

Afterward

By Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

There *is* no vacant chair. The loving meet—
A group unbroken—smitten, who knows how?
One sitteth silent only, in his usual seat;
We gave him once that freedom. Why not now?

Perhaps he is too weary, and needs rest;
He needed it too often, nor could we
Bestow. God gave it, knowing how to do so best.
Which of us would disturb him? Let him be.

There is no vacant chair. If he will take
The mood to listen mutely, be it done.
By his least mood we crossed, for which the heart must ache,
Plead not nor question! Let him have this one.

Death is a mood of life. It is no whim
By which life's Giver mocks a broken heart.
Death is life's reticence. Still audible to Him,
The hushed voice, happy, speaketh on, apart.

There is no vacant chair. To love is still
To have. Nearer to memory than to eye,
And dearer yet to anguish than to comfort, will
We hold him by our love, that shall not die.

For while it doth not, thus he cannot. Try!
Who can put out the motion or the smile?
The old ways of being noble all with him laid by?
Because we love, he is. Then trust awhile.