  
 My membrane scarce restrained its endoplast,  
 When, homogeneous, semi-fluid, plastic,  
 My vital molecules rotated fast.

Dry as I am, I once was young and tender,  
 Alive with chemic yearnings; then, alas!  
 What thoughtless joy was mine, in spring tide splendour,  
 To decompose carbonic acid gas!

Oh, had I sunk to inorganic slumber,  
 And left the atoms to their gaseous glee!  
 The greatest pleasure of the greatest number  
 My life may serve—but what is that to me?

Backward I look, as o'er a fearful chasm,  
 To days when I rejoiced to live and grow;  
 Now less and less becomes my protoplasm,  
 My nucleus divided long ago.

My wall grows thicker, dryer—oh to issue  
 From this dark prison, where compressed I dwell,  
 To live, no more a part of any tissue,  
 But a primordial protoplasmic cell!

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A cell amœboid, drifting from its mother,

Naked and houseless in the cruel storm,  
 Having no aid of sister or of brother,  
 Nor any cellulose to keep it warm;

Yet having freedom! Nay, the dream I banish,  
 The time of cell-division long is past;  
 Slowly and surely, all my contents vanish,  
 My walls are waterproof—I'm cork at last!

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### SIX YEARS OLD.

THEY'VE left me alone in the garden,  
 So I'll talk to that dear little wren—  
 Mr. Beetle! I *do* beg your pardon,  
 I was very near killing you, then.

I'll tell you a tale, Mrs. Robin,  
 Please do not be frightened at all—  
 A tale about Neddy and Dobbin—  
 She's gone! she's flown over the wall!

That wall must be very old—maybe  
 They're the children of Israel's bricks;  
 It was built before I was a baby,  
 And now—only think—I am six!

Six years old! What a beautiful swallow,  
 Catching flies! How I wish he could speak!  
 He's gone down to that house in the hollow;  
 I went there to dinner last week.

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I could stay in that garden for ever,  
 And make friends with the beeches and limes:  
 I saw Dr. Jones—he's so clever;  
 He writes to the papers sometimes!

He looked at me hard through his glasses,  
 And said, "Now make plenty of noise,  
 Have a regular romp with my lasses,  
 And be petted and teased by the boys."

He said that my curls wanted rumpling,  
 My cheeks should be red and not pink,  
 He called me a sweet little dumpling—  
 He's very insulting, I think.

'Twas Nurse that had made me so tidy,  
 And how can I help being small?  
 He gave me some roses on Friday;  
 Perhaps he is nice, after all.

I stayed with the children till seven;  
 They're kind, but so dreadfully rough!  
 There were ten of them—I made eleven—  
 We played Tick, French and English, and Buff.

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The girls are as bad as their brothers,  
 They teased me, and played me such tricks!  
 But Maude isn't rude like the others,  
 She says I look older than six.

She showed me her dog and her kittens,  
 And the birds, and the fish in the pool:  
 She crochets her scarves and her mittens,  
 And goes to Miss Trimmington's school.

She mustn't make blunders or stammer,  
 Or stoop when she sits on the bench;  
 She knows History, Science, and Grammar,  
 Geography, Tables, and French.

She takes pepper and mustard at dinner,  
 She may ask for plum-pudding again:  
 I wish I were taller and thinner,  
 I wish—how I *wish*—I were ten!

She has brothers and sisters—a dozen—  
 And Rover, and Pussy, and Poll;  
 But I haven't even a cousin,  
 I've only Mamma, and my doll.

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Papa's out all day in the City,  
 And I'm often in bed when he comes:  
 He's so tired and so grave—what a pity!  
 When *will* he have finished his sums?

I wish there were more of us, only  
 It's nice to play just what I please;  
 And when I am mopish and lonely  
 I always can talk to the trees.

Mamma says, "Sweet flowers will not tarry,  
 But trees are companions for life."  
 I wish that great lime-tree could marry,  
 With me for his dear little wife!

Sometimes, when I shoot at the sparrows  
 (I don't want to hit them, they know),  
 I peel his small twigs for my arrows,  
 And bend a strong branch for my bow.

If he died, oh, how much I should miss him!  
 (It's only his *dry* sticks I peel)  
 I put my arms round him and kiss him,  
 And sometimes I think he can feel.

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Those beautiful green caterpillars  
 Live here, that Nurse cannot endure;  
 And the birds—cruel butterfly-killers!  
 But they don't know it's wrong, I am sure.

