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**A Collection of Rhymes
and Poems for the Young
of all Ages**

WALTER DE LA MARE

THE FLEETING
AND OTHER POEMS

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TO
F. M. R.

THE poems included in this volume range over a good many years, but only a very few—which have been revised—were written before the publication of *The Veil* in 1921. Of the rest, many are recent. One poem has been reprinted from *Flora*.

My grateful thanks are due to the Editors of the periodicals in which many of the poems first appeared, and to those friends who have given me invaluable counsel and criticism.

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IN THE GARDEN

A MILD parochial talk was ours;
The air of afternoon was sweet
With burthen of the sun-parched flowers;
His fiery beams in fury beat
From out the 0 of space, and made,
Wherever leaves his glare let through,
Circlets of brilliance in the shade
Of his unfathomable blue.

Old Dr. Salmon sat pensive and grey,
And Archie's tongue was never still,
While dear Miss Arbuthnot fanned away
The stress of walking up the hill.
And little Bertha—how bony a cheek!
How ghastr an eye ! Poor mite. . . . That pause—
When not even tactful tongues could speak! . . .
The drowsy Cat pushed out her claws.

A bland, unvexing talk was ours—
Sharing that gentle gilded cage—
Manners and morals its two brief hours
Proffered alike to youth and age.

Why break so pleasing a truce ?—forefend !
Why on such sweetness and light intrude ?
Why bid the child, ' Cough, " Ah ! " '—and end
Our c6mplaisance; her solitude ?

PEEPINGTOM

‣
WAS there—by the curtains—
When some men brought a box :
And one at the house of
Miss Emily knocks:

A low *rat-tat-tat*.
The door opened—and then,
Slowly mounting the steps, stooped
In the strange men.

Then the door darkly shut,
And I saw their legs pass,
Like an insect's, Miss Emily's
Window-glass—

Though why all her blinds
Have been hanging so low
These dumb foggy days,
I don't know.

Yes, only last week
I watched her for hours,
Potting out for the winter her
 Balcony flowers.

And this very Sunday
She mused there a space,
Gazing into the street, with
 The vacantest face:

Then turned her long nose,
And looked up at the skies—
One you would not have thought
 Weather-wise!

Yet . . . well, out stepped the men—
One ferrety-fair—
With gentlemen's hats, and
 Whiskers and hair;

And paused in the porch.
Then smooth, solemn, grey,
They climbed to their places,
 And all drove away

In their square varnished carriage,
The horse full of pride,
With a tail like a charger's :
 They all sate outside.

Then the road became quiet:
Her house stiff and staid—
Like a Stage while you wait
 For the Harlequinade . . .

But what can Miss Emily
Want with a box
So long, narrow, shallow,
 And without any locks ?

EPISODES

'H ! Raining ! Look !' she whispered—

Gazing out

On wheat-fields parched with drought,

And trees that yet in prime

Even of summertime

Showed yellow in their green ;

But now, as with delight,

Showered down their withered leaves

Among the untimely sheaves

Of harvest, poor and lean :

' And I, alas ! '

She sighed,

' This day to be a bride ! '

Fair shone the sick man's moon

Upon his bed,

And her, cold silver shed.

Glazed eyes, in wasted face,

He marked her solemn pace,

As on, from height to height,
She to her zenith won,
And the wide fields below
Made lovely—as with snow—
Transfiguring the night.

' Thou courtesan ! '

Mocked he,

' Would'st thou, then, lie with *me* !'

Loud sounded out the Trump :

In vestry chill.

Its every stone athrill,
The parson leaned an ear,
With pouted lip, to hear.
But now a silence wells,
As of a sea at rest,
Stilling the honeyed air—
With fruit and flowers made fair—
As mute as his own bells.

He frowned. He sighed.

' To come

' Just now !—at Harvest Home !'

ON THE ESPLANADE

THE autumnal gales had wreaked their will;
Now lipped the wave its idle stones ;
And winter light lay grey and chill;
Snow-capped the town's one distant hill,
Snow-cloaked its churchyard bones.

Sole farers on the esplanade,
A mother with her daughter walked.
Across a sea of pallid jade
The air thin fretful music made
And whimpered while they talked :—

' It's not the *present* that I dread,
No vulgar talk of chances lost.
Your heart seems stranger to your head,
And time wears on,' the elder said ;
' My only fear, the cost.

' Sheer habit numbs the mind, my dear;
And lips by lover never kissed

Taste only at last the bitter cheer
Repining memory brings near
Of sweetness they have missed.

* You frown. Ah, yes ! But why forget
I too was once in youth astray ?
If ghosts at noonday could be met
And suns have heat that long have set—
Well, well, I have had my day.

' And now for yuu alone I live.
Think not I speak to pry, or vex ;
Mere cold advice not mine to give ;
Be truth and love between us, if
We share one heart, one sex!'

Awhile these two in silence paced,
Vacant the windows shoreward set.
Thin-screened with cloud the west they faced,
No glint of sun their shadows traced
On the flat flags ; and yet

A burning, proud, defiant flare
Gleamed in the younger's eyes, as she
'Neath louring brows, as cold as fair,

Gazed straightly through the wintry air
Over the restless sea.

' Yes, Mother, all you say is true/
She shrugged her slender shoulders. ' I—
Well, nothing I can say, or do
Has any meaning through and through ;
What use to question, why ?

' Infatuated bees may spend
Their silly lives of droning trance
In gathering nectar without end,
For other busy bees to blend,
And die in like mischance—

' The old, old tale. You say we share
One sex. It's that has gone askew.
The butterflies still dance on air
Without an instant's thought or care
And " sip the morning dew " ;

' As for the rest, they ape the Man,
And sacrifice their shapes and skin ;
In freedom's blaze their faces tan ;
Utopian revolutions plan ;
Bemoan the Might-have-been.

* Not I. I loathe them both. I know
My very instincts are at war—
Another kind of neuter. So,
Whatever now may come or go,
There's nothing I deplore.

' Pity I laugh at. Flatterer
Flatters not twice the self-same way !
And when at last I come to where
Mere growing old brings solace—there !
/ shall have had my day.

' A day as deadly black as night
For fatuous dream of a strange fate—
That long long since has taken flight—
A lover not of sense or sight:
For him I used to wait.

' I ask you, Mother, how could a mind
Farced up with all I have learned and read—
The lies that curious fools have spread—
A vestige of him hope to find ?
Enough of that! ' she said.

Turned then the twain about to see
An East as rayless, grey, and bland,

Stretching into infinity,
And vacant windows glassily
Edging the pebbled strand ;

While, poised in air, a bird of snow
Faltered on lifted wing—to glide
And glance at this strange to-and-fro,
That greying hair, that cheek's young glow—
And shrill, sad challenge cried.

THE FAT WOMAN

↳ ◀
MASSED in her creaseless black,
She sits—vast and serene ;
Light—on glossed hair, large knees,
Huge bust—a-sheen.

A smile lurks deep in her eyes,
Thick-lidded, motionless, pale,
Taunting a world grown old,
Faded, and stale.

Enormous those childless breasts :
God in His pity knows
Why, in her bodice stuck,
Keeps a mock rose.

THE FECKLESS DINNER-PARTY

WHO are we waiting for ?' ' Soup burnt ?'
.. Eight;
Only the tiniest party !—Us ! '
Darling! Divine!' ' Ten minutes late—
' And my digest——' ' I 'ra ravenous ! '
' " Toomes " ?—Oh, he's new/ ' Looks crazed, I
guess!'
' " Married "-Again!' ' Well; more or less!'
' Dinner is served !' (Dinner is served.'
' Is served ?' ' Is served.' ' Ah, yes/
' Dear Mr. Prout, will you take down
' The Lilith in leaf-green by the fire ? '
' Blanche Ogleton ? . . .' ' How coy a frown!'
' Hasn't she borrowed *Eve's* attire ? '
' Morose Old Adam!' ' Charmed—I vow.'
' Come then, and meet her now.'
' Now, Dr. Malms—would you please ?—
' Our daring poetess, Delia Seek ?'

' The lady with the bony knees ?'
 ' And—*entre nous*—less song than beak.'

' Sharing her past with Simple Si——'
 ' Bare facts! He'll blush!' ' Oh, fie!'

' And you, Sir Nathan—false but fair !—
 ' That fountain of wit, Aurora Pert.'

' More wit than It, poor dear! But there . . . !'
 ' Pitiless Pacha! *And* such a flirt!'

' " Flirt " ! *Me* ? ' ' Who else ? ' ' You here . . .
 Who can . . . ? '
 ' Incurrible man !'

' And now, Mr. Simon—little me!—
 ' Last and——' ' By no means least! ' ' Oh,
 come!—

' What naughty, naughty flattery !
 ' *Honey* !—I *hear* the creatures hum !'

' Sweets for the sweet, / always say !'
 ' " Always " ? . . . We 're last.' ' *This* way ? ' . . .

' No, sir; straight on, please.' ' I 'd have vowed!—
 ' I came the other . . . ' ' It's queer ; I'm
 sure . . . !'

' What frightful pictures! ' ' Fiends! ' ' The *crowd* I
 ' Such nudes! ' ' I can't endure , . . !'

' Yes, there they go.' ' Heavens! Are we right ?'
 ' Follow up closer!' ' " Prout" ?—sand-blind!'

' This endless . . .' ' Who's turned down the
 light ?'
 ' Keep calm! They 're close behind.'

' Oh ! Dr. Mallus; what dismal stairs !'
 ' I hate these old Victor . . .' ' Dry rot!'

' Darker and darker.' ' Fog !' ' The air's . . .'

 ' Scarce breathable!' ' Hell!' ' What?'

' The banister's gone!' ' It's deep ; keep close!'

 ' We 're going down and down !' ' What fun !'
 ' Damp ! Why, my shoes . . .' ' It's slimy . . .
 Not*moss!*'

 ' I 'm freezing cold!' ' Let's run/

' ... Behind us. I'm giddy....' ' The cata-
 combs ...'
 ' That shout!' ' Who's there ?' ' I'm alone!'

 ' Stand back!'

' She said, Lead...!' ' Oh!' ' Where's Toomes ?'
 ' *Toomes !* ' TOOMES !'
 ' Stifling!' ' My skull will crack!'

' Sir Nathan ! Ai!' ' I say ! Toomes ! Prout!'
'Where? Where?' "'Our silks and fine
array " . . .'
' She's mad/ 'I'm dying!' 'Oh! Let me *out!*'
' My God ! We Ve lost our way!' . . .

And now how sad-serene the abandoned house,
Whereon at dawn the spring-tide sunbeams beat;
And time's slow pace alone is ominous,
And naught but shadows of noonday therein meet;
Domestic microcosm, only a Trump could rouse:
And, pondering darkly, in the silent rooms,
He who misled them all—the butler, Toomes.

COMFORT

AS I mused by the hearthside,

Puss said to me :

' There burns the Fire, man,

' And here sit we.

' Four Walls around us

^c Against the cold air ;

' And the latchet drawn close

⁶ To the draughty Stair.

' A Roof o'er our heads

 ' Star-proof, moon immune,

' And a wind in the chimney

 ' To wail us a tune.

' What Felicity !' miaowed he,

 ' Where none may intrude ;

' Just Man and Beast—met

 ' In this Solitude !

' Dear God, what security,
 ' Comfort and bliss!
' And to think, too, what ages
 ' Have brought us to this !

' You in your sheep's-wool coat,
 ' Buttons of bone,
' And me in my fur-about
 ' On the warm hearthstone/

THE SLUM CHILD

NO flower grew where I was bred,
No leafy tree
Its canopy of greenness spread
Over my youthful head.

My woodland walk was gutter stone,
Nowhere for me
Was given a place where I alone
Could to my self be gone.

In leafless Summer's stench and noise
I 'd sit and play
With other as lean-faced girls and boys,
And sticks and stones for toys—

Homeless, till evening dark came down ;
And street lamp's ray
On weary skulking beggary thrown
Mared in the night-hung town.

Then up the noisome stairs I 'd creep
For food and rest,
Or, empty-bellied, lie, and weep
My wordless woes to sleep :

And wept in silence—shaken with fear—
But cautious lest
Those on the mattress huddled near
Should, cursing, wake and hear. . . .

O wondrous Life ! though plainly I see,
Thus looking back,
What evil, and filth, and poverty,
In childhood harboured me,

And marvel that merciless man could so
The innocent wrack;
Yet, in bare truth, I also know
A well-spring of peace did flow,

Secretly blossomed, along that street;
And—foul-mouthed waif—
Though I in no wise heeded it
In the refuse at my feet,

Yet, caged within those spectral bones,
Aloof and safe,
Some hidden one made mock of groans,
Found living bread in stones.

O mystery of mysteries !
Between my hands I take that face,
Bloodless and bleak, unchildlike wise—
Epitome of man's disgrace—
I search its restless eyes,
And, from those woe-flecked depths, at me
Looks back through all its misery
A self beyond surmise.

NEWS

' HEARKEN / 'Tis news I cry ! ' .

The Shades drift by ...

' Strange and ominous things :

' A four-foot Beast upon Wings,

' Thieves in a burning Mill,

' An empty Cross on a Hill,

' Ravin of swine in Beauty's places,

' And a Woman with two Faces !

' News !—News ! ' I call, . . .

' But a wind from the cold unknown

' Scatters the words as they fall—

' Into naught they are blown.'

What do these Walkers seek,

Pranked up in silk and in flax,

With a changeless rose on the cheek,

And Hell's hump on their backs ?

These of the mincing gait,
And an ape in each sidelong leer ;
These for the Way that is strait
To the pomp-hung bier ;
These of the wasted dream.
Of the loveless silver and gold,
And the worm of disgust in them
That shall never grow old ?

