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Twelve Idyls and Other Poems

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Twelve Idyls
And Other Poems
By Lascelles Abercrombie

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TO
ELIZABETH AND ROBERT TREVELYAN

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Mary and the Bramble

To my Mother

Mary and the Bramble

THE great blue ceremony of the air
Did a new morrow for the earth prepare ;
The silver troops of mist were almost crept
Back to the streams where through the day they
 - - slept ;
And, high up on his tower of song, the glad
Galloping wings of a lark already had
A message from the sun, to give bright warning
That he would shortly make a golden morning.
It was a dawn when the year is earliest.
Mary, in her rapt girlhood, from her rest
Came for the hour to wash her soul. Now she
Beheld, with eyes like the rain-shadowed sea,
Of late an urgency disturb the world ;
Her thought that, like a curtain wide unfurl'd
With stir of a hurrying throng against it prest,
Seen things flutter'd with spiritual haste
Behind them, as a rush of winged zeal
Made with its gusty passage shiver and reel,

Twelve Idyls

Like a loose weaving, all the work of sense.
Surely not always could such vehemence
Of Spirit stay all shrouded in the green
Appearance of earth's knowledgeable mien :
Ay, see this morning trembling like a sail !
Can it still hold the strain ? must it not fail
Even now ? for lo how it doth thrill and bend !
Will not, as a torn cloth, earth's season rend
Before this shaking wind of Heaven's speed,
And show her God's obediences indeed
Burning along behind it ? Never yet
Was such a fever in the frail earth set
By those hid throngs posting behind its veil !

Unfearing were her eyes ; yet would they quail
A little when the curtain seemed nigh torn,
The shining weft of kind clear-weather'd morn,
In pressure of near Spirit forcing it.
And as she walkt, the marvel would permit
Scarce any love for the earth's delighted dress.
Through meadows flowering with happiness
Went Mary, feeling not the air that laid
Honours of gentle dew upon her head ;

Mary and the Bramble

Nor that the sun now loved with golden stare
The marvellous behaviour of her hair,
Bending with finer swerve from off her brow
Than water which relents before a prow :
Till in the shining darkness many a gleam
Of secret bronze-red lustres answered him.

The Spirit of Life vaunted itself : " Ho ye
Who wear the Heavens, now look down to me !
I too can praise. My dark encumberment
Of earth, whereinto I was hardly sent,
I have up-wielded as the fire wields flame,
And turned it into glory of God's name :
Till now a praise as good as yours I can,
For now my speech, the long-stammer'd being of
Man,
Rises into its mightiest, sweetest word."
Not vain his boast : for seemly to the Lord,
Blue-robed and yellow-kerchieft, Mary went.
There never was to God such worship sent
By any angel in the Heavenly ways,
As this that Life had utter'd for God's praise,
This girlhood—as the service that Life said

Twelve Idyls

In the beauty and the manners of this maid.
Never the harps of Heaven played such song
As her grave walking through the grasses long.
Yea, out of Jewry came the proof in her
That the angel Life was God's best worshipper.

Now in her vision'd walk beside a brake
Is Mary passing, wherein brambles make
A tangled malice, grown to such a riddle
That any grimness crouching in the middle
Were not espied. Bewildered was the place,
Like a brain full of folly and disgrace ;
And with its thorny toils it seemed to be
A naughty heart devising cruelty.
Ready it was with all its small keen spite
To catch at anything that walkt upright,
Although a miching weasel safely went
Therethrough. And close to this entanglement
This little world out of unkindness made,
With eyes beyond her path young Mary strayed
As an unheeded bramble's reach she crost,
Her breast a spiny sinew did accost
With eager thorns, tearing her dress to seize

Mary and the Bramble

And harm her hidden white virginities.
To it she spake, with such a gentle air
That the thing might not choose but answer her.

" What meanest thou, () Bramble,
So to hurt my breast ?
Why is thy sharp cruelty
Against my heart prest ? "

" How can I help, () Mary,
Dealing wound to thee ?
Thou hast Heaven's favour :
I am mortality."

" If I, who am thy sister,
Am in Heaven's love,
If it be so, then should it not
Thee to gladness move ? "

" Nay, nay, it moves me only
Quietly to wait,
Till I can surely seize thy heart
In my twisting hate."

Twelve Idyls

" Ah, thou hast pierced my paps, bramble,
Thy thorns are in my blood ;
Tell me for why, thou cruel growth,
Thy malice is so rude."

" Thou art looking, Mary,
Beyond the world to be :
If I cannot grapple thee down to the world,
I can injure thee."

" Ah, thy wicked daggers now
Into my nipple cling :
It is like guilt, so to be held
In thy harsh fingering."

The little leaves were language still,
And gave their voice to Mary's will ;
But till the bramble's word was said,
Thorns clutcht hard upon the maid.