I make tales about flying and creeping  
 About branches, and berries, and flowers;  
 And at night, when I ought to be sleeping,  
 I wake and lie thinking for hours.

I keep quiet, that Nurse may not scold me,  
 And think, while the stars twinkle bright,  
 Of the tales that Aunt Mary has told me,  
 And wonder—who comes here at night?

I fancy the fairies make merry,  
 With thorns for their knives and their forks;  
 They have currants for bottles of sherry,  
 And the little brown heads are the corks.

A leaf makes the tent they sit under,  
 Their ball-room's a white lily-cup:  
 Shall I know all about them, I wonder,  
 For certain, when I am grown up?

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Far over the seas and the mountains  
 There's a wonderful country of light;  
 My new home—full of castles and fountains;  
 My Dolly goes there every night.

I've seen it in dreams—there are plenty  
 Of birds and beasts, talking in verse;  
 I shall take Mamma there when I'm twenty,  
 And Papa, and Aunt Mary, and Nurse.

Papa will look glad, when I show him  
Such new and such beautiful things;  
He'll be pleased when I write my grand poem,  
And paint a bright angel with wings.

I'll swim, with a mermaid and merman,  
Through the seas and the ocean so broad;  
I'll learn French, and Italian, and German,  
And soon be as clever as Maude.

I'll often have tea at Aunt Mary's,  
With marmalade—orange and quince:  
I'll visit the queen of the fairies,  
And then I will marry a prince.

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 He formed his opinions at college,  
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 But compliments so scientific

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But hark! I must cease from my musing,

For that is his knock at the door!

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**☒ POET AND BOTANIST ☒.**

FAIR are the bells of this bright-flowering weed;  
Nectar and pollen treasures, where grope  
Innocent thieves; the ☒ **Poet** lets them ope  
**And** bloom, **and** wither, leaving fruit **and** seed  
To ripen; but the **Botanist** will speed  
To win the secret of the blossom's hope,  
And with his cruel knife and microscope  
Reveal the embryo life, too early freed.

Yet the mild Poet can be ruthless too,  
Crushing the tender leaves to work a spell  
Of love or fame; the record of the bud  
He will not seek, but only bids it tell  
*His* thoughts, and render up its deepest hue  
To tinge his verse as with his own heart's blood.

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## EVOLUTIONAL EROTICS

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## SCIENTIFIC WOOING.

I WAS a youth of studious mind,  
 Fair Science was my mistress kind,  
     And held me with attraction chemic;  
 No germs of Love attacked my heart,  
 Secured as by Pasteurian art  
     Against that fatal epidemic.

For when my daily task was o'er  
 I dreamed of



While stealing through my slumbers placid  
 Came Iodine, with violet fumes,  
 And Sulphur, with its yellow blooms,  
     And whiffs of Hydrochloric Acid.

My daily visions, thoughts, and schemes  
 With wildest hope illumed my dreams,  
     The daring dreams of trustful twenty:  
 I might accomplish my desire,  
 And set the river Thames on fire  
     If but Potassium were in plenty!

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Alas! that yearnings so sublime  
 Should all be blasted in their prime  
     By hazel eyes and lips vermilion!  
 Ye gods! restore the halcyon days  
 While yet I walked in Wisdom's ways,  
     And knew not Mary Maud Trevelyian!

Yet nay! the sacrilegious prayer  
 Was not mine own, oh fairest fair!  
     Thee, dear one, will I ever cherish;  
 Thy worshipped image shall remain  
 In the grey thought-cells of my brain  
     Until their form and function perish.

Away with books, away with cram  
 For Intermediate Exam!  
     Away with every college duty!  
 Though once Agnostic to the core,  
 A virgin Saint I now adore,  
     And swear belief in Love and Beauty.

Yet when I meet her tranquil gaze,  
 I dare not plead, I dare not praise,  
     Like other men with other lasses;  
 She's never kind, she's never coy,  
 She treats me simply as a boy,  
     And asks me how I like my classes!

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I covet not her golden dower—  
 Yet surely Love's attractive power  
     Directly as the mass must vary—  
 But ah! inversely as the square  
 Of distance! shall I ever dare  
     To cross the gulf, and gain my Mary?