Not unto such I cry,
But to thee, O Solitary ! . . .
' The world founders in air,
' Plague-stricken Vanity Fair
' Dyed hath its booths with blood ;
' Quenched are its stars in mud ;
' Come now the Mourners to chaunt
' End and lament.'

There is a stream I know,
Sullen in flood its waters flow,
Heavy with secrets, slow,
Leaden and lightless, deep
With slumber and sleep.
Shall not even Innocence find
Peace of body and mind ?

Ay, but thou also art old,
And there 's news to be told.

News, strange to hearing and sight . . .

' It is Winter. And Night.

' An icy and pitiless moon

' Witched hath our sea-tides. And soon

' The Nymph in her grottoes will hear

' The loud trumpet of fear !

' She weepeth cold tears in the sea ! . . . !

You shall *buy* not such tidings of me :

' Stoop an ear, bow a desolate head :

' It is breathed, " Love is dead." '

I SIT ALONE

I SIT alone,
And clear thoughts move in me,
Pictures, now near, now far,
Of transient fantasy.
Happy I am, at peace
In my own company.

Yet life is a dread thing, too,
Dark with horror and fear.
Beauty's fingers grow cold,
Sad cries I hear,
Death with a stony gaze
Is ever near.

Lost in myself I hide
From the cold unknown :
Lost, like a world cast forth
Into space star-sown :
And the songs of the morning are stilled,
And delight in them flown.

So even the tender and dear
Like phantoms through memory stray--
Creations of sweet desire,
That faith can alone bid stay :
They cast off the cloak of the real
And vanish away.

Only love can redeem
This truth, that delight;
Bring morning to blossom again
Out of plague-ridden night;
Restore to the lost the found,
To the blinded, sight.

FORESTS

TURN, now, tired mind unto your rest,
Within your secret chamber lie,
Doors shut, and windows curtained, lest
Footfall or moonbeam, stealing by,
Wake you, or night-wind sigh.

Now, Self, we are at peace—we twain ;
The house is silent, except that—hark !—
Against its walls wells out again
That rapture in the empty dark ;
Where, softly beaming, spark by spark,

The glow-worms stud the leaves with light;
And unseen flowers, refreshed with dew—
Jasmine, convolvulus, glimmering white,
The air with their still life endue,
And sweeten night for me and you.

Be mute all speech ; and not of love
Talk we, nor call on hope, but be—
Calm as the constant stars above—
The friends of fragile memory,
Shared only now by you and me.

Thus hidden, thus silent, while the hours
From gloom to gloom their wings beat on,
Shall not a moment's peace be ours,
Till, faint with day^r, the East is wan,
And terrors of the dark are gone ?

Nay—in the forests of the mind
Lurk beasts as fierce as those that tread
Earth's rock-strown wilds, to night resigned,
There stars of heaven no radiance shed—
Bleak-eyed Remorse, Despair becowed in lead.

With dawn these ravening shapes will go—
Though One at watch will still remain :
Till knell the sunset hour, and lo !
The listening soul once more will know
Death and his pack are hot afield again.

THE BOTTLE

OF green and hexagonal glass,
With sharp, fluted sides—
Vaguely transparent these walls,
Wherein motionless hides
A simple so potent it can
To oblivion lull
The weary, the racked, the bereaved,
The miserable.

Flowers in silent desire
Their life-breath exhale—
Self-heal, hellebore, aconite,
Chamomile, dwale:
Sharing the same gentle heavens,
The sun's heat and light,
And, in the dust at their roots,
The same shallow night.

Each its own livelihood hath,
Shape, pattern, hue;
Age on to age unto these
Keeping steadfastly true;

And, musing amid them, there moves
 A stranger, named Man,
Who of their ichor distils
 What virtue he can ;
Plucks them ere seed-time to blazon
His house with their radiant dyes ;
Prisons their attar in wax ;
Candies their petals ; denies
Them freedom to breed in their wont ;
Buds, fecundates, grafts them at will ;
And with cunningest leechcraft compels
 Their good to his ill.

Intrigue fantastic as this
 Where shall we find ?
Mute in their beauty they serve him,
 Body and mind.
And one—but a weed in his wheat—
Is the poppy—frail, pallid, whose juice
With its saplike and opiate fume
Strange dreams will induce
Of wonder and horror. And none
 Can silence the soul,
Wearied of self and of life,
 Earth's darkness and dole,

More secretly, deeply. But finally ?—
Waste not thy breath ;
The words that are scrawled on this phial
Have for synonym, *death*—

Wicket out into the dark
That swings but one way ;
Infinite hush in an ocean of silence
Aeons away—
Thou forsaken !—even thou !—
The dread good-bye;
The abandoned, the thronged, the watched,
the unshared—
Awaiting me—I!

WHAT?

W HAT dost thou surely know ?
What will the truth remain,
When from the world of men thou go
To the unknown again ?

What science—of what hope ?
What heart-loved certitude won
From thought shall then for scope
Be thine—thy thinking done ?

'Tis said, that even the wise,
When plucking at the sheet,
Have smiled with swift-darkening eyes,
As if in vision fleet

Of some mere flower, or bird,
Seen in dream, or in childhood's play;
And then, without sign or word,
Have turned from the world away.

RECONCILIATION

LEAVE April now, and autumn having,
Leave hope to fade, and darkness braving,
 Take thine own soul
 Companion,
 And journey on.

The cresset fire of noon is waning,
Shadow the lonelier hills is staining ;
 Watch thou the West
 Whence pale shall shine
 Hesper divine!

Beauty, what is it but love's vision ?
Earth's fame, the soul's supreme derision ?
 O ardent dust,
 Turn to thy grave,
 And quiet have!

THE HOUSE

☛ ☛ ☛

MOTHER, it's such a lonely house/
The child cried ; and the wind sighed.

' A narrow but a lovely house,³

The mother replied.

' Child, it is such a narrow house/
The ghost cried ; and the wind sighed.

' A narrow and a lonely house/

The withering grass replied.

THE TACITURN

U
VjOUNTLESS these crosses and these ruinous
stones,

Which taunt the living with out sighs and groans !

Thou canst not in this quiet a moment stray

But dust cries, *Vanity!* and, *Welladay!*

Not mine such tedious tidings, Stranger. Yet,

Think not because I am silent, I forget.

ISAAC MEEK

AN EPITAPH

HoOK-NOSED was I, loose-lipped; greed fixed
its gaze

In my young eyes ere they knew brass from gold;
Doomed to the blazing market-place my days—

A sweated chafierer of the bought and sold.

Fawned on and spat at, flattered and decried—

One only thing men asked of me, my price.

I lived, detested; and deserted, died,

Scorned by the virtuous, and the jest of vice.

And now, behold, blest child of Christ, my worth ;

Stoop close : I have inherited the earth!

THE THOEN

✓ THOU who pausest here,
With naught but some thorned wilding near
To tell of beauty ; be not sad.
For he who in this grave is laid
Would give the all on earth he had
One moment but by thee to stand
And with warm hand touch hand.

ARIEL

1 HIS lad, when but a child of six,
Had learned how earth and heaven may mix—
At this so innocent an age
He, as light Ariel, frod the stage ;
So nimble-tongued, and silver-fleet,
Air, fire, did in one body meet.
Ay ; had he hied to where the bones
Of Shakespeare lie 'neath Stratford's stones,
And whispered : ° Master, hearken ! '—so :
One might have answered—Prospero !

BENEATH A MOTIONLESS YEW

BENEATH a motionless yew, and tower,
Hoary with age, whose clock's one bell
Of Sexton Time had hour by hour
As yet in vain rung out the knell,

A worn old woman, in her black,
Knelt in the green churchyard alone ;
And, self-forgotten, crook'd arm, bent back,
Scrubbed at her husband's burial stone.

Here lies J——H——: Aged 34 :

' He giveth his beloved sleep ' :

Fainter the letters than of yore—
Where lichens had begun to creep—

Showed 'neath the pale-blue vacant sky,
Under that dust-dry shadowiness ;
She stayed to read—with a long sigh,
Less of regret than weariness.

Evening's last gleam now tinged the yew ;
The gilded hand jerked on ; a bird
Made stony rattle ; and anew
She scanned the tombstone's every word.

For forty years she had kept her tryst,
And grief long since had ceased to upbraid
Him whose young love she had sorely missed,
And at whose side she would soon be laid.

Tired out, and old; past hope or thought,
She pined no more to meet some day
Her dead ; and yet, still faithfully sought
To wash the stains of Time away.

GOOD COMPANY

THE stranger from the noisy inn
Strode out into the quiet night,
Tired of the slow sea-faring men.

The wind blew fitfully in his face ;
He smelt the salt, and tasted it,
In that sea-haunted, sandy place.

Dim ran the road down to the sea
Bowered in with trees, and solitary ;
Ever the painted sign swang slow—
An Admiral staring moodily.

The stranger heard its silly groan ;
The beer-mugs rattling to and fro ;
The drawling gossip : and the glow
Streamed thro' the door on weed and stone.--

Better this star-sown solitude,
The empty night-road to the sea,
Than company so dull and rude.

He smelt the nettles sour and lush,
About him went the bat's shrill cry,
Pale loomed the fragrant hawthorn-bush.

And all along the sunken road—
Green with its weeds, though sandy dry—
Bugloss, hemlock and succory—
The night-breeze wavered from the sea.
And soon upon the beach he stood.

A myriad pebbles in the faint
Horned radiance of a sinking moon
Shone like the rosary of a saint—
A myriad pebbles which, through time,
The bitter tides had visited,
Flood and ebb, by a far moon led,
Noon and night and morning-prime.

He stood and eyed the leaping sea,
The long grey billows surging on,
Baying in sullen unison
Their dirge of agelong mystery.

And, still morose, he went his way,
Over the mounded shingle strode,
And reached a shimmering sand that lay
Where transient bubbles of the froth
Like eyes upon the moonshine glowed,
Faint-coloured as the evening moth.

But not on these the stranger stared,
Nor on the stars that spanned the deep,
But on a body, flung at ease,
As if upon the shore asleep,
Hushed by the rocking seas.

Of a sudden the air was wild with cries—
Shrill and high and violent,
Fled fast a soot-black cormorant,
'Twixt ocean and the skies.

It seemed the sea was like a heart
That stormily a secret keeps
Of what it dare to none impart.
And all its waves rose, heaped and high—
And communed with the moon-grey sky.

The stranger eyed the sailor there,
Mute, and stark, and sinister—
His stiffening sea-clothes grey with salt;
His matted hair, his eyes ajar,
And glazed after the three-fold fear.

And ever the billows cried again
Over the rounded pebble stones,
Baying that heedless sailor-man.

He frowned and glanced up into the air--
Where star with star all faintly shone,
Cancer and the Scorpion,
In ancient symbol circling there :

Gazed inland over the vacant moor ;
But ancient silence, and a wind
That whirls upon a sandy floor,
Were now its sole inhabitants.

Forthwith, he wheeled about—away
From the deep night's sad radiance;
The yell of gulls and cormorants
Bang shrilly in his mind.

Pursued by one who noiseless trod,
Whose sharp scythe whistled as he went,
O'er sand and shingle, tuft and sod,
Like hunted hare he coursing ran,
Nor stayed until he came again
Back to the old convivial inn—
The mugs, the smoke, the muffled din—
Packed with its slow-tongued sailor-men.

THE EAILWAY JUNCTION

FROM here through tunnelled gloom the track
Forks into two; and one of these
Wheels onward into darkening hills
And one toward distant seas.

How still it is; the signal light
At set of sun shines palely green ;
A thrush sings ; other sound there 's none,
Nor traveller to be seen—

Where late there was a throng. And now,
In peace awhile, I sit alone ;
Though soon, at the appointed hour,
I shall myself be gone.

But not their way : the bow-legged groom,
The parson in black, the widow and son,
The sailor with his cage, the gaunt
Gamekeeper with his gun,

That fair one, too, discreetly veiled—
All, who so mutely came, and went,
Will reach those far nocturnal hills,
Or shores, ere night is spent.

I nothing know why thus we met—
Their thoughts, their longings, hopes, their fate ;
And what shall I remember, except—
The evening growing late—

That here through tunnelled gloom the track
Forks into two ; of these
One into darkening hills leads on,
And one toward distant seas ?

REFLECTIONS

THREE Sisters—and the youngest
Was lovelier to see
Than wild flower palely blooming
Under Ygdrasil Tree;

Than this well at the woodside
Whose waters silver show,
Though in womb of the blind earth
Ink-like, ebon, they flow.

Creeps on the belled bindweed ;
The bee, in hoverings nigh,
Sucks his riches of nectar ;
Clouds float in the sky ;

And she, O pure vanity,
Newly-wakened, at that brink,
Crouches close, smiling dreamlike,
To gaze, not to drink.

She sees not earth's morning
Darkly framed in that cold deep :
Naught, naught but her beauty
Made yet fairer by sleep.

And though glassed in that still flood
She peer long, and long,
As faithful stays that image,
As echo is to song . . .

Anon—in high noontide
Comes her sister, wan with fear,
Lest the love in her bosom
Even the bright birds should hear

Wail divine grieved enchantment.
She kneels; and, musing, sighs;
Unendurable strangenesses
Darken the eyes

That meet her swift searchings.
From her breast there falls a flower.
Down, down—as she ponders—
The fair petals shower,

Hiding brow, mouth, cheek—all
That reflected there is seen.
And she gone, that Mirror
As of old rests serene. . . .

Comes moth-light, faint dusk-shine,
The green woods still and whist;
And their sister, the eldest
To keep her late tryst.