" Yes, like guilt, for guilt am I,
Sin and wrong and misery.
For thy heart guilt is feeling ;
Hurt for which there is no healing

Mary and the Bramble

Must the bramble do to thee,
If thou wilt not guilty be.
Know'st thou me ? These nails of hate
Are the fastenings of the weight
Of substance which thy God did bind
Upon thy upward-meaning mind.
Life has greatly sworn to be
High as the brows of God in thee ;
But I am heaviness, and I
Would hold thee down from being high.
Thou thyself by thy straining
Hast made my weight a wicked thing ;
Here in the bramble now I sit
And tear thy flesh with the spines of it.
Yet into my desires come,
And like a worshipping bridegroom
I will turn thy life to dream,
All delicious love to seem.
But if in Heaven God shall wear
Before any worship there
Thy Spirit, and Life boasteth this,
Thou must break through the injuries
And shames I will baout thee wind,

Twelve Idyls

The hooks and thickets of my kind ;
The whole earth's nature will come to be
Full of my purpose against thee ;
Yea, worse than a bramble's handling, men
Shall use thy bosom, Mary, then.
And yet I know that by these scars
I make thee better than the stars
For God to wear ; and thou wilt ride
On the lusts that have thee tried,
The murders that fell short of thee,
Like charioting in a victory ;
Like shafted horses thou wilt drive
The crimes that I on earth made thrive
Against thee, into Heaven to draw
Thy soul out of my heinous law.
But now in midst of my growth thou art,
And I have thee by the heart ;
And closer shall I seize on thee
Even than this ; a gallows-tree
Shall bear a bramble-coil on high ;
Then twisted about thy soul am I,
Then a withe of my will is bound
Strangling thy very ghost around."

Mary and the Bramble

Homeward went Mary, nursing fearfully
The bleeding badges of that cruelty.
Now closer spiritual turbulence whirled
Against her filmy vision of the world,
Which was like shaken silk, so gravely leant
The moving of that throng'd astonishment
On the far side : the time was near at hand
When Gabriel with the fiery-flower'd wand
Would part the tissue of her bodily ken,
And to the opening all God's shining men
Would crowd to watch the message that he took
To earthly life : " Hail, Mary, that dost look
Delightful to the Lord ; I bid thee know
That answering God's own love thy womb shall
throe."

The Innocents

The Innocents

NIGHT had squandered over the glowing air
The thousands of her stars. A slender woman
Smiled at them as she hurried from the farm,
After the long day of a widow's toil :
With her heart planning eager things at home,
Smiling she faced the loft of Syrian night,
As if her mind knew how to match itself
With those blue depths and that immortal trance
Of blissful fire, the stars of Palestine.

" You cannot look me down ! Here on the earth
Stumbling and tired and unnoticeable
I go ; and you are bright and endless heaven.
Yet I can live as measureless as you,
O darkness, in the sorrow of my love ;
And surely in my love's delight my heart
Can mock the whitest of your quivering stars.
Death is as great as you ; and I am love

Twelve Idyls

Whose region now is death—O emptiness
About me where my longing for my lover
Glowes dark and boundless as your infinite blue !—
Ah, but as well and in the midst of this,
My life is like the clustering of starlight
In silver dances of its fiery glee :
My shining life adoring with its love
The little laughing son my lover gave me.
O night, burning joy and room unending,
I know where you are equalled, I that am
Love of a lover dead and a son living ! "

By this there should have been a golden eye
Of candle-light watching for her approach.
But there was only night in front of her :
The house was dark, a piece of blacker night ;
And night of a more jealous silence held
About its walls, and was shockt by her steps.
She felt it did not know her, such a blank
It stood, a rapt and heedless thing. But quick
To push the door she was, and stand within
Listening ; and for one tick of her heart
It seemed the mood of the house at the stir she made

The Innocents

Shrank off and shudder'd away from her ; and then
Came settling back and closed over her brain.
And at once gentleness of outdoor dark
With all its easing of the sense of things,
Alter'd to graver darkness, loading on her,
Pressing down as thick as deep-sea water.

But she was hungry for her hour. She stooped
To peer into the room, and held her arms
Ready to catch the boy running to her.

" You are both very still ! Is this to be
A hiding game ? Where are you, little deceiver ?
Sweetheart, just one laugh ! and home in a pounce
I'll track your voice, my minim of the rogues.
Out with a jump, frighten me !—Mother, where is
he ?
Where are you, mother ?—Gone ? They can't be
gone ! "

She started forward ; but her mother's voice
Spoke from the back of the room, very low
And even : a tone that took her by the soul.

Twelve Idyls

" Be careful. Make a light before you move,
Else you may trip——"

" How can I make a light ?
The tinder-box must be by you. Quick, strike !
Has he been harmed ? "

" Near me, yes : I forgot.
Keep where you are : wait for the light; I'm bound
To fumble, with this wicked cramp in me.
I've hardened into an image, sitting here
So long. And I'm not ready for you yet.
I was just trying over what I'd say."

" How was he hurt ? Have you put him to
bed ? "

" I tell you, wait; not an inch nearer, girl !——
It glows at last. Now for these doddering hands
To manage with the candle. And I hope
God will be with your heart as well as mine/'

The faint light hung in a ball of yellow haze
Hovering larger and larger round the flame ;
And when the room was full of it, she saw
Where the boy lay. Right at her feet he lay,
Naked, with open eyes, speared in the breast.