So chill she seems—and yet she might  
 Welcome with radiant heat and light

My courtship, if I once began it;  
 For is not e'en the palest star  
 That gleams so coldly from afar  
 A sun to some revolving planet?

My Mary! be a solar sphere!  
 Envy no comet's mad career,  
 No arid, airless lunar crescent!  
 Oh for a spectroscope to show  
 That in thy gentle eyes doth glow  
 Love's vapour, pure and incandescent!

Bright fancy! can I fail to please  
 If with similitudes like these  
 I lure the maid to sweet communion?  
 My suit, with Optics well begun,  
 By Magnetism shall be won,  
 And closed at last in Chemic union!

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At this I'll aim, for this I'll toil,  
 And this I'll reach—I will, by Boyle,  
 By Avogadro, and by Davy!  
 When every science lends a trope  
 To feed my love, to fire my hope,  
 Her maiden pride must cry is "*Peccavi!*"  
 I'll sing a deep Darwinian lay  
 Of little birds with plumage gay,  
 Who solved by courtship Life's enigma;  
 I'll teach her how the wild-flowers love,  
 And why the trembling stamens move,  
 And how the anthers kiss the stigma.

Or Mathematically true  
 With rigorous Logic will I woo,  
 And not a word I'll say at random;  
 Till urged by Syllogistic stress,  
 She falter forth a tearful "Yes,"  
 A sweet "*Quod erat demonstrandum!*"

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#### THE NEW ORTHODOXY.

SO, dear Fred, you're not content  
 Though I quote the books you lent,  
 And I've kept that spray you sent  
 Of the milk-white heather;  
 For you fear I'm too "advanced"  
 To remember all that chanced  
 In the old days, when we danced,  
 Walked, and rode together.

Trust me, Fred, beneath the curls  
 Of the most "advanced" of girls,  
 Many a foolish fancy whirls,  
 Bidding Fact defiance,  
 And the simplest village maid  
 Needs not to be much afraid  
 Of her sister, sage and staid,  
 Bachelor of Science.

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Ah! while yet our hope was new  
 Guardians thought 'twould never do  
 That Sir Frederick's heir should woo  
 Little Amy Merton:  
 So the budding joy they snatched  
 From our hearts, so meetly matched—  
 You to Oxford they despatched,  
 Me they sent to Girton.

Were the vows all writ in dust!

No—you're one-and-twenty—just—  
 And you write—"We will, we must  
     Now, at once, be married!"  
 Nay, you plan the wedding trip!  
 Softly, sir! there's many a slip  
 Ere the goblet to the lip  
     Finally is carried.

Oh, the wicked tales I hear!  
 Not that you at Ruskin jeer,  
 Nor that at Carlyle you sneer,  
     With his growls dyspeptic:  
 But that, having read in vain  
 Huxley, Tyndall, Clifford, Bain,  
 All the scientific train—  
     You're a hardened sceptic!

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Things with fin, and claw, and hoof  
 Join to give us perfect proof  
 That our being's warp and woof  
     We from near and far win;  
 Yet your flippant doubts you vaunt,  
 And—to please a maiden aunt—  
 You've been heard to say you can't  
     Pin your faith to Darwin!

Then you jest, because Laplace  
 Said this Earth was nought but gas  
 Till the vast rotating mass  
     Denser grew and denser:  
 Something worse they whisper too,  
 But I'm sure it *can't* be true—  
 For they tell me, Fred, that you  
     Scoff at Herbert Spencer!

Write—or telegraph—or call!  
 Come yourself and tell me all:  
 No fond hope shall me enthrall,  
     No regret shall sway me:  
 Yet—until the worst is said,  
 Till I know your faith is dead,  
 I remain, dear doubting Fred,  
 Your believing  
 AMY.

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#### NATURAL SELECTION.

I HAD found out a gift for my fair,  
     I had found where the cave-men were laid;  
 Skull, femur, and pelvis were there,  
     And spears, that of silex they made.

But he ne'er could be true, she averred,  
     Who would dig up an ancestor's grave—  
 And I loved her the more when I heard  
     Such filial regard for the Cave.

My shelves, they are furnished with stones  
     All sorted and labelled with care,  
 And a splendid collection of bones,  
     Each one of them ancient and rare;

One would think she might like to retire  
     To my study—she calls it a "hole!"  
 Not a fossil I heard her admire,  
     But I begged it, or borrowed, or stole.