Long thought and lone broodings
Have wanned, have withered, lined
A face, without beauty,
Which no dream hath resigned

To love's impassioned grieving.
She stands. The luring air
Breathes cold on her cheekbone,
Stirs thief-like her hair;

And a still quiet challenge
Fills her dark, her flint-grey eyes,
As she lifts her bowed head
To survey the cold skies.

Wherein stars, hard and restless,
 Burn in station fore-ordained,
As if mocking for ever
 A courage disdained.

And she stoops wearied shoulders,
 Void of scorn, of fear, or ruth,
To confront in that well-spring
 The dark gaze of Truth.

SELF TO SELF

WOULD'ST thou then happy be
On earth, where woes are many ?
Where naught can make agree
Men paid for wage a penny ?
Wherein ambition hath
Set up proud gate to Death ;
And fame with trump and drum
Cannot undeaf the dumb
Who unto dust are come ?
Would'st thou then happy be ?—
Impossibility ?

Maybe, when reasons rule
Dunces kept in at school;
Or while mere Logic peers
Sand-blind at her bright shears
Snip-snapping this, and this,
Ay, on my soul, it is—
Till, looking up, thou see
Noonday's immensity,

And, turning back, see too
That in a bead of dew.

Heart-near or fancy-far,
All's thine to make or mar.
Thine its sole consciousness,
Whether thou ban or bless.
Loving delight forgot,
Life's very roots must rot.
Be it for better or worse,
Thou art thy universe.
If then at length thou must
Eender them both to dust,
Go with their best in trust.
If thou wake never—well:
But if perchance thou find
Light, that brief gloom behind,
Thou 't have wherewith to tell
If thou 'rt in heaven or hell!

THE SLEEPER

THE Lovely, sleeping, lay in bed,
Her limbs, from quiet foot to chin,
Still as the dust of one that ^s dead
Whose spirit waits the entering-in.

Yet her young cheek with life's faint dye
Was mantled o'er ; her gentle breast
Like sea at peace with starry sky,
Moved with a heart at rest.

Fair country of a thousand springs,
Calm hill and vale ! Those hidden eyes
And tongue that daylong talks and sings,
Wait only for the sun to rise.

Let but a bird call in that ear,
Let beam of day that window wan,
This hidden one will, wakening, hear,
And deathlike slumber-swoon be gone :

Her ardent eyes once more will shine,
She will uplift her hair-crowned head ;
At lip, miraculous, life's wine,
At hand, its wondrous bread.

THE HUNTER

‘~~THE~~

WHY wilt thou take my heart ? It fawnlike
flies,
'Frighted at clarion of thy hunting cries,
And shrinks benumbed beneath thy jealous eyes.

' Shun these green solitudes, these paths and vales
Where winds the grasses tell their faint-sung tales
Of distant Ocean's secret nightingales;

' Of frail foam-bubbles, spun of light and air,
From glass wherein sirens braid their sun-gilt hair,
Watching their round mouths chaunt a dying
air. . . .

' O arrows, pierce me not! O horns, be still!
Sweet God, divine compassion have: or kill!

THE VISIONARY

THERE is a pool whose waters clear
Reflect not what is standing near ;
The silver-banded birch, the grass
Find not therein a looking-glass ;
Nor doth Orion, pacing night,
Scatter thereon his wintry light.
Nor ever to its darnelled brink
Comes down the hare or deer to drink ;
Sombre and secret it doth keep
Stilled in unshaken, crystal sleep.

But once, a Wanderer, parched, forlorn,
Worn with night-wayfaring, came at morn,
By pathless thickets grey with dew ;
And stooping at its margent blue
To lave his wearied eyes, discerned
Somewhat that in the water burned—
A face like amber, pale and still,
With eyes of light, unchangeable,

Whose grave and steadfast scrutiny
Pierced through all earthly memory.
Voiceless and windless the green wood,
Above its shadowy quietude,
Sighed faintly through its unfading leaves ;
And still he stooped ; and still he yearned
To kiss the lips that therein burned ;
To close those eyes that from the deep
Gazed on him, wearied out for sleep.

He drank ; he slumbered ; and he went
Back into life's wild banishment,
Like one whose every thought doth seem
The wreckage of a wasting dream ;
All savour gone from life, delight
Charged with foreboding dark as night;
Love but the memory of what
Woke once, but reawakens not.

THE CAPTIVE

—
I TWINED a net; I drove a stake; laid a
glittering bait.

With still of dewfall stepped my prey; cried—and
cried too late.

I clutched him by his golden curls: I penned his
flutterings.

Secure within a golden cage he beats in vain his
wings.

But why is now their beauty gone
From woods where once it happy shone ?
Why is my bosom desolate,
When entering in at fall of eve,
I listen at the wicket gate,
And hear my captive grieve ?

THUS HEE TALE

SPAKE the fire-tinged bramble, bossed with
gleaming fruit and blossoming,
Gently serpentine in the air a blunted tongue:—
' Far too long these bones I hide have blackened
in my covert here,
Too long their noxious odour to my sweetness
now hath clung.
Would they were gross clay, and their evil spell
removed from me;
How much lovelier I, if my roots not thence had
sprung.'

Breathed the wind of sundown, ^c Ay, this haunt is
long years sour to me ;
But naught on earth that's human can my
fancy free beguile.
Wings are mine far fleeter than the birds' that clip
these branches;
Arabian rich the burden which for honeyed mile
on mile

Is wafted on my bosom, hill to ocean, wood to vale-
land.

Anathema on relics that my fragrances defile!

Stirred a thousand frondlets and the willow tree
replied to it:—

' Sty and mixen, foetid pool, and carrion-shed—
whose these ?

Yet earth makes sweet the foulest; naught—naught
stays long unclean to her;

Thou too, howe'er reluctant, art her servant,
gliding Breeze.

Restrain thy fretting pudency; in pity sigh for
one I knew—

The woman whose unburied bones in thorn-
brake take their ease/

' *Urkkh*: when dark hath thicked to night/
croaked vermin toad that crouched near-by,

' And the stars that mock in heaven unto mid-
night's cope have clomb,

When the shades of all the humans that in life
were brutal foes to me

Lift thready lamentation from the churchyard's
rancid loam—

Return doth she in mortal guise 'gainst whom I
bear no enmity,
Foredoomed by fate this treacherous field for
aye to haunt and roam.'

' Pictured once her image I,' sang sliding brook
its rushes from,
(That sallow face, and eyes that seemed to stare
as if in dream,
Narrow shoulders, long lean hands, and hair like
withered grass in hue,
Pale lips drawn thwart with grieving in stars'
silver mocking beam.
Once, too, I heard her story, but little I remember
now,
Though the blood that gave her power to suffer
then imbrued my stream.'

Stony rock groaned forth its voice, 'No mirror
featly shattered I,
Blind I am by nature, but, I boast, not deaf or
dumb,
Small truck I pay to Time's decay, nor mark what
wounds black winter makes.

Not mine to know what depths of snow have
thawed and left me numb—
Since an eve when flowers had cast their seed, and
evening cooled my brow again.
And I echoed to a voice that whispered, " Loved
one, I have come." '

Wafting through the woodland swept an owl from
out the silentness,
' *Too wittoo woo,*' she hooted. ' A human comes
this way,
Gliding as on feathered heel, so tenuous that the
thorns she skirts
To eyes bright-glassed for glooms like mine show
black beyond her grey.
A tryst she keeps. Beware, good friends, not
mine day's mortal company,
Hungry my brood for juicier fare,' she squawked,
and plumed away.

Lone, in a shoal of milk-white cloud, bathed now
the punctual fickle moon
That nook of brook and willow, long impelled,
with silvery glare :—

' Unstilled yet tranquil Phantom, see, thou canst
not hide thy form from me:

When last thy anguished body trod these
meadows fresh and fair,

I, the ringing sand-dunes of the vast Sahara hoared
with light:

What secret calls thee from the shades; why
hither dost thou fare ?' . . .

Small beauty graced the spectre pondering mute
beneath the willow-boughs

O'er relics long grown noisome to the bramble
and the breeze;

A hand upon her narrow breast, her head bent low
in shadowiness;

' I've come/ sighed voice like muted bell of
nightbird in the trees,

' To tell again for all to hear, the wild remorse that
suffers me,

No single thought of rest or hope whereon to
muse at ease.

' Self-slaughtered I, for one I loved, who could not
give me love again,

Uncounted now the Autumns since that twilight
hour malign
When, insensate for escape from a hunger naught
could satisfy,
I vowed to God no more would I in torment live
and pine.
Alas! He turned His face away, and woeful
penance laid on me—
That every night make tryst must I till life my
love resign/

Furtive fell the anxious glance she cast that dread-
ful hiding-place;
Strangely still and muted ceased the tones in
which she spake.
Shadow filled her vacant place. The moon with-
drew in cloud again.
Hushed the ripples grieving to the pebbles in
their wake.
' Thus her *tale* \ ' quoth sod to sod. ' Not ours,
good friends, to challenge it;
Though her blood still cries for vengeance on
her murderer from this brake!'

ADIEU

HAD these eyes never seen you,
This heart kept its paces,
This mind—flooded river—
Had glassed not your graces;
Though lone my cold pillow
In peace I had slumbered,
Whose hours now of waking
By moments are numbered.

You came ; ice-still, asp-like ;
You glanced 'neath your lashes ;
You smiled—and you sighed out
Life's flame into ashes.
No compassion you showed me,
Void breast, cheating laughter :
Now I swing to my tryst
From this night-clotted rafter.

Peep out with your eyes.
Pout your mouth. Tilt your nose.
'Gainst the stench and the flies
Cull a balm-sprig, a rose.
This tongue that is stilled—
Not a tremor ! Oh, else,
The whole roof of heaven
Would cry, False!

THE OUTSKIRTS

T HE night was cloyed with flowers
In the darkness deep and sweet,
When, at the window of the World,
I heard the dancing feet;
And viol and tambour
Made musical the air,
While yet a voice within me cried,
Beware !

My eyes upon the glow were set
From out that thorny grot:
I hungered for the lips and eyes
And hearts remembering not;
And still the thrill and thud beat on
With sorcery in the air ;
And, luring, leaping, called to me,
Beware !

O all you hapless souls, like birds
Within night's branching may,
Hearken the words of him who speaks,
And fly from hence—away.
These dancers with their wiles and gauds,
That music on the air—
'Tis the swart Fowler with his nets
To play you false, though fair ;
Hearken—an outcast I—I cry,
Beware !

ROSE

THREE centuries now are gone
Since Thomas Campion
Left men his airs, his verse, his heedful prose.
Few other memories
Have we of him, or his,
And, of his sister, none, but that her name was
Rose.

Woodruff, far moschatel
May the more fragrant smell
When into brittle dust their blossoming goes.
His, too, a garden sweet,
Where rarest beauties meet,
And, as a child, he shared them with this Rose.

Faded, past changing, now,
Cheek, mouth, and childish brow.
Where, too, her phantom wanders no man knows.
Yet, when in undertone
That eager lute pines on,
Pleading of things he loved, it sings of Rose.

LUCY

STRANGE—as I sat brooding here,
While memory plied her quiet thread,
Your once-loved face came back, my dear,
Amid the distant dead.

That pleasant cheek, hair smooth and brown,
Clear brows, and wistful eyes—yet gay :
You stand, in your alpaca gown,
And ghost my heart away.

I was a child then ; nine years old—
And you a woman. Well, stoop close,
To heed a passion never told
Under how faded a rose !

Do you remember ? Few my pence :
I hoarded them with a miser's care,
And bought you, in passionate innocence,
A birthday maidenhair.

I see its fronds. Again I sit,
Hunched up in bed, in the dark, alone,
Crazed with those eyes that, memory-lit,
Now ponder on my own.

You gave me not a thought, 'tis true—
Precocious, silly child ; and yet,
Perhaps of all you have loved—loved you,
I may the last forget.

And though no single word of this
You heed—a lifetime gone—at rest;
I would that all remembrances
As gently pierced my breast!

A YOUNG GIEL

T
I SEAECH in vain your childlike face to see
The thoughts that hide behind the words you say;
I hear them singing, but close-shut from me
Dream the enchanted woods through which they
 stray.

Cheek, lip, and brow—I glance from each to each,
And watch that light-winged Mercury, your hand;
And sometimes when brief silence falls on speech
I seem your hidden self to understand.

Mine a dark fate. Behind his iron bars
The captive broods, with ear and heart astrain
For jangle of key, for glimpse of moon or stars,
Grey shaft of daybreak, sighing of the rain.
Life built these walls. Past all my dull surmise
Must burn the inward innocence of your eyes.

TWILIGHT

W HEN to the inward darkness of my mind
I bid your face come, not one hue replies
Of that curved cheek, no, nor the faint-tinged rose
Of lips, nor smile between the mouth and eyes:
Only the eyes themselves, past telling, seem
To break in beauty in the twilight there,
And out of solitude your very ghost
Steals through the scarce-seen shadow of your
hair.

THE TRYST

F AINT now the colours in the West;
And, stilled with lapse of day,
All life within it laid to rest,
The wintry wood grows grey.

Frost enlines the withered flower,
Its hips and haws now blackening are,
The slender naked tree-tops cower
Beneath the evening-star.

Pace we then softly, you and I,
Nor stir one England-wintering bird—
Start not!—'twas but some wild thing's cry,
No wailing ghost you heard.

Yet ghosts there are, remote and chill,
Waiting the moon's phantasmal fire,
But not for us to heed, until
We too doff Earth's attire.

Oh, far from home we both shall be,
When we, with them, shall coldly brood
On lovers twain, like you and me,
Trespassing in this wood.

THE ENCOUNTER

'T WIXT dream and wake we wandered on,
Thinking of naught but you and me ;
And lo, when day was nearly gone,
A wondrous sight did see.