The Innocents

Her throat lockt rigid on her shrieking breath.
When her stunn'd heart could feel its terrible
 beating,
She found herself huddled down on the floor,
Nursing her cold boy close against the warmth
Where not long since he fed. Her blacken'd mind
Now heard her mother speaking, like a drift
Of talk floating out of a lofty window.

" It was the soldiers. They had made them
 drunk.
And some were laughing drunk ; but most were
 wild,
As if they drove themselves to shouting fury
For fear they'ld be afraid ; and there was one
Who cried and cried like broken-hearted madness.
' I can't be doing this/ he said, ' not this ' ;
And it was he that snatcht the boy from me.—
And then the laughers and the swearers ran
Out of the house like men escaping fire,
Swearing and laughing still ; and he alone
Stayed crying here, looking on what he'd done,
And saying still, ' I can't do things like this, ' "

Twelve Idyls

" But why ? why ? What has come to the world ? "

" Messiah has come."

" Will you jeer at me ?

My baby murderM, and Messiah come ? "

" Messiah has come : this is the sign of it."

" You crazy woman, this ? And is that why
You let the fiends catch my beautiful darling ? "

" It is in the stars : Messiah is born in Jewry.
And because he is born, no one can tell where,
Herod is angry and sends his soldiers out
Everywhere killing Jewish boys ; and I
All afternoon must look at our beloved
Lying dead, with his frighten'd open eyes
Wondering at me. But Messiah has come ;
Ay, somewhere now the woman lives whose son
Is the Messiah : and we must call her blessed.
God will take care of her : none of Herod's soldiers
Will gash her son ; and when he makes the earth
His kingdom, in that sabbath of the world
This misery of ours will be forgotten."

" O be quiet ! I do not want Messiah :
[want my boy, my little nimble boy,

The Innocents

Warm and lively and laughing. We did not need
Messiah to change the world for us : the world
Would have been ours, we would have made it ours.
My darling and I would have known how to love
Our life together of joy and grief in the world,
As if it were a music we were making.
But she must murder him with her Messiah,
That woman ! So that she may be the one
All the half-hearted lives bless for Messiah,
He must be murder'd, my busy little dancer.
What good to me will be Messiah's kingdom ?
But let it be holiness mounting to heaven,
I will go with it ; bitterly into heaven
I'll haunt it ; it shall never be rid of me ;
It shall remember what it has done to me,
My voice shall be an injury to it for ever."

The Death of a Friar

The Death of a Friar

SO they would leave him there to die alone.
Why trouble more ? All they could do was done ;
Nothing but senseless breathing now remained
Of what the man had been. If death disdained
To notice his surrender, why should they,
Who never noticed yet the humble way
He had of living, dawdle to attend
Upon his humble dying to its end ?
The unregarded serviceable man
Was finisht ; any common coal that can
No longer heat the furnace was like him :
A cinder haunted by a twittering, dim,
Forsaking mutter of small, plucking flame.
And how long might it be, before there came
Negligent death contemptuously to bless
This lingering stir of mortal wretchedness
With one resolving touch, and on him cast
Mercy of cold and quietude at last ?

Twelve Idyls

The unregarded man had served his turn ;
Some flickering round the cinder still might burn,
But 'twas a life dismiss'd: surely alone
He could be left to die.

When they were gone
Death came ; but not in manner as they thought

Suddenly he was awake and staring, wrought
Out of his lethargy to expect amazing
Presences there, by summons of a blazing
White and unspeakable astonishment,
That with a shatter like the lightning rent
The drowsy darkness of his dying mind.
His kindled spirit gazed abroad, to find
His cell a miracle : the magnificence
Of tawny fire crimson'd round him, whence
Gleam of delicious green played among blue,
Like heavenly flashes globed in sunlit dew ;
And the air chimed, and changing fragrances
Were coolly fanned about him, as a breeze
Made by a pulse of great invisible wings
Drove spirits of flowers in sweet squanderings.

Then those he expected came : and first the
Queen

The Death of a Friar

Of Heaven, in all the joyous light of green
Moving that ever glowed in grass or glanced
From falling water, and every blue entranced
In summer bliss of deep seas, and the height
Of air from April noon to June midnight.
So in her paradise she came, and shed
The colour of its climate round his bed.

But fire, and mighty fire, attended her,
Three tranquil majesties of fire ; and where
Their golden pacing trod, there was no ground,
But gulf ; for downward without end or bound
Vacancy open'd underneath their station,
And darkness of the world's annihilation
There burned more blinding than their white-hot
wings.

Thus on the empty vanishing of things
The angels stood, Mary's obediences,
In fiery rank behind her loveliness ;
Composed and patient their immortal zeal:
Their faces splendour as of molten steel;
Brightness in folds that thrill'd like scarlet heat
In silver, falling to their golden feet;
And in the steadfast flaming of their wings

Twelve Idyls

A mounting ripple of fierce quiverings
Sparkling terribly—the infinite ascending
Of Fire unbeginning and unending,
Whereof their persons were the shapely flames.

