

# The Two Glasses

There sat two glasses filled to the brim  
On a rich man's table, rim to rim,  
One was ruddy and red as blood,  
And one was clear as the crystal flood.

Said the Glass of Wine to his paler brother:  
"Let us tell tales of the past to each other;  
I can tell of banquet and revel and mirth,  
Where I was king, for I ruled in might;  
For the proudest and grandest souls of earth  
Fell under my touch, as though struck with blight.  
From the heads of kings I have torn the crown;  
From the heights of fame I have hurled men down.  
I have blasted many an honored name;  
I have taken virtue and given shame;  
I have tempted youth with a sip, a taste,  
That has made his future a barren waste.  
Far greater than any king am I,  
Or than any army beneath the sky.  
I have made the arm of the driver fail,  
And sent the train from the iron rail.  
I have made good ships go down at sea.  
And the shrieks of the lost were sweet to me.  
Fame, strength, wealth, genius before me fall;  
And my might and power are over all!  
Ho, ho, pale brother," said the Wine,  
"Can you boast of deeds as great as mine?"

Said the Water Glass: "I cannot boast  
Of a king dethroned, or a murdered host;  
But I can tell of hearts that were sad,  
By my crystal drops made bright and glad;  
Of thirsts I have quenched and brows I have laved,  
Of hands I have cooled, and souls I have saved.  
I have leaped through the valley, dashed down the mountain,  
Slipped from the sunshine, and dripped from the fountain,  
I have burst my cloud-fetters, and dropped from the sky,  
And everywhere gladdened the prospect and eye;  
I have eased the hot forehead of fever and pain,  
I have made the parched meadows grow fertile with grain.

Poem with questions

I can tell of the powerful wheel of the mill,  
That ground out the flour, and turned at my will.  
I can tell of manhood debased by you  
That I have uplifted and crowned anew;  
I cheer, I help, I strengthen and aid,  
I gladden the heart of man and maid;  
I set the wine-chained captive free,  
And all are better for knowing me."

These are the tales they told each other,  
The Glass of Wine, and its paler brother,  
As they sat together, filled to the brim,  
On a rich man's table, rim to rim.

■ *Ella Wheeler Wilcox.*

QUESTIONS

1. What is the theme of this poem?

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2. What is the purpose of the poem?

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3. What is the tone of this poem?

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4. **Visualization question.** Create your own illustration of “The Two Glasses”.



5. Rewrite the poem in your own words.
6. What are the two types of glasses described in the poem?
7. What does the Glass of Wine claim to have the power to do?
8. How does the Glass of Wine describe its impact on people?
9. What does the Glass of Wine say about its influence over kings and famous individuals?
10. What consequences does the Glass of Wine mention regarding its effect on youth?
11. How does the Glass of Wine compare itself to kings and armies?
12. What events does the Glass of Wine refer to in terms of destruction and loss?

### **Discussion Questions.**

1. What contrasts do the two glasses represent, and how do they symbolize different outlooks on life? Additionally, how does the poem's imagery enhance the emotional weight of these contrasting perspectives?
2. What message does the poet convey about optimism and pessimism, and how does this relate to the broader human experience?
3. How does the structure of the poem contribute to its overall meaning, and what role do rhythm and rhyme play in reinforcing the poem's themes?