There, in a bed of rushes, lay
A child all naked, golden and fair—
Young Eros dreaming time away,
With roses in his hair.

Tender sleep had o'ertaken him,
Quenched his bright arrows, loosed his bow,
And in divine oblivion dim
Had stilled him through and through.

Never have I such beauty seen
As burned in his young dreaming face,
Cheek, hair, and lip laid drowsily
In slumber's faint embrace.

Oh, how he started, how his eyes
Caught back their sudden shiningness
To see you stooping, loving-wise,
Him, slumbering, to caress!

How flamed his brow, what childish joy
Leapt in his heart at sight of thee,
When, ' Mother, mother ! ' cried the boy :
And—frowning—turned on me !

KARMA

WHEN thou art little as I am, mother,
And I, oh, old as thou,
I 'II feed thee on syllabub, honeycomb,
And sweet milk from my cow.
I 'II make thee a swan's-down bed, mother ;
Watch over thee then, will I.
And when in a far-away dream you start,
I 'II sing thee, lullaby !
It's many, oh, many an age, mother,
We have been we. And now,
Soon thou 'It be happy, grown again young,
And I as old as thou.

THE GLANCE

DEAREST one, daughter! at glance of your
brow-shaded eye,
Fixed gravely in all its young scrutiny dark on my
own,
Lone seemed my soul as thi? earth was itself 'neath
the sky,
When at word of creation the trumps of the angels
were blown.

They rang to the verge of the universe, solemn and
deep,
Clanging untellable joy to the heavens above,
And, at core of that clangour, in silence profounder
than sleep,
Adam and Eve lay adream in their Eden of love.

But you, in your bird-eyed wonder, gazed steadily
on,
Knowing naught of the tempest so stirred. I
stooped down my head,

And, shutting my eyes to a prayer whereof words
there are none,
Could but clasp your cold hand in my own and was
dumb as the dead.

HOW BLIND!

TT
HOW blind 'twas to be harsh, I know—
And to be harsh to *thee* ;
To let one hour in anger go,
And unforgiven be !

And now—O idiot tongue to dart
That venom'd fang, nor heed
Not thine but mine the stricken heart
Shall never cease to bleed.

MAKING A FIRE

SCATTER a few cold cinders into the empty
grate;

On these lay paper puffed into airy balloon,
Then wood—parched dry by the suns of Summer
drowsy and sweet;

A flash, a flare, a flame; and a fire will be burning
soon—

Fernlike, fleet, and impetuous. But unless
you give heed,

It will faint, fade, fall, lose fervour, ash away
out.

So is it with anger in heart and in brain; the
insensate seed

Of dangerous fiery enkindling leaps into horror
and rout;

But remaining untended, it dies. And the
soul within

Is refreshed by the dews of sweet amity, pity's
cool rain.

Not so with the flames Hell has kindled for un-
assoiled sin,
As soon as God's mercy would quench them, Love,
weeping, lights them again.

THE ROUND

I WATCHED, upon a vase's rim,
An earwig—strayed from honeyed cell—
Circling a track once strange to him,
 But now known far too well.

With vexed antennae, searching space,
And giddy grope to left and right,
On—and still on—he pressed apace,
 Out of, and into, sight.

In circumambulation drear,
He neither wavered, paused nor stayed;
But now kind Providence drew near—
 A slip of wood I laid

Across his track. He scaled its edge :
And soon was safely restored to where
A sappy, dew-bright, flowering hedge
 Of dahlias greened the air.

Ay, and as apt may be my fate ! . .
Smiling, I turned to work again :
But shivered, where in shade I sate,
And idle did remain.

THE OMEN

FAR overhead—the glass set fair—
I heard a raven in the air;
'Twixt roof and stars it fanning went,
And croaked in sudden dreariment.

Over the pages of my book
I, listening, cast a sidelong look.
Curtained the window ; shut the door ;
I turned me to my book once more ;
But in that quiet strove in vain
To win its pleasure back again.

WHICH WAY ?

WANDER, spirit ?—*I!*
Who do not even know
Which way I 'd go :
Yet sigh:

Who cannot even, first,
What far-off living well
I pine for, tell:
Yet thirst!

Unfailing joys I share ;
No hour, however fleet,
But brings its sweet
And fair:

And yet—scoff not!—day gone,
Some silly ghost creeps back,
' What do you lack ? '
To groan.

MIST

~
SOMETIMES in moods of gloom—like mist
 Enswathing hill and wood—
A miracle of sunshine breaks
 Into my solitude.

In scattered splendour burns the dew ;
 Still as in dream, the trees
Their vaulted branches echo make
 To the birds' ecstasies.

What secret influence was this
 Made all dark brooding vain ?
Has then the mind no inward sun ?—
 The mists cloud down again :

Stealthily drape the distant heights,
 Blot out the songless tree :
Into cold silence flit the thoughts
 That sang to me.

THE ARGUMENT

W HY, then, if love is all there is need to give,
All love be thine.

Thine the bright wonder of this life I live,
Its doubt's dark broodings mine.

Serene that marvellous waste of crystal sky,
And that gaunt crook-backed tree!
Hush! breathes the wind invisibly rippling by,
Hush! to the wild bird's cry . . .

Yet even as mind vowed no more to grieve,
Heart answered with a sigh.

DAWN



IN EAR, far, unearthly, break the birds
From spectral bush and tree,
Into a strange and drowsy praise,
The flush of dawn to see.

Old ashen rooks, on ragged wing,
And heads with sidling eye,
Sweep in the silvery heights of daybreak,
Silent through the sky.

The restless robin—like a brook
Tinkling in frozen snow—
Shakes his clear, sudden, piercing bells,
Flits elf-like to and fro.

Cock to cock yells, the enormous earth
Lies like a dream outspread
Under the canopy of space,
Stretched infinite overhead.

Light on the wool-fleeced ewes pours in ;
Meek-faced, they snuff the air ;
The glint-horned oxen sit agaze ;
The east burns orient-fair.

The milk-white mists of night wreath up
From meadows greenly grey—
Their every blade of grass ablaze
With dewdrops drenched in day.

THE SPARK

By ALM was the evening, as if asleep,
But sickled on high with brooding storm,
Couched in invisible space. And, lo !
I saw in utter silence sweep
Out of that darkening starless vault
A gliding spark, as blanched as snow,
That burned into dust, and vanished in
A hay-cropped meadow, brightly green.

A meteor from the cold of space,
Lost in Earth's wilderness of air ?
Presage of lightnings soon to shine
In splendour on this lonely place ?
I cannot tell; but only how fair
It glowed within the crystalline
Pure heavens, and of its strangeness lit
My mind to joy at sight of it.

Yet what is common as lovely may be:
The petalled daisy, a honey bell,
A pebble, a branch of moss, a gem
Of dew, or fallen rain—if we
A moment in their beauty dwell;
Entranced, alone, see only them.
How blind to wait, till, merely unique,
Some omen thus the all bespeak!

JENNY WREN

OF all the birds that rove and sing,
Near dwellings made for men,
None is so nimble, feat, and trim,
As Jenny Wren.

With pin-point bill, and tail a-cock,
So wildly shrill she cries,
The echoes on his roof-tree knock
And fill the skies.

Never was sweeter seraph hid
Within so small a house—
A tiny, inch-long, eager, ardent,
Feathered mouse.

THE SNAIL

▲
ALL day shut fast in whorled retreat
You slumber where—no wild bird knows ;
While on your rounded roof-tree beat
The petals of the rose.
The grasses sigh above your house ;
Through drifts of darkest azure sweep
The sun-motes where the mosses drowse
That soothe your noonday sleep.

But when to ashes in the west
Those sun-fires die ; and, silver, slim,
Eve, with the moon upon her breast,
Smiles on the uplands dim ;
Then, all your wreathed house astir,
Horns reared, grim mouth, deliberate pace,
You glide in silken silence where
The feast awaits your grace.

Strange partners, Snail! Then I, abed,
Consign the thick-darked vault to you,
Nor heed what sweetness night may shed
Nor moonshine's slumbrous dew.

SPEECH

THE robin's whistled stave
Is tart as half-ripened fruit;
Wood-sooth from bower of leaves
The blackbird's flute ;
Shrill-small the ardent wren's ;
And the thrush, and the long-tailed tit—
Each hath its own apt tongue,
Shrill, harsh, or sweet.

The meanings they may bear
Is long past ours to guess—
What sighs the wind, of the past,
In the wilderness ?
Man also in ancient words
His thoughts may pack,
But if he not sing them too,
Music they lack.

Oh, never on earth was bird,
Though perched on Arabian tree,
Nor instrument echoing heaven
Made melody strange as he ;

Since even his happiest speech
Cries of his whither and whence,
And in mere sound secretes
His inmost sense.

TOM'S ANGEL

JNO ONE was in the fields
But me and Polly Flint,
When, like a giant across the grass,
The flaming angel went.

It was budding time in May,
And green as green could be,
And all in his height he went along
Past Polly Flint and me.

We'd been playing in the woods,
And Polly up, and ran,
And hid her face, and said,
'Tom ! Tom ! The Man ! The Man !'

And I up-turned ; and there,
Like flames across the sky,
With wings all bristling, came
The Angel striding by.

And a chaffinch overhead
Kept whistling in the tree
While the Angel, blue as fire, came on
Past Polly Flint and me.

And I saw his hair, and all
The ruffling of his hem,
As over the clovers his bare feet
Trod without stirring them.

Polly—she cried ; and, oh!
We ran, until the lane
Turned by the miller's roaring wheel,
And we were safe again.

ENGLISH DOWNS

HERE, long ere kings to battle rode
In thunder of the drum,
And trumps fee-faughed defiance,
And taut bow-strings whistled, ' Come ! '--

This air breathed milky sweet
With nodding columbine,
Dangled upon the age-gnarled thorn
The clematis twine;

Meek harebell hung her head
Over the green-turfed chalk,
And the lambs with their dams forgathered
Where the shepherds talk.

' HOW SLEEP THE BRAVE '

BITTERLY, England, must thou grieve—
 Though none of these poor men who died
But did within his soul believe
 That death for thee was glorified.

Ever they watched it hovering near—
 A mystery beyond thought to plumb—
And often, in loathing and in fear,
 They heard cold danger whisper, Come !—

Heard, and obeyed. Oh, if thou weep
 Such courage and honour, woe, despair;
Remember too that those who sleep
 No more remorse can share.

THE IMAGE

FAINT sighings sounded, not of wind, amid
That chasmed waste of boulder and cactus flower,
Primeval sand its sterile coverlid,
Unclocked eternity its passing hour.

Naught breathed or stirred beneath its void of
blue,
Save when in far faint dying whisper strained
Down the sheer steep, where not even lichen grew,
Eroded dust, and, where it fell, remained.

Hewn in that virgin rock, nude 'gainst the skies,
Loomed mighty Shape—of granite brow and
breast,
Its huge hands folded on its sightless eyes,
Its lips and feet immovably at rest.

Where now the wanderers who this image scored
For age-long idol here ?—Death ? Destiny ?
Fame ?—

Mute, secret, dreadful, and by man adored;
Yet not a mark in the dust to tell its name ?

A ROBIN

GHOST-GREY the fail of night,

Ice-bound the lane,

Lone in the dying light

Flits he again;

Lurking where shadows steal,

Perched in his coat of blood,

Man's homestead at his heel,

Death-still the wood.

Odd restless child ; it's dark ;

All wings are flown

But this one wizard's—hark !—

Stone clapped on stone !

Changeling and solitary,

Secret and sharp and small,

Flits he from tree to tree,

Calling on all.

SNOWING

SNOWING; snowing;
Oh, between earth and sky
A wintry wind is blowing,
Scattering with its sigh
Petals from trees of silver that shine
Like invisible glass, when the moon
In the void of night on high
Paces her orchards divine.

Snowing; snowing;
Ah me, how still, and how fair
The air with flakes interflowing,
The fields crystal and bare,
When the brawling brooks are dumb
And the parched trees matted with frost,
And the birds in this wilderness stare
Dazzled and numb!

Snowing ; snowing ; snowing :
Moments of time through space
Into hours, centuries growing,
Till the world's marred lovely face,

Wearied of change and chance,
Radiant in innocence dream—
Lulled by an infinite grace
To rest in eternal trance.

MEMORY

▼▼▼
WHEN summer heat has drowsed the day
With blaze of noontide overhead,
And hidden greenfinch can but say
What but a moment since it said ;
When harvest fields stand thick with wheat,
And wasp and bee slave—dawn till dark—
Nor home, till evening moonbeams beat,
Silvering the nightjar's oaken bark :
How strangely then the mind may build
A magic world of wintry cold,
Its meadows with frail frost flowers filled—
Bright-ribbed with ice, a frozen wold! . . .

When dusk shuts in the shortest day,
And huge Orion spans the night;
Where antlered fireflames leap and play
Chequering the walls with fitful light—
Even sweeter in mind the summer's rose
May bloom again ; her drifting swan
Resume her beauty ; while rapture flows
Of birds long since to silence gone :

Beyond the Nowel, sharp and shrill,
Of Waits from out the snowbound street,
Drums to their fiddle beneath the hill
June's mill wheel where the waters meet . . .

O angel Memory that can
Double the joys of faithless Man !

A BALLAD OF CHRISTMAS

IT was about the deep of night,
And still was earth and sky,
When in the moonlight dazzling bright,
Three ghosts came riding by.

Beyond the sea—beyond the sea,
Lie kingdoms for them all:
I wot their steeds trod wearily—
The journey is not small.

By rock and desert, sand and stream,
They footsore late did go :
Now, like a sweet and blessed dream,
Their path was deep with snow.