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But there comes an idealess lad,  
     With a strut, and a stare, and a smirk;

And I watch, scientific though sad,  
The Law of Selection at work.

Of Science he hasn't a trace,  
He seeks not the How and the Why,  
But he sings with an amateur's grace,  
And he dances much better than I.

And we know the more dandified males  
By dance and by song win their wives—  
'Tis a law that with *Aves* prevails,  
And even in *Homo* survives.

Shall I rage as they whirl in the valse?  
Shall I sneer as they carol and coo?  
Ah no! for since Chloe is false,  
I'm certain that Darwin is true!

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### SOLOMON REDIVIVUS, 1886.

WHAT am I? Ah, you know it,  
I am the modern Sage,  
Seer, savant, merchant, poet—  
I am, in brief, the Age.

Look not upon my glory  
Of gold and sandal-wood,  
But sit and hear a story  
From Darwin and from Buddh.

Count not my Indian treasures,  
All wrought in curious shapes,  
My labours and my pleasures,  
My peacocks and my apes;

For when you ask me riddles,  
And when I answer each,  
Until my fifes and fiddles  
Burst in and drown our speech,

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Oh then your soul astonished  
Must surely faint and fail,  
Unless, by me admonished,  
You hear our wondrous tale.

We were a soft Amœba  
In ages past and gone,  
Ere you were Queen Of Sheba,  
And I King Solomon.

Unorganed, undivided,  
We lived in happy sloth,  
And all that you did I did,  
One dinner nourished both:

Till you incurred the odium  
Of fission and divorce—  
A severed pseudopodium  
You strayed your lonely course.

When next we met together  
Our cycles to fulfil,  
Each was a bag of leather,  
With stomach and with gill.

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But our Ascidian morals  
Recalled that old mischance,  
And we avoided quarrels  
By separate maintenance.

Long ages passed—our wishes  
Were fetterless and free,  
For we were jolly fishes,  
A-swimming in the sea.

We roamed by groves of coral,  
We watched the youngsters play—  
The memory and the moral  
Had vanished quite away.

Next, each became a reptile,  
With fangs to sting and slay;  
No wiser ever crept, I'll  
Assert, deny who may.

But now, disdainful trammels  
Of scale and limbless coil,  
Through every grade of mammals  
We passed with upward toil.

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Till, anthropoid and wary  
Appeared the parent ape,  
And soon we grew less hairy,  
And soon began to drape.

So, from that soft Amœba,  
In ages past and gone,  
You've grown the Queen of Sheba,  
And I King Solomon.

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# Constance Naden (1858-1889) – Poet and Philosopher, and New Woman.

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by

Clare Stainthorp

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In 1888 Constance Naden was made the first female Associate of the Mason Science College (which became the University of Birmingham in 1900), a title that acknowledged the distinguished position she had taken as a student during her six years studying there. A year later, in an obituary printed in the Mason College Magazine, the editor claimed that ‘It is not too much to say that hers was the most powerful intellect, her gifts the most remarkable, and the most highly cultivated of any who have received their education in science within these walls.’

As well as studying and mastering a wide range of sciences and languages, Naden published two volumes of poetry (both of which were well received in the national press), and was an active proponent of a scientifically-grounded philosophy called Hylo-Idealism. These achievements are all the more remarkable in that all this intellectual activity took place during the decade before she died at the age of 31 in 1889. Furthermore, in the last year and a half of her life Naden travelled for several months with a friend through the Middle East and India, moved away from Birmingham where she had lived all of her life in order to buy a house in London, and became actively involved in several political and philanthropic causes.

You could say that Naden is a near-perfect example of that icon of the fin-de-siècle, the New Woman; she was intelligent, educated, emancipated, and independent. An inheritance from her grandparents meant that she was free to avoid the usual paths open to young middle-class women that needed to support themselves in the late nineteenth century: getting married or training to become a teacher. Instead Naden was able to pursue an education in science, art and philosophy,

and through this she developed a full and nuanced understanding of the universe in its physical, intellectual and social aspects.

After her death Naden's life became a somewhat contested narrative as biographies proliferated. The principle of these is the multiple authored *Constance Naden: A Memoir* (1890), but in addition there are prefaces to the posthumously published volumes of her essays and poetry, and obituaries in the national and local press. As a result, while the basic facts of Naden's life are well documented, conflicting portraits emerge, depending on whether the memoirist knew her primarily as a child, a student, a philosopher, or a poet.