In passion the man cried, as one who claims
Rescue with agony of all his strength,
" Mother of God, may I not die at length ? "
Whether it music were he could not tell
That answered him, or an insensible
Piercing of ravishment into his brain ;
But thus the meaning spoke : " Now for thy pain
Have thy reward ! I bring electuaries,
Made of such honey and such herbs that thrice,
Tasting of these, into delight extreme
Thou shalt be changed as ever heart could dream :
And they shall make it well with thee after all."
Askance, for fear the mere glimpse should appal
His seeing to a blank, beyond the bound
Of gleam delectable that sphered him round,
He eyed those glittering statures where they stood
Quietly ardent; and with a blench he could
See there were caskets in their dazzling hands.

The Death of a Friar

But instantly they knew their Queen's commands ;
And the first splendour for her ministry,
Bearing his casket of electuary,
Strode forth, making his way the yawn'd abyss
Beneath him ; and as he near'd the bliss
The man lay in, the paradise of hues
That Mary loved him with, the sheltering blues
Mingled with sweet surprise of green, began
To glare a burning amber, and there ran
Through the translucency of azure shade
Reddening curls of lustre, and a blade
Of whitening vehemence : till the man sealed his sight
Against the full severe angelic light.

His service done, and Mary with his first
Of sacred food that poor heart having nurst,
Back to his place the stately angel went
To shine beside his brothers there ; content,
As when his Queen her miracle began,
To wait upon her dealing with this man.

" Take now thy first delight ! "
The signs of it
Were these : but the joy was an infinite

Twelve Idyls

Exceeding its occasions, even these.

For stript from his life were labour and disease

Like unclean wrapping, and the shame to be

Indecent servitude to malady.

As if his flesh were all new exquisite sense

Assuming a divine experience,

Health was the thing he knew, health quick and
beating.

Fine as a mind strange radiant beauty greeting,

His subtle body knew his health, and made

Bodily joy of it: joy his sinews said,

Muscles and skin and the hairs upon his skin,

Bones and the secret pith of the bones within,

Were intellectual speech of joy, and each

Marvelling distinctly in joyous speech

Of mere delighted faculty, aware

Of health and the beauty of health. And long time
there,

Receiving each elate particular glee

Of his brave body in serene harmony,

And passionately still, he lay intense,

Not to disturb the lucid affluence

Of health along the nerves of his delight :

The Death of a Friar

Collected so in this, that even of sight
His will was jealous, and kept closed his eyes.

But slowly out to ampler boundaries
Rejoicing knowledge well'd its way ; and soon
He knew where he was lying : and high noon
Above, and under him the crisp and spring
Of sheep-bit turf, and round him whispering
Short mountain grass to gentle mountain airs,
He knew. Untouchable by men's affairs,
The great slope of the mountain held him high
And lonely, offered to sunlight and the sky.

There in his wholesome flesh he took his
rest,

His eyes still shut : not seizure now of zest
That fastened every motion, but because
All his desires closed in this heavenly pause
Of rest perfected in the loftiest
Of light and air—his joy now all in rest,
And rest sensibly loving him from the profound
Of his hale body, and out of the vast surround
He felt unseeing of the mountain's day.

In mere simplicity of joy he lay.
No sight: no matter if the wind should tease

Twelve Idyls

Fleeces of cloud to thin white delicacies
Brushed clean across the blue in curve and stroke
(Loveliest thing to see), he would not look.
No sound : but a continual passing by
Of living silences ; save, far or nigh,
Some sound belonging to the silences
Would drop like diamond ; and chiefly these :
Down falls of moss small water into wells
Ringing in glassy little syllables ;
And quivering glides of cadence shrill and rare
Of curlews whistling down the shining air.

There was the touch of power on his head,
The hand of the goddess ; and it was into dread
She roused him, dread of any greater bliss :
" No more, no more ! I want no more than this !
This was enough ! "—the anguish of a child.
But Mary's love inexorably smiled ;
The second angel came, and at his side
Gloried, and went back blazing to abide
In those devoted wings of throbbing fire,
A white-gold instinct one with her desire ;
And with the second of the electuaries,

The Death of a Friar

Fulfilling to the end her promises,
She bid the man : " Now take thy next delight ' "
Not to be named, but as to think starlight
Enlarging measurelessly circular
In utterance round the bright point of a star,
The tale of joys the man's life now must be.
Nay, such a speed and such perplexity
Of pleased sense and mind's beatitude,
Not to be named at all, not understood,
No spectre of it fantastically kenn'd,
The joy his spirit came to in the end.