Shining like hoarfrost, rode they on,
Three ghosts in earth's array :
It was about the hour when wan
Night turns at hint of day.

Oh, but their hearts with woe distraught
 Hailed not the wane of night,
Only for Jesu still they sought
 To wash them clean and white.

For bloody was each hand, and dark
 With death each orbless eye ;—
It was three Traitors mute and stark
 Came riding silent by.

Silver their raiment and their spurs,
 And silver-shod their feet,
And silver-pale each face that stared
 Into the moonlight sweet.

And he upon the left that rode
 Was Pilate, Prince of Rome,
Whose journey once lay far abroad,
 And now was nearing home.

And he upon the right that rode,
 Herod of Salem sate,
Whose mantle dipped in children's blood
 Shone clear as Heaven's gate.

And he, these twain betwixt, that rode
Was clad as white as wool,
Dyed in the Mercy of his God,
White was he crown to sole.

Throned mid a myriad Saints in bliss
Rise shall the Babe of Heaven
To shine on these three ghosts, i-wis,
Smit through with sorrows seven ;

Babe of the Blessed Trinity
Shall smile their steeds to see:
Herod and Pilate riding by,
And Judas one of three.

THE SNOWDROP



IN OW—now, as low I stooped, thought I,
I will see what this snowdrop *is* ;
So shall I put much argument by,
 And solve a lifetime's mysteries.

A northern wind had frozen the grass ;
Its blades were hoar with crystal rime,
Aglint like light-dissecting glass
 At beam of morning prime.

From hidden bulb the flower reared up
Its angled, slender, cold, dark stem,
Whence dangled an inverted cup
 For tri-leaved diadem.

Beneath these ice-pure sepals lay
A triplet of green-pencilled snow,
Which in the chill-aired gloom of day
 Stirred softly to and fro.

Mind fixed, but else made vacant, I,
Lost to my body, called my soul
To don that frail solemnity,
 Its inmost self my goal.

And though in vain—no mortal mind
Across that threshold yet hath fared !—
In this collusion I divined
 Some consciousness we shared.

Strange roads—while suns, a myriad, set—
Had led us through infinity ;
And where they crossed, there then had met
 Not two of us, but three.

THE SNOWFLAKE

SEE, now, this filigree : 'tis snow,
Shaped, in the void, of heavenly dew ;
On winds of space like flower to blow
In a wilderness of blue.

Black are those pines. The utter cold
Hath frozen to silence the birds' green woods.
Rime hath ensteed the wormless mould,
A vacant quiet broods.

Lo, this entranced thing breath
Of life that bids Man's heart to crave
Still for perfection : ere fall death,
And earth shut in his grave.

THE FLEETING

THE late wind failed ; high on the hill
The pine's resounding boughs were still:
Those wondrous airs that space had lent
To wail earth's night-long banishment
From heat and light; and song of day
In a last sighing died away.

Alone in the muteness, lost and small,
I watched from far-off Leo fall
An ebbing trail of silvery dust,
And fade to naught; while, near and far,
Glittered in quiet star to star;
And dreamed, in midnight's dim immense,
Heaven's universal innocence.

O transient heart that yet can raise
To the unseen its pang of praise,
And from the founts in play above
Be freshed with that sweet love !

HERESY

Enter on to a prodigious headland, a little before noon, two men in alien dress, and between them a third, younger than they, blindfold, and in the raiment of a prince. They remove the bandage from his eyes, and seat themselves on the turf. His hands bound behind his back, the PRINCE stands between them, looking out to sea. Dazed for a moment by the sudden glare, he stays silent.

PRINCE. What place is this ?

All's strange to me, and I
Had fallen at last accustomed to the dark.
Why, then, to this vast radiance bring me
blindfold ?

HANGMAN. Why, Prince, a happy surprise!
First coach-room; then,
A steady creeping upward ; and now—this.
Once died—and lived—a corpse named Lazarus:
Remember, then, to all men else than they
Who will not blab, you've been three days dead—

And, that far gone, even princes are soon forgot.
Lo, then, your resurrection!—take your fill.
Nor need we three have joy in it alone.
Legions of listeners surround us here,
Alert, though out of hearing and of sight.

PRINCE. Like many journeys, this is best being
done.

My lungs ache with the ascent and the thin air.
After your souring ' coach-room ' it smells sweet.

(He turns away.)

How wondrous a scene of universal calm,
These last days' troubles and distractions done!
Look, how that pretty harebell nods her head,
Whispering, ay, ay. How fresh the scent of thyme!
The knife-winged birds that haunt this sea-blue
vault
Even in their droppings mock the eye with
flowers
Whiter than snow.

HANGMAN. Yes, and as bleached have picked
This coney's bones that dared their empire here.

PRINCE. How dark a shadow in so little a head
Peers from its thin-walled skull.

HANGMAN. By Gis,
Not thyme but stark Eternity domes this perch;

And who needs hempseed when his ghost's gone
home?

COUBTIEB. When yours goes home, the bitterest
weed earth fats

Would taste more savoury to the hawks of hell.

HANGMAN. Meanwhile, a civil tongue hang in
your head!

You Ve bribed your coming hither; let it rest.

PRINCE. I pray you cut these ropes from oS my
wrists.

Here's neither need nor hour to challenge why

And by whose tyranny I have endured

Monstrous humiliations. That may wait.

But I am faint, and have no hope in flight.

In quiet we 11 sit, and you shall then rehearse

What wrongs are yours a little thought may right.

We all are human, and the heavens be judge.

HANGMAN (*as he picks up the skull of the rabbit
from the turf*). ' We all are human, and the
heavens be judge'!—

A dainty saying, Prince, in either part;

Come noon, and ample proof is yours of both!

I Ve heard of hermits drowned so deep in silence

Their hairy ears dreamed voices in their brains.

I 'd be a hermit too, if⁴ in my cell

A homelier music than this bleaching wind's
In these sharp-bladed grasses lulled me asleep.
It seemed an instant gone a halting voice
Sighed, / ^—as if in envy of these mew
That scream defiance o'er our innocent heads.
Alackaday, the dirge they seem to sing!

COURTIER. This is sole solitude. It utterly
dwarfs

Not merely man's corporeal girth and stature,
But melts to naught the imaginings of his soul.

HANGMAN (*mocking Urn*). So empty this wide
salt-tang'd vast of air

'Twould gobble up the cries of all the *dying*
As artlessly as God Man's sabbath prayers !
Kaved here some fell she-Roc a shrill lament
Over her brood struck cold by heedless thunder,
The nearest listener would softly smile
Dreaming him lulled by sigh of passing zephyr!
(*To the Prince.*) So, sir, our talk has edged again
to'rd you.

PRINCE. Ay, has it so ? What would you ?

HANGMAN, Our sole selves,
And a something motionless in a huddle of clothes,
Which soon air's birds, earth's ants will disinfect,
Leaving it naught more talkative than bones,

PRINCE. Murder is in your thoughts ?

HANGMAN.

Ah, sir, a boy

That lugs poor Puss close-bagged and stone-
companioned

Off to her first—and only—watery bath

May have misgivings; but not so grown men.

Murder 's no worse a thing when it's called Justice.

We promise you your remorse shall vex no ear

Unwonted to reproaches. Scan this height!

COURTIER (*sotto voce*). It is a table open to the
eye of heav'n:

And lo, beyond that girdle of huge egg boulders,

Sun-shivering waters to the horizon's verge—

The Ocean Sea—self-lulled, like full-fed babe

That mumbles its mother's nipple in its dreams.

HANGMAN. You see, sir, though Fate may on
Kings cry, ' Check!',

Princes she merely pushes off the board.

Ay, and one broken down there, upon those
stones,

Frenzied with thirst and pain, need not despair !

The lapping comfort of the inning tide,

Though of a languid pace as tardy as time's,

Will, at its leisure, muffle all lamentings.

And what care lobsters if their supper talk ?

PRINCE. You speak as if some devil in your
brains
Had stolen their sanity.

HANGMAN (*smiling closely into his face*). There
runs a silly saying in my mind,
Moaned by poor lovers cheated of desire,
Two's company ; three 's none !

PRINCE(*ironically*). So be it, my friend.
Adieu. I will turn back without delay!
Doubtless the paths by which you have led me
blindfold
Some instinct of direction will recall.

HANGMAN. I 'm told that cats have such a
sense of home
They'll dog their would-be murderers twenty
miles,
To miaow defiance.

PRINCE (*facing him, eye to eye*). Yes. And so
would I!
Wait but till I am free from fleshly bonds!

HANGMAN (*laughing hollowly*). An assignation
past the post of death!
So be it! tho' night grows cold to'rd crow of cock!
COURTIER (*to the hangman*). Hold now your
festering tongue awhile,'and wait;

A few more minutes, and it's final noon.

(He cuts the ropes that bind the Prince's wrists. The Prince seats himself on the turf. The Courtier paces the edge of the diff, pausing at times to peer into the abyss.)

COURTIER. This three days gone—and now no hope can help me—

A last brief message from the King's been mine
To bring you, Prince. In vain, in vain I stayed,
Pining in misery it might harmless prove,
Since Fate the while held all things in the
balance.

The waiting's over; and the balance down.
The wild resolve I neither loved nor shared
Has fallen to worse than nothing; and the foes
That hated you can now feed full on scorn.

PRINCE. Cut to the bone, friend; I am sick of
snippets.

HANGMAN. Well said, cut softly to the very
bone.

The minutes dwindle, and the tide has turned.

COURTIER. I'll keep my Master's pace, . . .
There was a realm,
A state, a hive, a human emmet heap,

Ruled over by a king whose sceptre of iron
He wielded wisely, and bade kiss or crush,
According to his kingdom's need and crisis.
Merciful he when mercy he knew well
Could virtue serve, his People, justice, peace;
But swift and pitiless when his anxious gaze
Pierced to the cancer of that People's ill.
Such rulers win more confidence than love.
None ever assailed his lealty to the good
That in his inmost soul he deemed the best—
Best for the most, less, least—since best for all.

HANGMAN. A pleasing purge—and kingly common sense.

Think now, had this bold rabbit, gone to dust,
Ruled o'er his warren—why, this bright green turf
Were now a rodents' Golgotha of bones.
He who brews poison should be first to taste it.

PEINCE. Of your twin voices one is wolfish bass,
But keeps the nearer to the tune they share.

COURTIER. But little more of *that*, God knows—
then none.

(He continues almost as if he were talking to himself.)

In hives of Bees, whose summer is all spent
Toiling and moiling against Wintry want,

It 'S not the worker, or the fatted drone,
May breed disaster, but some royal she
Fed only on nectar in her nymphal cell,
And yet uniquely sensed, who issues out
Into the whispering business of the hive,
Intent on some pre-natal paradise,
To find it but a maze of servile instinct.
What wonder if in heat of youth she rove.
Plagued and impatient at a fate so pinched,
Lusting to free her kind, to entice them on—
On to some dreamed chimera of workless bliss!
Treason! she trumps to her contented kin.
*'Awake! Arouse! Fools, fools, your Queen is
mid!'*

But skeps of straw are not of the weaving of
heaven,
And Nature's neutral tyranny is such
She'll sate with sunshine, and then starve in
ice.

This jade I tell of, ardent, selfless, rash
May of truth's essence have sucked, but what of
that?

One born too wise within a polity
As ancient as the Bee's is curse more dire
Than countless generations of the dull.

HANGMAN. All that this prating means is, Look
at me!—

Crafty enough to feign I have few wits,
But yet can do with skill the things I 'm bid.
And after, bloody-fingered, fist my wages.

PRINCE. So plain the gallows shows upon your
face

You need no hangman tongue to draw the trap.

(To the other.) Of you I ask only a moment's peace
To be alone in commune with myself.

I weary of your parables and am dumb.

Were I led hither again, again, again,

And at this bleak abyss which now I face

My bowels in a frenzy of fear should melt—

Again, again ; I would no word recant,

No act recall, nor one ideal betray

Which these last few vain hours have brought to
naught.

Oh, I am weary, give me leave to die.

Words may worse torture wreak than screw or
rack.

HANGMAN. And that's why we have given you
words in plenty.

COURTIER *(still ignoring him)*. One other grief
—to share; and / have? done.

This She I spoke of was, in fact, a prince ;
The hive, his father's realm: a prince held
dear

Beyond idolatry; the wonder and hope
Of this wise monarch's soul. No Absalom—
Since thrones in time began—was more endued
With beauty, genius, grace, fame, fortune, zeal.
He 'd but to turn his head to be beloved.
The dumb-tongued stones that paved his palace
court

Echoed of glory when he trod ; no bliss
Was past his full achievement. Yes, my lord,
Our royal master grudged you nothing; and
He bade me breathe you peace on this account;
Avow again—though you are past his pity—
That not one blotch of envy in his blood
Did ever incite him to a thought's revenge.
He loved you ... So, 'tis done. And I am
here

To bring his blessing ere your feet go on
Into the dark unknown. There this world's kings
May find them less in rank than scullions
In service of the gods ; who yet decreed
That they reign faithfully and reign unmoved
By any hope too high for human practice.

To call men equal is a heresy;
And worse—denial of the divine. Think you,
Doth jealousy green the hyssop in the wall
That with the cedar shares her mote of sunlight ?
Is pain the blessedder for being shared ?
Is aught in life worth having but what the mind
Hath sealed its own within its secret silence ?
What is heart's ease—ambition, or the peace
That only comes of loving its poor best ? . . .
When death is in the pulpit—thus he speaks!
And I, alas, his deputy. But now
I cease. No more the mouthpiece of my Master,
I stay to keep you company to the end.

