

ON A HOMELY WOMAN, DEAD.

By CONSTANCE FENIMORE WOOLSON.

AND hast thou served the purpose of thy life,
 Poor helpless clay, that many times did ask,
 "Why was I born?" Not thine the daily task
 Of direst Poverty that, with its strife
 For bread, doth crush all faces to one mould
 Of haggard care; nor thine the grace of age,
 Which covereth all our lack with reverence
 For silver hairs. No: in thy pilgrimage
 Thou knewest always that all eyes did hold
 Thee as a blot upon their loving sense
 Of beauty: there was discord in the air
 When thou passed by.

Thou couldst not open thy mind,
 Shed out a radiance, or compel the ear
 To listen while the eye forgot; no kind
 Relenting Fortune turned and gave thee wit
 Or eloquence as compensation. Spare
 And lean thy stores of pleasure through the years—
 Some thanks, some small remembrance; thou didst sit
 And gather thankfully a breath, a crumb
 Of happiness thrown to thee, as the dumb
 And patient dog doth wait. And if there came
 One who professed to love thee, in thy shame
 At thine own bitter soul deficiency,
 Thou hatedst him for his dull mockery
 Of love, when it was household need alone
 That wanted thee. And if a kinder tone
 Did sue, thou knewest, through thy hidden tears,
 It was but pity, and thy pale cheek turned
 Paler as thou saidst—no! Thy pulsing years,
 That radiant should have been, have dimly burned
 In their cramped darkened prison: couldst thou dream
 Of love, of motherhood? Thou wouldst not take
 The false for want of true, the gilt for gold,
 The tinsel for the gem; so thou didst hold
 Thy dreary life alone. And, for the sake
 Of womanhood, thou wouldst not condescend
 To things beneath thee; but didst ever see
 To walk with fixed endurance on thy brow
 Through life, nor e'en look upward toward the end,
 Lest thou shouldst lose the path that thou didst trace
 In early years for all thy life.

O Face!

Poor homely Face, still, rigid, dead, and now
 Soon to pass out forever from our sight
 Beneath the sod, no more to vex the light,
 Wert thou a mask? Then, oh! how fair must be
 The face she weareth now, for wearing thee!