It began sweetly. Fragrance to him stole,
With calling of blithe thrush and oriole,
From cherry orchards that a sauntering breeze
Has visited, when each garth of crowded trees
Is one broad mound of happy blossoming,
White as a cloud from the new heaven of spring
Fallen to lie on green. But sharper scent
Flowed in, dividing this mild air, and went
Spicing the inmost chambers of his brain :
Gorse steeped in sunshine, sweetbriar in warm rain,
Kindling of rosemary ; and many more
Unknown : to odours that for tenderest core

Twelve Idyls

Of feeling pry'd with searching nicety
Like spirits' smouldering fingers, now must he
Submit his being. Gust in his mouth, that past
Apples and honey, was power to hold fast
His saturated mind. Sense into sense
Confused ; and medley of sweet excellence
Poured into him vibrating, like a tide
Taking a narrow harbour and magnified
In surging of its waters to be there :
Such thronging in, such narrowed turbulence were
The floods of delicate tumult in his mind,
The race in undistinguishable kind
Of the world's rapture into him : the quire
Of colours, and in flights of glistening fire
The music there—amethyst, chrysolite,
And topaz, reeds and strings and horns ; and
white,
Whiter than moonlight on a sword, a noise
Crystalline bright, like the singing of boys.

Then out of sense he broke ; no more by sense
He was aware, but his intelligence
Was now to Be, not know : life, conscious still
In thought and in a body incredible,

The Death of a Friar

Became the beauty sense could only know :
Himself a sound of music—naked so
To all the pulses of rejoicing things,
Fibres of mind alike and bodily strings
Took trembling thence the passion of a sound ;
And light he was, out of him glorying round
Issue of living light—the joy adoring
The gift of light become itself outpouring
Of answering light : his thought pure power of
light,

And torrents of flashing particles icily bright
His blood, in limbs of flesh like fiery glass.
Not beyond this could vivid substance pass :
As if this speck of being, this body and mind,
In one essential energy combined
The shining din of the whole creature of light
And music of the burning world's delight.

Then something new and nameless : a caress
Blandishing dark and silent all the stress
Of joys intelligible, and through him sending
Blissful dissolution and an ending.

And he was free, thoughtless and bodiless,
Having no form, acknowledging no place :

Twelve Idyls

A speed, a phantom speed for ever fleeing,
Speed the uttermost purity of being,
Speed the imperishable thing in things,
The changeless ghost about which changeably clings
The growth and dying of the world : in speed
Out of the momentary man is freed
Unquenchable phantom purity of being,
The speed beyond the world for ever fleeing.

Once more where Mary and her angels stood,
The panting body and the pelting blood
And the confounded mind came back to be
Of common men the common misery ;
But he by mighty memory pursued—
Longing to have it, and fearful lest it should
Descend on him. But more he durst not know :
" O let me be ! Thou wilt not give me, no,
Thou must not give me more ! For I have been
Where no more can be borne : O dost thou mean
To kill me with delight ?"—The Queen of Heaven
Impassibly smiled : " More shall yet be given.
There is a third delight."—And by him stands
Now the third angel : in the blinding hands

The Death of a Friar

The third electuary.

And heaven was gone ;

And in his last delight he lay alone.

The morning found his blessed face, and there

The joy that is too great for life to bear.

At Endor

At Endor

The Ghost of Samuel

Behold me, then !—Who has sent for me here ?
Who has required the tomb
To yield me up ? I come
Out of death to thee : behold me, and fear !

The Witch

Fear thee ! What should I fear, what harm
From ghost so faithful to my charm ?

The Ghost of Samuel

What power art thou, to meddle with the dead ?
Who gave thee leave to hound
My dead soul underground,
And out of the hollow world's dark core of dread
Draw me helpless in obedience
To ache in this remember'd sense
Of earthly things again ?
Who gave thy mind to be
Radiance of such piercing ecstasy

Twelve Idyls

It thrilled down to the dead its craving agony ?
The stone above us to its force
Was glass to blazing light or morning air to trumpets :
Cleaving through the grave thy message made its
course.

It smote apart the swarming dead
That huddled surging back and fled,
As a prow puts aside the water in its way,
Over the bowing waves superbly passing on.
For it was want of me alone
That came so mightily :
I was the thing demanded, I the chosen prey
Thy hungering passion found
With all death's infamy humming round.
Tier above tier of spectral glee
Upon my ignominy stared :
Idlers, malignants, folly and lechery,
Scoffers and cheats and hordes of idolatry—
When all this filth was spared,
I alone, out of the whole world's burial,
I must be fetcht away before them all :
I, whom God spoke to once and loved,
I only am not left in peace.

At Endor

What must I do for my release ?
Or is thy mastery proved ?

The Witch

And this was Samuel!—First I praise
Obedience prompt as ever thou wouldst give
Jehovah in the famous days
When He was on thy side, and let thee live
With Heaven's public favour on thy brow.
But thou art dead, thy body under a stone,
Thy spirit where no living god is known :
My will is thy Jehovah now.

The Ghost of Samuel

Ay, well I see how vile it is to die :
I know thee, and thy sorcery !
When I had life and God with me,
The light was dangerous to thee ;
Thou and thy art must burrow into holes,
Cunningly in the hillside deserts housing :
And often among the stones thy hunted drowsing
Dreamt I had got thee at last and had thee on the
coals !
Now I, that once was sacred life, am made

Twelve Idyls

Matter for thy obscene trade.
But rain, that has gone gleaming white,
High in heavenly wind and light,
Falling, drains into the sewers of a town
And pours in darkness there,
Forgotten with the offal scouring down,
Mixt with the grime of roads and staling of horses :
So falling into death my soul is brought
To flow along thy will, and be mixture with thy
thought.