The primary point of contention was Naden's rejection of religion in favour of adopting a rational atheist philosophy. Only after meeting the retired army surgeon Robert Lewins did Naden's unbelief take a clear and specific form, as they worked together to refine the concept of Hylo-Idealism. This was a materialist philosophy that insisted upon the subjective nature of all perception and rejects any dualist opposition of matter to spirit. In his memorial essay, originally printed in *The Contemporary Review*, family friend R.W. Dale asserted that Lewins 'acquired a remarkable ascendancy over her mind' and 'She felt and welcomed his power over her' but George McCrie refutes this, arguing (and concurring with other obituary essays) that though Lewins introduced Naden to his specific philosophical ideas, she 'had worked herself free from the creed of Christendom' before meeting him (1891). Clearly this is not simply a disagreement about influences, it also highlights contemporary debates regarding the degree of rational autonomy that a woman could be presumed to have.

Perhaps we cannot blame her friends for having conflicting views of her actions and character though, since Naden was clearly aware of her many-sidedness, and was careful to distinguish between the poetry published by Constance Naden, and her essays on Hylo-Idealism signed with pseudonyms such as C. Arden, C.A., or C.N.. Clearly these pen-names elide her gender, something that was particularly useful as she participated in debates in the letters pages of the *Journal of Science, Knowledge* and several other periodicals, since on the rare occasion that her status as a woman was apparent she invariably found her opinions to be belittled and dismissed in a way that was not evident at other times. However, as explored by Marion Thain in her 2003 essay "'Scientific Wooing": Constance Naden's Marriage of Science and Poetry', they also functioned to maintain, semi-successfully, distinction between the secularism of her philosophy, which had working-class and republican origins, and her status as a poet and successful student who grew up in bourgeois Birmingham society.

Nevertheless, Naden was the lone woman in a coterie of middle-aged men with whom she published many pamphlets, books, articles, reviews, and letters extolling the new 'creed' of Hylo-Idealism. As noted by one of her fellow Hylo-Idealists, she was perhaps at risk of becoming a symbolic figurehead of the group. However her prowess as a philosopher meant that she often outshone her older, male counterparts and became the philosophy's most clear and successful proponent. For example, the editor of theosophical magazine *Lucifer* acknowledged 'a letter signed C.N.' that 'places Hylo-Idealism in a new and different light, and its straightforward style and language are in strong contrast to the turgid effusions of such writers as G. M. McCrie' that had been published in previous issues (1888).

While the obituary essays can disagree, they do combine to construct a persona for Naden that her friends believed was her rightful legacy, rather than one that rings entirely true. In particular, their repeated emphasis of her femininity is interesting, and seems to stem from the societal expectations and prejudices surrounding gender norms in this period. Clearly Naden was a fiercely independent and intelligent woman: her prowess at commanding the floor with keen and insightful comments in debates and the classroom is well documented and the academic prizes won at Mason College demonstrate her talent for science, philosophy and languages. The issue from her friends' point of view is neatly summarised by the attitude of Herbert Spencer, who wrote a letter to Lewins after her death that had resulted from an unsuccessful operation to treat infected ovarian cysts. Although primarily complementary of her talents, his reservations regarding female intelligence are quite shocking to the modern reader:

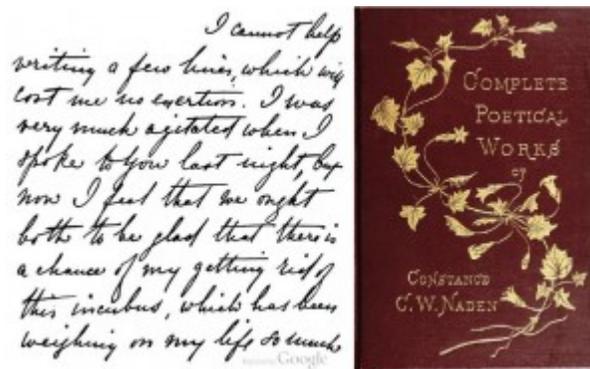
“Already I had formed a high estimate of her intellect and character, and now perusal of some parts of the volume you have sent me has greatly raised this estimate. Very generally, receptivity and originality are not associated; but in her mind they appear to have been equally great. I can think of no woman, save “George Eliot,” in whom there has been this union of high philosophical capacity with extensive acquisition. Unquestionably her subtle intelligence would have done much in furtherance of rational thought; and her death has entailed a serious loss.

