

Dreaming in the Trenches

by William Gordon McCabe
(1841-1920)

I picture her there in the quaint old room,
 Where the fading fire-light starts and falls,
Alone in the twilight's tender gloom
 With the shadows that dance on the dim-lit walls.

Alone, while those faces look silently down
 From their antique frames in a grim repose—
Slight scholarly Ralph in his Oxford gown,
 And stanch Sir Alan, who died for Montrose.

There are gallants gay in crimson and gold,
 There are smiling beauties with powdered hair,
But she sits there, fairer a thousand-fold,
 Leaning dreamily back in her low arm-chair.

And the roseate shadows of fading light
 Softly clear, steal over the sweet young face,
Where a woman's tenderness blends to-night
 With the guileless pride of a knightly race.

Her hands lie clasped in a listless way
 On the old Romance—which she holds on her knee—
Of Tristram, the bravest of knights in the fray,
 And Iseult, who waits by the sounding sea.

And her proud, dark eyes wear a softened look,
 As she watches the dying embers fall:
Perhaps she dreams of the knight in the book,
 Perhaps of the pictures that smile on the wall.

What fancies, I wonder, are thronging her braini,
 For her cheeks flush warm with a crimson glow!
Perhaps—ah! me, how foolish and vain!
 But I'd give my life to believe it so.

Well, whether I ever march home again
 To offer my love and a stainless name,
Or whether I die at the head of my men,
 I'll be true to the end all the same.