The Witch

Lo, Samuel's reward
For serving well his Lord !
These are the wages thy Most High
Pays his champions when they die :
Fool ! dead fool ! and wilt thou still be good ?
Thou wert alive when a god beside thee,
Swearing to deal with thy enemies, stood
Flourishing his anger like a headsman's sword :
What is the god thou hast with thee in the grave ?
What stroke of flame comes leaping now to save
Thy spirit from me, thy spirit from sorcery ?

At Endor

O thou prophet of the terrible Lord,
Now an old witch can god thee with a word !
Certainly a fallen storm is thy spirit !
Loud as a storm of hail were thy prophecies :
But very soon the troublesome sound
Passes, the whiten'd pelted ground
In a bright hour cheerfully dries ;
And down to the wells the melting hail
Trickles away ; and a child with a pail
Winds up easily what once was a storm,
Mere innocent quiet water !
Even so from the pit below
I draw this harmless Samuel:
The storm that sounded once like God I bring
Hither to be my serviceable thing.

The Ghost of Samuel

Enough. I am thine : but I was God's.
In that vast shadow underneath the earth
Evil and good are of an equal worth :
Malice is one with sanctity,
For both are dead there, both are nothing.
Must it not always be
That lucid steel is humbled into rust ?

Twelve Idyls

And must it even be
For the bitter mind of evil—ay ! for *thee*—
To wield my spirit now lightly as wind the dust ?
But once I was alive ; and then
I was the voice of God calling on living men ;
And with their lives they answered me.
Men must not be mere swarm on earth,
Like maggots in a carcase prospering ;
But, all their countless birth
Of perishing happiness transfiguring,
An increase of rejoicing energy,
Designing its great image in their lives
In gradual promise of their destiny.

And I have seen it. I have seen
Flame like the sun earth's living green,
To be the splendour of the place
Wherein man consummates his race.
For the whole kind of man I have seen
One blessed creature at the last:
Lovely as the divinely fortunate stars
Innumeraably burn in one consent
Of perfect motion round their firmament,
One everlasting music there

At Endor

Of manifold joyous light,
Wherewith to be so glorified
Exults in glowing blue the night.
Even in such security here
Shall beauty on the earth abide,
When all men's lives at last make one immense
Heavenly intelligence,
That like the sphered starlight
Its own illustrious experience
Immortally enjoys :
Imagination that so shapely thrives
And passion so divinely bright,
That, shapely and bright as an untroubled flame
Lives in its vanishing substance still the same,
Steadfast in the change of ever-dying lives
The changeless figure of undying beauty grows,
The same whoever comes or goes,
The mind of God made man.
Let thy art use me all it can !
This is not in thy power—that men have seen
The beauty God and I have meant.
Yea, am I dead, and thine ?—But I have been
Alive, and I was God's. I am content.

Witchcraft: New Style

Witchcraft: New Style

THE sun drew off at last his piercing fires.
Over the stale warm air, dull as a pond
And moveless in the grey quieted street,
Blue magic of a summer evening glowed.
The sky, that had been dazzling stone all day,
Hollowed in smooth hard brightness, now dissolved
To infinite soft depth, and smoulder'd down
Low as the roofs, dark burning blue, and soared
Clear to that winking drop of liquid silver,
The first exquisite star. Now the half-light
Tidied away the dusty litter parching
Among the cobbles, veiled in the colour of distance
Shabby slates and brickwork mouldering, turn'd
The hunchback houses into patient things
Resting ; and golden windows now began.

A little brisk grey slattern of a woman,
Pattering along in her loose-heel'd clogs,

Twelve Idyls

Pusht the brass-barr'd door of a public house.
The spring went hard against her ; hand and knee
Shoved their weak best. As the door poised ajar,
Hullabaloo of talking men burst out,
A pouring babble of inflamed palaver ;
And overriding it and shouted down,
High words, jeering or passionate, broken like
Crests that leap and stumble in rushing water.
Just as the door went wide and she stept in,
" She cannot do it ! " one was bawling out:
A glaring hulk of flesh with a bull's voice.
He finger'd with his neckerchief, and stretcht
His throat to ease the anger of dispute ;
Then spat to put a full stop to the matter.
The little woman waited, with one hand
Propping the door, and smiled at the loud man.
They saw her then ; and the sight was enough
To gag the speech of every drinker there :
The din fell down like something chopt off short.
Blank they all wheel'd towards her, with their
mouths
Still gaping as though full of voiceless words.
She let the door slam to ; and all at ease,

Witchcraft: New Style

Amused, her smile wrinkling about her eyes,
Went forward : they made room for her quick
enough.

Her chin just topt the counter ; she gave in
Her bottle to the pot-boy, tuckt it back,
Full of bright tawny ale, under her arm,
Rapt down the coppers on the planisht zinc,
And turned : and no word spoken all the while.

The first voice, in that silent crowd, was hers,
Her light snickering laugh, as she stood there
Pausing, scanning the sawdust at her feet.
Then she switcht round and faced the positive man
Whose strong " She cannot do it ! " all still felt
Huskily shouting in their guilty ears.

