

THE CHURCH WALKING WITH THE WORLD

The Church and the World walked far apart
On the changing shores of time,
The World was singing a giddy song,
And the Church a hymn sublime.
"Come, give me your hand," said 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 that leads to 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,
But mine is broad and plain;
My way is paved with flowers and dews,
And yours with tears and pain;
The sky to me is always blue,
No want, no toil I know;
The sky above you is always dark,
Your lot is a lot of woe;
There's room enough for you and me
To travel side by side."

Half shyly the Church approached the World
And gave him her hand of snow;
And 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 her pure, white garments drifted away,
And the World gave, in their place,
Beautiful satins and shining silks,
Roses and gems and costly pearls;
While 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;
Most splendid it was to behold;
Her sons and her beautiful daughters dwelt there.
Gleaming in purple and gold;
Rich fairs and shows in the halls were held,
And the World and his children were there.
Laughter and music and feasts were heard

In the place that was meant for prayer.
There were cushioned pews for the rich and the gay,
To sit in their pomp and pride;
But the poor, who were clad in shabby array,
Sat meekly down outside.

"You give too much to the poor," said the World,
"Far more than you ought to do;
If they are in need of shelter and food,
Why need it trouble you?
Go take your money and buy rich robes,
Buy horses and carriages fine,
Buy pearls and jewels and dainty food;
Buy the rarest and costliest wines;
My children they dote on all these things,
And if you their love would win,
You must do as they do, and walk in the ways
That they are walking in."

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Then the Church held fast the strings of her purse,
And modestly lowered her head,
And simpered, "Without doubt you are right, sir;
Henceforth I will do as you've said."
So the poor were turned from her door in scorn,
And she heard not the orphan's cry;
But she drew her beautiful robes aside,
As the widows went weeping by.
Then the sons of the World and 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 my goods increase;
I have need of nothing, or aught to do,
But to laugh, and dance, and feast."
The sly World heard, and he laughed in his sleeve,
And mocking said, aside –
"The Church is fallen, the beautiful Church,
And her shame is her boast and her pride."

The angel drew near to the mercy-seat,
And whispered in sighs her name,
Then the loud anthems of rapture were hushed,
And heads were covered with shame.
And a voice was heard at last by the Church
From Him who sat on the Throne,
"I know thy works, and how thou hast said,
'I am rich;' and hast not known
That thou art naked, poor and blind,
And wretched before My face;
Therefore I from My presence, cast thee out.
And blot thy name from its place."

– SELECTED.