*(With a gesture the hangman bids the Prince
stand. He leads him to the brink of the
abyss.)*

PRINCE. So wild a light, and then the little dark.
This is the end, then. And, to you, farewell.
What was between my father and his son
I gave you never warranty to share.
What was between my inmost self and me
Yours never the faintest insight to descry.
He gave me life—scant boon in world half-dead.
And now he craves it of me, since his seed
Has fruited past his liking. Tell him this—

When you from your day's pleasuring have gone
back:

I died remorseless, yet in shame—for one
So rich in magnanimity who yet
Eefused his realm the very elixir of life;
And sick with terror of what the truth might
tell,
Uncharged, untried, has chos'n me *this* for end.
I am gone forth on my high errand ; he
Breathes on in infamy.

HANGMAN. Ha, ha, *ha, ha!* The pity that a
roost
So fecund as this gives the young cock no hens !

COURTIER. Great deeds great crimes may be;
and so
Of their extravagance win doom at last,
Commensurate in scope, in kind, in awe,
With him whose blinded wisdom brought them
forth.

Hence this immensity on which we stand.
Such was his edict.

PRINCE. And is *this* the sot
He of his own sole choice bade bring me here ?
We two—though at this pass—are of a kin;
I loved you ; love you yet, but—

COURTIER. I know not, sir. The King's mouth
now says nothing.

I came at no man's orders ; only lest
This hangman here . . .

*(A triple fanfare of trumpets is heard echoing
up from where beyond view of the headland
the three legions of soldiery have been
awaiting noon.)*

But hark, we 're for a journey
Beyond the talisman of our wits to scan.

HANGMAN *(spitting upon the ground in contempt
of both of them)*. 'Ware, then! Lift princely
eyes into the void

And watch as 'twere your soul's winged silver slide
Into the empyrean. Get you gone !

PRINCE *(leaping out into space)*. Away !

COURTIER. And I! . . . Away! . . .

*(A triple roll of drums reverberates in the
parched air of noonday from out of the
valky, ascends into the heavens, ceases.)*

BEEAK OF MORNING

FOUND the invisible trumps. In circuit vast
The passive earth, like scene in dream, is set.
The small birds flit and sing, their dark hours past,
And their green sojournings with dewdrops wet.

With giant boughs outspread, the oaks on high
Brood on in slumbrous quiet in the air.
Sole in remote inane of vacant sky
Paling Arcturus sparkles wildly fair.

Sound the invisible trumps. The waters weep.
A stealing wind breathes in the meads, is gone.
Into their earthen burrows the wild things creep;
Cockcrow to thinning cockcrow echoes on.

Avert thine eyes, sleep-ridden face! Nor scan
Those seraph hosts that in divine array
Girdle the mortal-masked empyrean:
Their sovereign beauty is this break of day.

Theirs is the music men call silence here;
What wonder grief distorts thy burning eyes ?
Turn to thy pillow again—in love and fear;
Not thine to see the Son of Morning rise.

THE OWL

' Well, God 'ild you! They say the owle was a
baker's daughter.'

Hamlet, iv, 5.

THE door-bell jangled in evening's peace,
Its clapper dulled with verdigris.
Lit by the hanging lamp's still flame
Into the shop a beggar came,
Glanced gravely around him—counter, stool,
Ticking clock and heaped-up tray
Of baker's dainties, put to cool;
And quietly turned his eyes away.

Stepped out the goodwife from within—
Her blandest smile from brow to chin
Fading at once to blank chagrin
As she paused to peer, with keen blue eyes
Sharpened to find a stranger there,
And one, she knew, no customer.
{ We never give . . . ' she said, and stayed;
Mute and intent, as if dismayed

At so profoundly still a face.

' What do you want ?' She came a pace
Nearer, and scanned him, head to foot.
He looked at her, but answered not.

The tabby-cat that, fathom deep,
On the scoured counter lay asleep,
Beared up its head to yawn, and then,
Composing itself to sleep again,
With eyes by night made black as jet,
Gazed on the stranger. ' A crust,' he said.

' A crust of bread.'

Disquiet in the woman stirred—
No plea, or plaint, or hinted threat—
So low his voice she had scarcely heard.
She shook her head; he turned to go.
' We Ve nothing here for beggars. And so . . .
' If we gave food to all who come
' They 'd eat us out of house and home—
' Where charity begins, they say;
' And ends, as like as not—or may.'

Still listening, he answered not,
His eyes upon the speaker set,
Eyes that she tried in vain to evade

But had not met.

She frowned. ' Well, that's my husband's rule;
' But stay a moment. There 's a stool;
' Sit down and wait. Stale bread we 've none.
' And else . . .' she shrugged. ' Still, rest
awhile,'

Her smooth face conjured up a smile,
' And I will see what can be done.'

He did as he was bidden. And she
Went briskly in, and shnt the door;
To pause, in brief uncertainty,
Searching for what she failed to find.
Then tiptoed back to peer once more
In through the ribboned muslin blind,
And eyed him secretly, askance,
With a prolonged, keen, searching glance ;
As if mere listening might divine
Some centuries-silent countersign.
Scores of lean hungry folk she had turned
Even hungrier from her door, though less
From stint and scorn than heedlessness.
Why then should she a scruple spare
For one who, in a like distress,
Had spoken as if in heart he yearned
Far more for peace than bread ? But now

No mark of gloom obscured his brow,
No shadow of darkness or despair.
Still as an image of age-worn stone
That from a pinnacle looks down
Over the seas of time, he sat;
His stooping face illumined by
The burnished scales that hung awry
Beside the crusted loaves of bread.
Never it seemed shone lamp so fair
 On one so sore bestead.

' Poor wretch/ she muttered,' he minds me of . . . !
A footfall sounded from above;
And, hand on mouth, intently still,
She watched and pondered there until,
Stepping alertly down the stair,
Her daughter—young as she was fair—
Came within earshot.

⁶ H'st/ she cried.

' A stranger here! And Lord betide,
' He may have been watching till we 're alone,
' Biding his time, your father gone.
' Come, now; come quietly and peep !—
' Rags!—he might make a Christian weep !
' I Ve promised nothing; but, good lack !
' What shall I say when I go back ?'

Her daughter softly stepped to peep.

' Pah ! begging/ she whispered; ' I know that tale.

' Money is all he wants—for ale!'

Through the cold glass there stole a beam

Of lamplight on her standing there,

Stilling her beauty as in a dream,

It smote to gold her wing-soft hair,

It scarleted her bird-bright cheek,

With shadow tinged her childlike neck,

Dreamed on her rounded bosom, and lay—

Like a sapphire pool at break of day,

Where martin and wagtail preen and play—

In the shallow shining of her eye.

' T't, mother,' she scoffed, with a scornful sigh,

And peeped again, and sneered—her lip

Drawn back from her small even teeth,

Showing the bright-red gums beneath.

' Look, now ! The wretch has fallen asleep—

' Stark at the counter, there; still as death.

'As I sat alone by my looking-glass,

' I heard a footstep—watched him pass,

'Turn, and limp thief-like back again.

' Out went my candle. I listened; and then

' Those two faint *dings*. Aha ! thought I,

' Honest he may be, though old and blind,

' But *that's* no customer come to buy.
' So down I came—too late ! I knew
' He 'd get less comfort from me than you !
' *I* warrant, a pretty tale he told !
' " Alone " ! Lord love us ! Leave him to me.
' I 'll teach him manners. Wait and see.'
She nodded her small snake-like head,
Sleeked with its strands of palest gold,
'Waste not, want not, say I,' she said.
Her mother faltered. Their glances met—
Furtive and questioning ; hard and cold—
In mute communion mind with mind,
Though little to share could either find.
' Save us !' she answered, ' sharp eyes you have,
' If in the dark you can see the blind !
' He was as tongueless as the grave.
' " Tale " ! Not a sigh. Not one word said.
' Except that he asked for bread.'

Uneasy in her thoughts, she yet
Knew, howsoever late the hour,
And none in call, small risk they ran
From any homeless beggar-man.
While as for this—worn, wasted, wan—
A nod, and he M be' gone.

Waste not, want not, forsooth ! The chit—
To think that she should so dictate !
' Asleep, you say ? Well, what of that ?
' What mortal harm can come of it ?
' A look he gave me ; and his eyes . . .
' Le\$ve him to me, Miss Worldly-wise !
' Trouble him not. Stay here, while I
' See what broken meat's put by.
' God knows the wretch may have his fill.
' And you—keep watch upon the till! '

She hastened in, with muffled tread.
Meanwhile her daughter, left alone,
Waited, watching, till she was gone ;
Then softly drew open the door, to stare
More nearly through the sombre air
At the still face, dark matted hair,
Scarred hand, shut eyes, and silent mouth,
Parched with the long day's bitter drouth ;
Now aureoled in the lustre shed
From the murky lamp above his head.
Her tense young features distorted, she
Gazed on, in sharpening enmity,
Her eager lips tight shut, as if
The very air she breathed might be

Poisoned by this foul company.
That such should be allowed to live !
Yet, as she watched him, needle-clear,
 Beneath her contempt stirred fear.
Fear, not of body's harm, or aught
Instinct or cunning may have taught
Wits edged by watchful vanity :
It seemed her inmost soul made cry—
Wild thing, bewildered, the huntsmen nigh—
Of hidden ambush, and a flood
Of vague forebodings chilled her blood.
Kestrel keen, her eyes' bright blue
Narrowed, as she stole softly through.

' H'st, you !' she whispered him. ' Waken!

Hear!

' Come to warn you. Danger 's near!
Cat-like she scanned him, drew-to the door,
' She is calling for help. No time to wait!—
' Before the neighbours come—before
' They hoick their dogs on, and it's too late !'
The stranger listened; turned; and smiled :
' But whither shall I go, my child ?
' All ways are treacherous to those
' Who, seeking friends, find»only foes.⁵

My child!—the words like poison ran
Through her quick mind. 'What!' she began,
In fuming rage; then stayed; for, lo,
This visage, for all its starven woe,
That now met calmly her scrutiny,
Of time's corruption was wholly free.
The eyes beneath the level brows,
Though weary for want of sleep, yet shone
With strange directness, gazing on.
In her brief life she had never seen
A face so eager yet serene,
And, in its deathless courage, none
To bear with it comparison.

'I will begone/ at length he said.

'All that I asked was bread/

Her anger died away; she sighed;
Pouted; then laughed. 'So Mother tried
'To scare me? Told me I must stop
'In there—some wretch was in the shop
'Who 'd come to rob and . . . Well, thought I,
'Seeing ^J's believing; I could but try
'To keep *her* safe. What else to do—
'Till help might come?' She paused, and drew
A straying lock of yellow hair

Back from her cheek—as palely fair—
In heedless indolence ; as when
A wood-dove idly spreads her wing
Sunwards, and folds it in again.
Aimless, with fingers slender and cold,
She fondled the tress more stealthily
 Than miser with his gold.
And still her wonder grew : to see
A man of this rare courtesy
So sunken in want and poverty.
What was his actual errand here ?
And whereto was he journeying ?
A silence had fallen between them. Save
The weight-clock's ticking, slow and grave,
No whisper, in or out, she heard ;
The cat slept on ; and nothing stirred.
'Is it only hungry ? ' she cajoled,
In this strange quiet made more bold.
' Far worse than hunger seems to me
' The cankering fear of growing old.
' That is a kind of hunger too—
'Which even / can share with you.
' And, heaven help me, always alone !
' Mother cares nothing for that. But wait;
' See now how dark it is, and late ;

' Nor any roof for shelter. But soon
 ' Night will be lovely—with the moon.
 ' When all is quiet, and she abed,
 ' Do you come back, and click the latch ;
 ' And I 'll sit up above, and watch.
 ' A supper then I 'll bring,' she said,
 ' Sweeter by far than mouldy bread !'
 Like water chiming in a well
 Which uncropped weeds more sombre make,
 The low seductive syllables fell
 Of every word she spake—
 Music lulling the listening ear,
 Note as of nightbird, low and clear,
 That yet keeps grief awake.
 But still he made no sign. And she,
 Now, fearing his silence, scoffed mockingly,
 ' God knows I 'm not the one to give
 ' For the mere asking. As I live
 ' I loathe the cringing skulking scum,
 ' Day in, day out, that begging come ;
 ' Sots, tramps, who pester, whine, and shirk—
 ' They 'd rather starve to death than work.
 ' And lie!'—She aped, ' " God help me, m'm ;
 ' " 'Tisn't myself but them at home!
 ' " Crying for food they are. Yes, seven !—

' " And their poor mother safe in heaven ! " '

Glib as a prating parrot she
Mimicked the words with sidling head,
Bright-red tongue and claw-like hands.
' But—I can tell you—when / 'm there
' There 's little for the seven to share !'
She raised her eyebrows ; innocent, mild—
Less parrot now than pensive child;
Her every movement of body and face,
As of a flower in the wind's embrace,
Born of a natural grace.

A vagrant moth on soundless plume,
Lured by the quiet flame within,
Fanned darkling through the narrow room,
Out of the night's obscurity.

She watched it vacantly.

' If we gave food to *all*, you see,
' We might as well a Workhouse be !
' I Ve not much patience with beggary.
' What use is it to whine and wail ?—
' Most things in this world are made for sale!
' But one who really needs . . .' She sighed.
' I 'd hate for him to be denied.'

She smoothed her lips, then smiled, to say :

' Have you yourself come far to-day ? '
Like questing call, where shallows are
And sea-birds throng, rang out that/ar—
Decoy to every wanderer.

The stranger turned, and looked at her.
' Far, my child; and far must fare.
' My only home is everywhere ;
 ' And that the homeless share;
' The vile, the lost, in misery—
 ' Where comfort cannot be.
' You are young, your life your own to spend;
' May it escape as dark an end.'