" She can't, eh ? She can't do it ? "—Then she'd
heard !

The man, inside his ruddy insolent flesh,
Had hoped she did not hear. His barrel chest
Gave a slight cringe, as though the glint of her
eyes

Prickt him. But he stood up to her awkwardly bold,
One elbow on the counter, gripping his mug
Like a man holding on to a post for safety.

Witchcraft: New Style

The Woman : Running : unless
He's broke his leg, and then he'll have to come
Crawling : but he will come.

First Man : How do you know
What he may choose to do, three counties off ?

The Woman : He choose ?

Third Man : You haven't got him on a lead.

The Woman : Haven't I though !

Second Man : That's right ; it's what I said.

The Woman : Ay, there are brains in your family.

First Man : You have
Some sort of pull on him, to draw him home ?

The Woman : You may say that : I have hold of
his mind.

And I can slack it off or fetch it taut,
And make him dance a score of miles away
An answer to the least twangling thrum
I play on it. He thought he lurkt at last
Safely ; and all the while, what has he been ?
An eel on the end of a night-line ; and it's time
I haul'd him in. You'll see, to-night I'll land him,

Third Man : Bragging's a light job.

The Woman : You daren't let me take

Twelve Idyls

Your eyes in mine !—Haul, did I say ? no need :
I give his mind a twitch, and up he comes
Tumbling home to me. Whatever work he's at,
He drops the thing he holds like red-hot iron
And runs—runs till he falls down like a beast
Pole-axt, and grunts for breath ; then up and on,
No matter does he know the road or not :
The strain I put on his mind will keep him going
Right as a homing-pigeon.

First Man : Devilry

I call it.

The Woman : And you're welcome.

Second Man : But the law
Should have a say here.

The Woman : What, isn't he mine,
My own ? There's naught but what I please about
it.

Third Man : Why did you let him go ?

The Woman : To fetch him back !
For I enjoy this, mind. There's many a one
Would think, to see me, " There goes misery !
There's a queer starveling for you !"—and I do
A thing that makes me like a saint in glory,

Witchcraft: New Style

And the life seem to sound in me like a tune
You could never imagine : I can send power
Delighting out of me ! O, the mere thought
Has made my blood go smarting in my veins,
Such a flame glowing along it !—And all the same
I'll pay him out for sidling off from me.
But Til have supper first.

When she was gone,
Their talk could scarcely raise itself again
Above a grumble. But at last a cry
Sharp-pitcht came startling in from the street: at
once

Their moody talk exploded into flare
Of swearing hubbub, like gunpowder dropt
On embers ; mugs were clapt down, out they bolted
Rowdily jostling, eager for the event.

All down the street the folk throng'd out of doors,
But left a narrow track clear in the middle ;
And there a man came running, a tall man
Running desperately and slowly, pounding
Like a machine, so evenly, so blindly ;
And regularly his trotting body wagg'd.

In the Dunes

In the Dunes

BRIGHT-MINDED were they both, the boy
and girl ;
Mirror'd in steel the world gleamed on their lives.
But each took now only the other's brightness,
Each burnisht mind turned wholly to its fellow ;
While in between, and far into lucid depths,
Their love burnt white, unwavering poise of flame
Infinitely reflected back and forth.

They were among the dunes : valleys of sand,
And little alps of sand scarp'd clean and sheer,
Whose fretting cliffs the wind still quarried down
To banks that slurred in landslide at a step.
The air was gentle, but as white as rime
With sea-fret, that came vapouring inland
Placidly and slowly on a warm breeze,—
Clinging along the ground, and smelling keen
As camphor. Light was shadowless and blancht

Twelve Idyls

Dissolved in it ; unless, far out at sea,
A tarnisht glare lay like a bar of brass,
The gleam of hidden sunshine, when the fog
Rifted and closed again. The tide was in ;
It swayed a lazy pulse along the beach,
And drew the pebbles down purring and clucking
In shallow lapse of ripples—the noise stole
About the dunes soft as the stroking of silk.

They loiter'd, with the warm mist blank around
them.

She : A stranger would be lost now. It's all one,
Right road or wrong road : the white fog gives way
And closes in behind, and you seem still
In the same place whichever way you go.

He : All the better for idling : no world left
But where we are, and we need none.

She : None left
But an old quiet sea murmuring somewhere,
Deserted by the other creatures.

He : Still
Thinking aloud of those courageous days
When there was stubborn land to quarrel with.

In the Dunes

She : We must belong to the sea then ; or why
* else

Should we stay hiding in its memory—
This whispering cloud of salty moist sea-smell—
When all the world beside has slipt away ?

He : When I'm inland, and I dream of the sea,
It always is a thing that comes to claim me ;
Or, as the other night, I am its captive.

She : Drown'd, were you ?

He : No ; walking upon the water
A good league from the land : the prisoner
Of some fierce tribe I might have been, set free
To watch the onslaught on his native town.
A high wind clamour'd there through bright blue
weather,

And on the flashing tide I paced, the foam
And rocking sunshine firm to tread as marble.
The waves went charging by me like crazed troops
Fanatic to die fighting, and the cliffs
Flung them, and their brothers trampled them ;
For the wind whoopt them on, and giant spray
Stood up like menacing priests in snowy gowns
And prophesied the conquest of the land.