While I say this, however, I cannot let pass the occasion for remarking that in her case, as in other cases, the mental powers so highly developed in a woman are in some measure abnormal, and involve a physiological cost which the feminine organization will not bear without injury more or less profound.”

Naden's friends were, unsurprisingly, appalled at the suggestion that it was abnormal for a woman to be highly intelligent, and that through her education Naden was somehow culpable for her

early death. The letter was printed in the 1890 *Memoir*, followed by a counter-argument by Hughes, which is extremely limited in its success as he concurs that a woman displaying a high level of intelligence is abnormal (meaning that it lies outside a ‘natural range’), although he argues that this does not mean it is dangerous or unhealthy since ‘either sex under special stimulations is capable of manifesting powers ordinarily shown only by the other’.

Other friends took a different approach to re-establishing Naden’s character. They highlight not only her intellectual strength but also the robustness of her physical constitution, while emphasising that her intelligence did not nullify her femininity. Thus, Madeline Daniell provides the following sketch of her physical features: ‘tall, slender, pale, with dark hair; a delicate, yet powerful face [...] She had especially small white hands.’ Further on it is stated that she had ‘very dainty hand-writing’, which allows us to attempt to verify these conjectures about her femininity; however I would suggest that, when you look at the sample of Naden’s writing below, ‘dainty’ is not the first adjective that comes to mind!



Facsimile of the last letter written by Naden to Lewins (dated 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1888), reprinted at the beginning of *Further Reliques of Constance Naden: Being Essays and Tracts for Our Times*, edited by George McCrie (1891). <https://archive.org/details/furtherreliques00mccrgoog>

The cover of *The Complete Poetical Works of Constance Naden*, edited by Robert Lewins (1894). <https://archive.org/details/cu31924013529205>

In addition, the obituaries often focus on her more traditionally feminine activities, such as her poetry and flower paintings. This type of art was often considered socially acceptable for women, being viewed as a hobby rather than a serious creative pursuit, and both were clearly important to

Naden since a version of one such painting became the motif embossed on the covers of her volumes of poetry (see above). Nevertheless, she ceased painting in the last few years of her life and in 1888 she announced that she had stopped writing poetry in order to concentrate on her Hylo-Idealistic work. It seems that by emphasising her 'feminine' artistic output the more subversive 'masculine' facets of Naden's character and activities could be elided. This is supported by the biographers who knew her academically stating that 'poetry was mere amusement for her, for she had [...] deeper and more exalted work for her intellectual powers', while family friends maintained that her true vocation was poetic, and 'if she had lived a few years longer; she would have risen buoyantly again and sung like a lark' (*Memoir* 1890).

I would contend that Naden's scientific education, philosophical writings and poetic work are intrinsically connected, the concept of ideal unity being a recurring theme. She predicted a future in which 'we shall no longer be able to distinguish between matter and spirit, and shall be forced to find in Hylo-Idealism the reconciliation of poetry, philosophy and science' (*What Is Religion?* 1883), and fundamental binaries such as idealism and materialism, the objective and the subjective will be reconciled. Poem titles such as 'Poet and Botanist', 'Speech and Silence', and 'Science and Philosophy' attest to this preoccupation. It is also reflected in her educational agenda, Professor William Tilden stating that 'No inducement seemed sufficient to prevail upon her to become a mere specialist [...] she came to gather herself the elements of a synthetic philosophy'. By studying a range of physical and social sciences Naden was able to draw upon cutting-edge developments in how experts understood the functioning of the universe (whether it be Heinrich Hertz's work on light waves or Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism).

Nour Alarabi, in her 2009 PhD thesis, discusses how Hylo-Idealism is an essentially humanist philosophy, which asserted that 'both women and men were suffering due to the limits set against their potential by scientific misconceptions and religious dogmas'. While Alarabi suggests that this negates the idea that Naden was writing from an essentially feminist perspective, I would argue that this philosophical stance is fundamentally ingrained with a feminist ideal. While it is never explicitly stated in her essays, the concept of reconciling binaries strongly linked to the appeals of the suffrage movement that socially constructed gender binaries should be challenged on the basis that women have the same abilities, and therefore have a right to the same opportunities, as men.