Her fickle heart fell cold, her eyes
Stirred not a hair's breadth, serpent-wise.
' You say/ she bridled, ' that to me !
' Meaning you 'd have their company
' Rather than mine ? Why, when a friend
' Gives for the giving, there 's an end
' To that dull talk! *My child*/—can't you
' See whom you are talking to ?
' Do you suppose because I stop
' Caged up in this dull village shop
' With none but clcuds and numskulls near,

' Whose only thought is pig and beer,
 ' And sour old maids that pry and leer,
 ' I am content ? Me! Never pine
 ' For what by every right is mine ?
 ' Had I a wild-sick bird to keep,
 ' Is this where she should mope and cheep ?
 ' Aching, starving, for love and light,
 ' Eating her heart out, dawn to night!
 ' Oh yes, they say that safety's sweet;
 ' And groundsel—something good to eat!
 ' But, Lord! I 'd outsing the morning stars,
 ' A lump of sugar between the bars!
 ' I loathe this life. *My child!* You see !
 ' Wait till she 's dead—and I am free !'
 Aghast, she stayed—her young cheeks blenched,
 Mouth quivering, and fingers clenched—
 ' What right have you . . . ?' she challenged, and
 then,
 With a stifled sob, fell silent again.
 (And now/ she shuddered, frowned, and said,
 ' It's closing time. And I 'm for bed.'
 She listened a moment, crossed the floor,
 And, dumbing on tiptoe—thumb on latch—
 The clapper-bell against its catch,
 Stealthily drew wide ihe door.

All deathly still, the autumnal night
Hung starry and radiant, height to height,
O'er moon-cold hills and neighbouring wood.
Black shadows barred the empty street,
Dew-bright its cobbles at her feet,
And the dead leaves that sprinkled it.
With earthy, sour-sweet smell indued
The keen air coldly touched her skin—
Alone there, at the entering in.
Soon would the early frosts begin,
And the long winter's lassitude,
Mewed up, pent in, companionless.
No light in her mind to soothe and bless ;
Only unbridled bitterness
Drummed in her blood against her side.
Her eyelids drooped, and every sense
Languished in secret virulence.
She wheeled and looked. ' You thought,' si
cried,
Small and dull as a toneless bell,
' A silly, country wench like me,
' Goose for the fox, befooled could be
' By your fine speeches! " Hungry " ? Well,
' I 've been in streets where misery is
' Common as wayside blackberries—

' Been, and come back; less young than wise.
' Go to the parson, knock him up ;
' *He 'll* dole you texts on which to sup.
' Or, if his tombstones strike too cold,
' Try the old Squire at Biddingfold :
' Ask there ! He thinks the village pond 's
' The drink for rogues and vagabonds !'

The Hunter's Moon from a cloudless sky
In pallid splendour earthward yearned ;
Dazzling in beauty, cheek and eye:
And her head's gold to silver turned.
Her fierce young face in that wild shine
Showed like a god's, morose, malign.
He rose : and face to face they stood
In sudden, timeless solitude.
The fevered frenzy in her blood
Ebb'd, left enfeebled body and limb.
Appalled, she gazed at him,
Marvelling in horror of stricken heart,
In this strange scrutiny, at what
She saw but comprehended not.
Out of Astarte's borrowed light
She couched her face, to hide from sight
The tears of anguish and bitter pride

That pricked her eyes. ' My God/ she cried,
Pausing in misery on the word,
As if another's voice she had heard,
' Give—if you can—the devil his due—
' I 'd rather sup with him than you!
' So get you gone ; no more I want
 ' Of you, and all your cant !'

A hasty footstep neared ; she stayed,
Outwardly bold, but sore afraid.
' Mother !' she mocked. ' Now we shall see
' What comes of asking charity/
Platter in hand, the frugal dame
Back to the counter bustling came.
Something, she saw, had gone amiss.
And one sharp look her daughter's way
Warned her of what she had best not say.
Fearing her tongue and temper, she
Spoke with a smiling asperity.
' Look, now/ she said, ' I have brought you this.
' That slut of mine 's an hour abed ;
' The oven chilled, the fire half dead,
' The bellows vanished. . . . Well, you have seen
' The mort of trouble it has been.
' Still, there it is ; and food at least.

' My husband does not hold with waste ;
' That's been his maxim all life through.
' What's more, it's in the Scriptures too.
' By rights we are shut; it's growing late;
' And as you can't bring back the plate,
' Better eat here—if eat you must!
' And now—ah, yes, you 'II want a crust.
' All this bread is for sale. I 'I in
' And see what leavings are in the bin.'
Their glances met. Hers winced, and fell;
But why it faltered she could not tell. . . .

The slumbering cat awoke, arose—
Roused by the savour beneath his nose,
Arched his spine, with tail erect,
Stooped, gently sniffing, to inspect
The beggar's feast, gazed after her,
And, seeing her gone, began to purr.
Her daughter then, who had watched the while,
Drew near, and stroked him—with a smile
As sly with blandishment as guile.
Daintily, finger and thumb, she took
A morsel of meat from off the plate,
And with a sidling crafty look
Dangled it over him for a>bait:

' No, no; say, please !' The obsequious cat
Reared to his haunches, with folded paws,
Round sea-green eyes, and hook-toothed jaws,
Mewed, snapped, and mouthed it down; and then
Up, like a mammet, sat, begging again.

' Pie, now; he 's famished ! Another bit ?

' Mousers by rights should hunt their meat!

' That's what the Master says: isn't it ?'

The creature fawned on her, and purred,
As if he had pondered every word.

Yet, mute the beggar stood, nor made

A sign he grudged this masquerade.

' *I* dote on cats/ the wanton said.

' Dogs grovel and cringe at every nod;

' Making of man a kind of god!

' Beat them or starve them, as you choose,

' They crawl to you, whining, and lick your shoes.

' Cats know their comfort, drowse and play,

' And, when the dark comes, steal away—

' Wild to the wild. Make *them* obey !

' As soon make water run uphill.

' I 'm for the night; I crave the dark;

' Would wail the louder to hear them bark ;

' Pleasure myself till the East turns grey/

She eyed the low window; ' Welladay!

' You the greyhound, and I the hare,
' I warrant of coursing you 'd have your share/
Scrap after scrap she dangled, until
The dainty beast had gorged his fill,
And, lithe as a panther, sheened like silk,
Minced off to find a drink of milk.
' There ! That's cat's thanks ! His feasting done,
' He's off—and half your supper gone! . . .
' But, wise or foolish, you 'll agree
' You had done better to sup with me !'

The stranger gravely raised his head.
{ Once was a harvest thick with corn
' When I too heard the hunting-horn ;
' I, too, the baying, and the blood,
' And the cries of death none understood.
' He that in peace with God would live
' Both hunter is and fugitive.
' I came to this house to ask for bread,
' We give but what we have,' he said;
' Are what grace makes of us, and win
' The peace that is our hearts within.'
He ceased, and, yet more gravely, smiled.
' I would that ours were reconciled !'
So sharply intent were sense, and ear

On his face and accents, she failed to hear

The meaning his words conveyed.

' *Peace !*' she mocked him. ' How pretty a jibe!

' So jows the death-belp's serenade.

' Try a less easy bribe!'

The entry darkly gaped. And through

The cold night air, a low *a-hoo*,

A-hoo, a-hoo, from out the wood,

Broke in upon their solitude ;

A call, a bleak decoy, a cry,

Half weird lament, half ribaldry.

She listened, shivered ; ' Pah!' whispered she,

' No peace of yours, my God, for me !

' have gone my ways, have eyes, and wits.

' Am I a cat to feed on bits

' Of dried-up Bible-meat ? I know

' What kind of bread has that for dough ;

' Yes, and how honey-sweet the leaven

' That starves, on earth, to glut, in heaven!

' Dupe was I ? Well, come closer, look,

' Is my face withered ? Sight fall'n in ?

' Beak-sharp nose and gibbering chin ?

' Lips that no longer can sing, kiss, pout ?

' Body dry sinews, thp fire gone out ?

' So it may be with me Judgement Day ;
' And, men being men, of hope forsook,
' Gold all dross—hair gone grey,
' Love burnt to ashes.

Yet, still, I 'd say—

' Come then, to taunt me, though you may—
' 'd treat hypocrites Pilate's way !
' False, all false !—Oh, I can see,
' You are not what you pretend to be !'

Weeping, she ceased ; as flowerlike a thing
As frost ever chilled in an earthly spring.
Mingling moonlight and lamplight played
On raiment and hair; and her beauty arrayed
In a peace profound, as when in some glade
On the confines of Eden, alone, unafraid,
Cain and his brother as children strayed.
' What am I saying ! I hear it. But none—
' None is—God help me !—my own.'

Her mother, listening, had heard
That last low passionate broken word.
What was its meaning ? Shame or fear—
It knelled its misery on her ear
Like voices in a dgeam.

And, as she brooded, deep in thought,
Trembling, though not with cold, she sought
In her one twinkling candle's beam
From stubborn memory to restore
Where she had seen this man before ;
What, in his marred yet tranquil mien—
Dimmed by the veils of time between—
Had conjured the past so quickly back :
Hours when by hopes, proved false, beguiled,
She too had stubborn been and wild,
As vain ; but not as lovely. Alas!
And, far from innocent, a child.
A glass hung near the chimney shelf—
She peered into its shadows, moved
By thoughts of one in youth beloved,
Long tongueless in the grave, whom yet
Rancour could shun, but not forget.
Was this blowed woman here herself ?
No answer made the image there—

Bartered but stare for stare.

She turned aside. What use to brood
On follies gone beyond recall—
Nothing to do the living good,
Secrets now shared by none ; and all
Because this chance-come outcast had

Asked for alms a crust of bread.
Clean contrary to common sense,
She 'd given him shelter, fetched him food—
Old scraps, maybe, but fit, at worst,
For her goodman ; and warmed them first!
And this for grace and gratitude !
Charity brings scant recompense
This side of Jordan—from such as he !

But then ; what meant that frenzied speech,
Cry of one loved, lost—out of reach,
From girlhood up unheard before,
And past all probing to explore ?
What was between them—each with each ?

What in the past lay hid ?

Long since the tongue of envy had
Whispered its worst about her child ;
Arrogant, beautiful, and wild;
And beauty tarnished may strive in vain
To win its market back again . . .
To what cold furies is life betrayed
When the ashes of youth begin to cool,
When things of impulse are done by rule,
When, sickened of faiths, hopes, charities,
The soul pines only to be at ease ;

And—moulting vulture in stony den—
Waits for the end, Amen!

Thus, in the twinkling of an eye,
This heart-sick reverie swept by;
She must dissemble—if need be—lie;
Kid house and soul of this new pest,
Prudence would do the rest.

Muffling her purpose, aggrieved in mind,
In she went, and, knee on stool,
Deigning no glance at either, leant
Over the tarnished rail of brass
That curtained off the window-glass,
And, with a tug, drew down the blind.

' Lord's Day, to-morrow,' she shrugged. ' No
shop!

' Come, child, make haste; it's time to sup;

' High time to put the shutters up.'

The shutters up: The shutters up—

Ticked the clock the silence through,

And a yet emptier silence spread.

Shunning the effort, she raised her head;

' And *you* 'll be needing to go,' she said.

She seized a loaf, broke oS a crust,

Turned, and, ' There's no stale left . . .' began

Coldly, and paused—her haunted eyes
Fixed on the grease-stains, where the cat,
Mumbling its gobbets, had feasting sat.
All doubting done, pierced to the quick
At hint of this malignant trick,
Like spark in tinder, fire in rick,
A sudden rage consumed her soul,
Beyond all caution to control.
Ignored, disdained, deceived, defied !—
' Have you, my God !' she shrilled, ' no pride ?
 ' No shame ?
' Stranger, you say—and now, a friend!
' Cheating and lies, from bad to worse—
' Fouling your father's honest name—
' Make *me*, you jade, your stalking-horse !
' / 've watched you, mooning, moping—ay,
 ' And now, in my teeth, know why !'

A dreadful quiet spread, as when
Over Atlantic wastes of sea,
Black tempest-swept, there falls a lull,
As sudden as it is momentary,
In the maniac tumult of wind and rain,
Boundless, measureless, monstrous : and then
The insensate din begins again.

The damsel stirred.

Jade—she had caught the bitter word;
Shame, cheating, lies. Crouched down, she stood,
Lost in a lightless solitude.
No matter; the words were said ; all done.
And yet, how strange this woman should,
Self-blinded, have no heart to see
The secret of her misery;
Should think that she—all refuge gone,
And racked with hatred and shame, could be
The *friend* of this accursed one !
The anguished blood had left her cheek
White as a leper's. With shaking head,
And eyes insanely wide and bleak,
Her body motionless as the dead,
At bay against a nameless fear,
She strove awhile in vain to speak.
Then, ' Thank you for that!' she whispered.

'Who

' Betrayed me into a world like this,
' Swarming with evil and deviltries ?
' Gave me these eyes, this mouth, these feet,
' Flesh to hunger—and tainted meat ?
' Pampered me—flattered—yet taunted me when
' Body and soul became prey to men,

And though—as if the spirit within
Were striving through fleshly bonds to win
Out to its chosen—fiery pangs
Burned in her breast like serpent's fangs,
She lifted her stricken face, and laughed :
Hollowly, ribaldly, *Heugh, heugh, heugh!*

'A Jew! A Jew!'—

Ran, clawed, clutched up the bread and meat,
And flung them at his feet.

And then was gone ; had taken her flight
Out through the doorway, into the street,
Into the quiet of the night,
On through the moon-chequered shadowy air ;

Away, to where

In woodland of agelong oak and yew,
Echoing its vaulted dingles through,
Faint voices answered her—*Hoo ! A-hoo !*
A-hoo ! A-hoo !
A-hoo!

