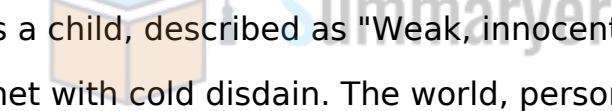


VERSE: GOD'S GIFTS

In the poem "God's Gifts" from "Legends and Lyrics--First Series," a stark contrast is drawn between two scenarios involving the gift of a child to Earth by God, each unfolding with echoing symmetry but diverging outcomes based on Earth's reception of this gift.



Initially presented is a child, described as "Weak, innocent, and undefiled," whose arrival on Earth is met with cold disdain. The world, personified as a harsh and neglectful guardian, curses the child's birth, assigning it a "tarnished name" and a legacy marred by "tainted fame," setting the innocent into an existence cradled in "want and shame." Earth blinds the child to all "influence of Good or Right," ensuring that any divine light or moral guidance is staunchly obscured, leaving the child to stray unattended in "dens of guilt." This environment, steeped in sin and bereft of virtue, readily schools the child in the dark arts of vice, with "Black sin for lesson--oaths for prayer." As the child inevitably falters, Earth, relentless in her condemnation, casts him deeper into societal abysses, branding him anew with marks of disgrace that he cannot comprehend, thus completing his transformation into the "felon outcast of the land."

The narrative shifts dramatically in the second portrayal of God's gift. Here, the same child, equally "Weak, innocent, and undefiled," is received with jubilation. Earth, now a nurturing presence, celebrates the child's potential for greatness, eagerly assuming the role of a protective and guiding force. Every effort is made to ensure the child's path is adorned with love and opportunity, his environment ripe with moral and ethical beauty designed to inspire and cultivate. The dawn of the child's life is tenderly showered with affection and safeguarded against harm, his journey illuminated with the "rainbow hues of light" that symbolize hope, goodness, and the virtuous path laid before him.

This dichotomy underscores a profound commentary on the impact of societal influence, nurture, and the conducive environment in shaping the destinies and moral compasses of the innocent. "God's Gifts" serves as a poignant reminder of the dual paths that await the unfledged spirit: one forged through neglect and scorn, leading to desolation and despair, and the other sculpted with care and love, heralding a bright ascent into promise and honor.