From the activities undertaken in the last year of her life, it is evident that Naden was engaging with the women's rights movement. She became a public advocate by giving lectures at Deptford and the Central Finsbury Radical Club on the subject 'Women's Suffrage', although the specific content of these is unknown. After her death the *Women's Penny Paper* published articles of

remembrance, reiterating the sentiment articulated at a Committee Meeting of the Women's Suffrage Society that 'we can ill spare her from our rank. She exhibited a union of powers which marked her out as a woman with a great future' (1890). While it is futile to wonder "what if?", it is difficult not to think that the suffrage movement lost a unique voice upon Naden's untimely death.

Today, thanks to the turn to gynocriticism during the 1980s and 1990s, Naden (while still relatively obscure) is becoming an established figure in Victorian women's poetry. Her most well-known poems are the four 'Evolutional Erotics', which pit contemporary human relationships against Darwin's theory of sexual selection. Here she employs a knowing, comic tone to dissect core assumptions surrounding romantic relationships, focussing upon the rapidly expanding class of newly educated men and women that resulted from increasing access to universities for both sexes during this period. (The second half of the nineteenth century saw the opening of the women's colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, and new civic universities and colleges in London and the industrial cities often had policies of gender equality for their admissions and examinations.) One of these, 'The New Orthodoxy', will here provide an introduction to Naden's playful but pointed poetic voice:

-

SO, dear Fred, you're not content

Though I quote the books you lent,

And I've kept that spray you sent

Of the milk-white heather;

For you fear I'm too "advanced"

To remember all that chanced

In the old days, when we danced,

Walked, and rode together.

-

Trust me, Fred, beneath the curls

Of the most “advanced” of girls,

Many a foolish fancy whirls,

Bidding Fact defiance,

And the simplest village maid

Needs not to be much afraid

Of her sister, sage and staid,

Bachelor of Science.

–

Ah! while yet our hope was new

Guardians thought ’twould never do

That Sir Frederick’s heir should woo

Little Amy Merton:

So the budding joy they snatched

From our hearts, so meetly matched—

You to Oxford they despatched,

Me they sent to Girton.

–

Were the vows all writ in dust!

No—you're one-and-twenty—just—

And you write—"We will, we must

Now, at once, be married!"

Nay, you plan the wedding trip!

Softly, sir! there's many a slip

Ere the goblet to the lip

Finally is carried.

—

Oh, the wicked tales I hear!

Not that you at Ruskin jeer,

Nor that at Carlyle you sneer,

With his growls dyspeptic:

But that, having read in vain

Huxley, Tyndall, Clifford, Bain,

All the scientific train—

You're a hardened sceptic!

—

Things with fin, and claw, and hoof

Join to give us perfect proof

That our being's warp and woof

We from near and far win;

Yet your flippant doubts you vaunt,

And—to please a maiden aunt—

You've been heard to say you can't

Pin your faith to Darwin!

—

Then you jest, because Laplace

Said this Earth was nought but gas

Till the vast rotating mass

Denser grew and denser:

Something worse they whisper too,

But I'm sure it can't be true—

For they tell me, Fred, that you

Scoff at Herbert Spencer!

—

Write—or telegraph—or call!

Come yourself and tell me all:

No fond hope shall me enthrall,

No regret shall sway me:

Yet—until the worst is said,

Till I know your faith is dead,

I remain, dear doubting Fred,

Your believing

AMY.

People have debated the extent to which this poem rejects or confounds traditional gender roles and stereotypes, but what I think is most evident here is the engaging and engaged poetic voice that articulates some key issues facing women who were accessing higher education. They were manoeuvring around the expectations of a society that did not yet comfortably accommodate them. Several of Naden's poems take a similar perspective and tone, while others use the dramatic monologue to articulate the plight of both men and women who can no longer integrate into society. In addition her long narrative poems, such as 'The Lady Doctor', 'A Modern Apostle' and 'The Story of Clarice', offer more extended considerations of such issues. Happily, Indiana University's Victorian Women Writers Project has made Naden's Complete Poetical Works freely accessible here: <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/view?docId=VAB7115> . The fascinating work of this extraordinary multi-faced woman deserves to be more widely read.



**Clare Stainthorp is in the first year of her PhD at the University of Birmingham, funded by the AHRC. She is researching how Constance Naden's poetry and philosophical prose were influenced by the range of subjects she was studying during the 1880s at Mason Science**