THE STRANGE SPIRIT

AGE shall not daunt me, nor sorrow for youth
that is gone,

If thou lead on before me;

If thy voice in the darkness and bleak of that final
night

Still its enchantment weave o'er me.

Thou hauntest the stealing shadow of rock and
tree;

Hov'ring on wings invisible smilest at me;

Fannest the secret scent of the moth-hung flower;

Making of musky eve thy slumber-bower.

But not without danger thy fleeting presence abides
In a mind lulled in dreaming.

Lightning bepictures thy gaze. When the thunder
raves,

And the tempest rain is streaming,

Betwixt cloud and earth thy falcon-head leans
near-

Menacing earth-bound spirit I betrayed to fear.

Cold then as shadow of death, that *icy* glare
Pierces the window of sense to the chamber bare.

Busied o'er dust, engrossed o'er the clod-close root,
Fire of the beast in conflict bleeding,
Goal of the coursing fish on its ocean tryst,
Wind of the weed's far seeding,
Whose servant art thou ? Who gave thee earth,
 sky and sea
For uttermost kingdom and ranging ? Who bade
 thee to be
Bodiless, lovely; snare, and delight of the soul,
Fantasy's beacon, of thought the uttermost goal ?

When I told my love thou wert near; she bowed,
 and sighed.

With passion her pale face darkened.

Trembling the lips that to mine in silence replied ;
Sadly that music she hearkened.

Miracle thine the babe in her bosom at rest,
Flowerlike, hidden loose-folded on gentle breast—
And we laughed together in quiet, unmoved by
 fear,

Knowing that, life of life, thou wast hovering
 near.

TO K. M.

*And there was a horse in the king's stables: and
the name of the horse was, Genius.*



WE sat and talked. It was June, and the
summer light
Lay fair upon ceiling and wall as the day took
flight.
Tranquil the room—with its colours and shadows
wan,
Cherries, and china, and flowers: and the hour
slid on.
Dark hair, dark eyes, slim fingers—you made the
tea,
Pausing with spoon uplifted, to speak to me.
Lulled by our thoughts and our voices, how happy
were we!

And, musing, an old, old riddle crept into my
head,

' Supposing I just say, *Horse in afield?* I said,

' What do you *see* ? ' And we each made answer:

' I—

A roan—long tail, and a red-brick house, near by.'

' I—an old cart-horse and rain ! ' ' Oh no, not
rain;

A mare with a long-legged foal by a pond—oh
plain!'

' And I, a hedge—and an elm—and the shadowy
green

Sloping gently up to the blue, to the West, I
mean!' . . .

And now: on the field that I see night's darkness
lies.

A brook brawls near : there are stars in the empty
skies.

The grass is deep, and dense. As I push my way,
From sour-nettled ditch sweeps fragrance of
clustering May.

I come to a stile. And lo, on the further side,
With still, umbrageous, night-clad fronds, spread
wide,

A giant cedar broods. And in crescent's gleam—
A horse, milk-pale, sleek-shouldered, engendered
of dream!

Startled, it lifts its muzzle, deep eyes agaze,
Silk-plaited mane . . .

' Whose pastures are thine to graze ?
Creature, delicate, lovely, with womanlike head,
Sphinx-like, gazelle-like ? Where tarries thy
rider ?' I said.

And I scanned by that sinking slip's thin twink-
ling shed

A high-pooped saddle of leather, night-darkened red,
Stamped with a pattern of gilding; and over it
thrown

A cloak, chain-buckled, with one great glamorous
stone,

Wan as the argent moon when o'er fields of wheat
Like Dian she broods, and steals to Endymion's
feet.

Interwoven with silver that cloak from seam to
seam.

And at toss of that head from its damascened
bridle did beam

Mysterious glare in the dead of the dark. . . .

' Thy name,
Fantastical steed ? Thy pedigree ?
Peace, out of Storm, is the tale ? Or *Beauty, of*
Jeopardy ?'

The water grieves. Not a footfall—and midnight
here.

Why tarries Darkness's bird ? Mounded and clear
Slopes to yon hill with its stars the moorland
sweet.

There sigh the airs of far heaven. And the
dreamer's feet

Scatter the leagues of paths secret to where at last
meet

Roads called Wickedness, Righteousness, broad-
flung or strait,

And the third that leads on to the Queen of fair
Elfland's gate. . . .

This then the horse that I see ; swift as the wind;
That none may master or mount; and none may
bind—

But she, his Mistress: cloaked, and at throat that
gem-

Dark head, dark eyes, slim shoulder. . . .

God-speed, K. M.!

DREAMS

EV'N one who has little travelled in
This world of ample land and sea;
Whose Arctic, Orient, tropics have been—
Like Phoenix, siren, jinn, and *Sidhe*—
But of his thoughts' anatomy—
Each day makes measureless journeys twain:
From wake to dream ; to wake again.

At night he climbs a quiet stair,
Secure within its pictured wall;
His clothes, his hands, the light, the air,
Familiar objects one and all—
Accustomed, plain, and natural.
He lays him down: and, ages deep,
Flow over him the floods of sleep.

Lapped in this influence alien
To aught save sorcery could devise,
Heedless of *Sesame* or *Amen*,
He is at once the denizen
Of realms till then beyond surmise ;

Grotesque, irrational, and sans
All law and order known as Man's.

Though drowsy sentries at the gate
Of eye and ear dim watch maintain,
And, at his absence all elate,
His body's artisans sustain,
Their toil in sinew, nerve, and brain:
Nothing recks he ; he roves afar,
Past compass, chart, and calendar.

Nor is he the poor serf who shares
One self alone where'er he range,
Since in the seven-league Boots he wears
He may, in scores of guises, change
His daily ego—simple or strange ;
Stand passive looker-on ; or be
A paragon of energy.

Kegions of beauty, wonder, peace
By waking eyes unscanned, unknown,
Waters and hills whose loveliness,
Past mortal sense, are his alone.
There flow'rs by the shallows of Lethe sown
Distil their nectar, drowsy and sweet,
And drench the air w:..th news of it.

Or lost, betrayed, forlorn, alas!
Gaunt terror leads him by the hand
Through demon-infested rank morass;
O'er wind-bleached wilderness of sand;
Where cataracts rave ; or bleak sea-strand
Shouts at the night with spouted spume;
Or locks him to rot in soundless tomb.

Here, too, the House of Folly is,
With gates ajar, and windows lit,
Wherein with foul buffooneries
A spectral host carousing sit.
' Hail, thou!' they yelp. ' Come, taste and
eat!'
And so, poor zany, sup must he
The nightmare dregs of idiocy.

All this in vain ? Nay, thus abased,
Made vile in the dark's incontinence,
Though even the anguish of death he taste,
The murderer's woe—his penitence,
And pangs of the damned experience—
Will he God's mercy less esteem
When dayspring prove them only a dream ?

What bliss to clutch, when thus beset,
The folded linen of his sheet;
Or hear, without, more welcome yet,
A footfall in the dawnlit street;
The whist of the wind ; or, far and sweet,
Some small bird's daybreak rhapsody,
That bids him put all such figments by.

Oh, when, at morning up, his eyes
Open to earth again, then, lo !
An end to all dream's enterprise !—
It melts away like April snow.
What night made false now true doth show ;
What day discloses night disdained ;
And who shall winnow real from feigned ?

But men of learning little heed
Problems that simple folk perplex ;
And some there are who have decreed
Dreams the insidious wiles of sex ;
That slumber's plain is wake's complex ;
And, plumbing their own minds, profess
Them quagmires of unconsciousness.

Sad fate it is, like one who is dead,
To lie inert the dark night through,
And never by dream's sweet fantasy led
To lave tired eyes in heavenly dew !
But worse—the prey of a gross taboo
And sport of a Censor—to squat and make
Pies of a mud forbidd'n the awake!

Nay, is that Prince of the Dust—a man,
But a tissue of parts, dissectable ?
Lancet, balances, callipers—can
The least of his actions by human skill
Be measured as so much Sex, Want, Will ?—
Fables so dull would the sweeter be
With extract of humour for company !

Once was a god whose lovely face,
Wan as the poppy and arched in wings,
So haunted a votary with his grace
And the still wonder that worship brings,
That, having sipped of Helicon's springs,
He cast his beauty in bronze. And now
Eternal slumber bedims bis brow—

Hypnos : and Dream was his dear son.
Not ours these follies. We haunt instead
Tropical jungles drear and dun,
And see in some fetish of fear and dread
Our symbol of dream—that brooding head !
And deem the wellspring of genius hid
In a dark morass that is dubbed the Id.

Sacred of old was the dyed baboon.
Though least, of the monkeys, like man is he,
Yet, rank the bones of his skeleton
With *homo sapiens'*: will they be
Void of design, form, symmetry ?
To each his calling. Albeit we know
Apes father no Michelangelo !

In truth, a destiny undivined
Haunts every cell of bone and brain ;
They share, to time and space resigned,
All passions that to earth pertain,
And twist man's thoughts to boon or bane ;
Yet, be he master, need we ban
What the amoeba's made of man ?

Who of his thoughts can reach the source ?
Who in his life-blood's secret share ?
By knowledge, artifice, or force
Compel the self within declare
What fiat bade it earthward fare ?
Or proof expound this journey is
Else than a tissue of fantasies ?

See, now, this butterfly, its wing
A dazzling play of patterned hues;
Far from the radiance of Spring,
From every faltering flower it choose
'Twill dip to sip autumnal dew :
So flit man's happiest moments by,
Daydreams of selfless transiency.

Was it by cunning the curious fly
That preys in a sunbeam schooled her wings
To ride her in air all motionlessly,
Poised on their myriad winnowings ?
Where conned the blackbird the song he sings ?
Was Job the instructor of the ant ?
Go bees for nectar to Hujne and Kant ?

Who bade the scallop devise her shell ?
Who tutored the daisy at cool of eve
To tent her pollen in floreted cell ?
What dominie taught the dove to grieve ;
The mole to delve ; the worm to weave ?
Does not the rather their life-craft seem
A tranced obedience to a dream ?

Thus tranced, too, body and mind, will sit
A winter's dawn to dark, alone,
Heedless of how the cold moments flit,
The worker in words, or wood, or stone :
So far his waking desires have flown
Into a realm where his sole delight
Is to bring the dreamed-of to mortal sight.

Dumb in its wax may the music sleep—
In a breath conceived—that, with ardent care,
Note by note, in a reverie deep,
Mozart penned, for the world to share.
Waken it, needle ! And then declare
How, invoked by thy tiny tang,
Sound such strains as the Sirens sang !

Voyager dauntless on Newton's sea,
Year after year still brooding on
His algebraical formulae,
The genius of William Hamilton
Sought the square root of *minus* one ;
In vain; till—all thought of it leagues away—
The problem flowered from a dream one day.

Our restless senses legrp and say,
' How marvellous this !—How ugly that! '
And, at a breath, will slip away
The very thing they marvel at.
Time is the tyrant of their fate;
And frail the instant which must be
Our all of actuality.

If then to Solomon the Wise
Some curious priest stooped low and said,
' Thou ! with thy lidded, sleep-sealed eyes,
This riddle solve from out thy bed :
Art thou—am I—by phantoms led ?
Where is the real ? In dream ? Or wake ?'
I know the answer the Kjing might make!

And teeming Shakespeare: would he avow
The creatures of his heart and brain,
Whom, Prospero-like, he could endow
With all that mortal souls contain,
Mere copies that a fool can feign
Out of the tangible and seen ?—
This the sole range of his demesne ?

Ask not the Dreamer ! See him run,
Listening a shrill and gentle neigh,
Foot into stirrup, he is up, he has won
Enchanted foothills far away.
Somewhere ? Nowhere ? Who need say ?
So be it in secrecy of his mind
He some rare delectation find.

Ay, once I dreamed of an age-wide sea
Whereo'er three moons stood leper-bright;
And once—from agony set free—
I scanned within the womb of night,
A hollow inwoven orb of light,
Thrilling with beauty no tongue could tell,
And knew it for Life's citadel.

And—parable as strange—once, I
Was lured to a city whose every stone,
And harpy human hastening by
Were spawn and sport of fear alone—
By soulless horror enthralled, driven on :
Even the waters that, ebon-clear,
Coursed through its dark, raved only of *Fear* \

Enigmas these; but not the face,
Fashioned of sleep, which, still at gaze
Of daybreak eyes, I yet could trace,
Made lovelier in the sun's first rays ;
Nor that wild voice which in amaze,
Wide-wok'n, I listened singing on—
All memory of the singer gone.

O Poesy, of wellspring clear,
Let no sad Science thee suborn,
Who art thyself its planisphere !
All knowledge is foredoomed, forlorn—
Of inmost truth and wisdom shorn—
Unless imagination brings
It skies wherein to use its wings.

Two worlds have we : without; within ;
But all that sense can mete and span,
Until it confirmation win
From heart and soul, is death to man.
Of grace divine his life began ;
And—Eden empty proved—in deep
Communion with his spirit in sleep

The Lord Jehovah of a dream
Bade him, past all desire, conceive
What should his solitude redeem;
And, to his sunlit eyes, brought Eve.
Would that my day-wide mind could weave
Faint concept of the scene from whence
She awoke to Eden's innocence !

Starven with cares, like tares in wheat,
Wildered with knowledge, chilled with doubt,
The timeless self in vain must beat
Against its walls to hasten out
Whither the living waters fount;
And—evil and good no more at strife—
Seek love beneath the tree of life.

When then in memory I look back
To childhood's visioned hours I see
What now my anxious soul doth lack
Is energy in peace to be
At one with nature's mystery :
And Conscience less my mind indicts
For idle days than dreamless nights.