Twelve Idyls

Then I was swimming : I had slipt my guard,
And made off in the press towards the land.
Like prairie-herds thundering head-down
The senseless charge swept on : no heed for me,
Though the shouting gale that sat the high-curv'd
 crests
Pulled at their spindrift manes and knee'd their
 withers,
But could not turn them ; and I won to shore,
And held as close to the rocks as if I'd been
Crucified to them. Then they saw my escape,
The waters ; then they leapt upon me raging,
And pouring down on me to scour me off
They became beasts : at ankle, hip, and shoulder
Hands wrencht with sinewy baboon fingers, mouths
Worried and tugg'd like wolves, the paws of bears
Cufft every sense in me stupid, rugged tails
Of alligators clubb'd me ; thick and lithe
Bodies like snakes beneath me prized : I felt them
Tighten and sleek and swell and shrug against me.
But I clung on, and clamber'd safely away.

She : High seas and shining wind ! This was a
 game

In the Dunes

Your brain was playing. I have dreamt of music
Capturing me ; I did not listen to it,
My mind past into sound like heaven's delight:
Your dream of sunlit waves and cloudless gale
Was nothing worse. But if you had been taken
By calm sea crooning to itself in mist,
You would have dreamt a sea-spell to be feared.

He : The sea means most when it is like to-day,
In hiding and very quiet ?—Yes ; it would be
Such a veil'd sea as this first gave the pattern
To that old tale I spoke of.

She : Read it me.

It's warm enough to linger here awhile.

He : " There was a wicked emperor in Rome ;
And when his body slept, his wickedness
Was waking still, and moved about his sleep
In likeness of the things his senses knew.
Sometimes a horse it would be, that would look
Winking upon him with old criminal eyes ;
Or a great toad, licking the wither'd smile
Of rusty lips that rimm'd the flattish face
With a red tongue like a man's, dripping with
pleasure ;

Twelve Idyls

And men and women frantic with desire
To be strange in sin, and all hopelessly frantic,
Were usual visitors. Or it might be
He saw a mountain towering in its furs
Of forest and bright cape of folded snow ;
And, staring on it, suddenly to his eyes
The mountain turned obscene, a squatted hunch,
Bald hardy pate and fell of brutish hair,
Brooding some impossible lickerish greed.
This was the wicked emperor's punishment.
Awake, he was his own insatiate self;
Asleep, the whole world came and lookt at him
Wickedly : wickedness would not let him be.

" And once he dreamt he saw an ancient man
With sorrowful shaggy face, laboriously
Footing towards him, clad in restless grey ;
Up out of a grey fume of mist he trudged,
And his clothes hung on him like sopping things.
And like a fisherman who hauls a seine
With shoulders roped, plodding up the loose beach,
The stooping old man came, and after him
He lugg'd a trailing heaviness of broad
Swaying enormous water, that rebelled

In the Dunes

Behind him, and in whiten'd fury swashing
Plunged like a netted beast. It was the sea,
The ancient ghost of the sea, come with his toil
Of everlasting water to confer
With him whose life dragg'd after it loads of lust.
The ghost stood panting ; noise of broken waves
Shouted past him : a smell like stale salt weed
Came from his sloven clothes of tatter'd foam
And caught the emperor's disgusted throat.
He kept both arms back to one shoulder crookt
To clutch his tightest on the rope, and leant
In forward strain against the bellowing
Ceaseless revolt of vast unwilling sea ;
And ridged along his hands there was a gleam
Of silver and green scale, and on his cheeks
The skin was like the belly of a fish,
Glistening white and moist ; and clotted spume
Made him his drooping rags of beard. The dream
Bowed to the emperor, and as he bowed
His eyes lookt up and leered ; and instantly
The emperor knew the secret of the sea.

" Suppose a man driven into his trade,
Like a wedge hammer'd to the butt and held

Twelve Idyls

By the tough timber's pinch—one of the tools
His ruthless country must by thousands ply
To split and frame its fortune as it needs :
Suppose the helpless fasten'd man, his life
(All but imagination) fixt in work
And still forced deeper into duty, lets
His useless mind fly abroad in pleasures,
Fly in delights ; the firmer he is gript,
The more his fancy takes the scope of frenzy ;
Till his brain glows a gaiety of sin
His graspt incapable life can only love
In notions of anguishing desire. Just so
It was with this old spectre of the sea :
Bound in an endless task, spending his tides
Still in the great purpose of all the world ;
No will allowed him but to thrust and pull
Like engine strokes his weight of ocean water,
Grinding the coasts of the earth with waves, to
pile
New shingle on worn beaches otherwhere ;
And all to him mere blank and senseless toil,
No use, no meaning ; till the sea at last
Out of the ages of his slavery

In the Dunes

Imagined his escaping will, in dreams
Of exquisitely speculated sin,
Immense and accurate abomination,
The quintessential wickedness that could
Finally satisfy lust, even the sea's.
But all was mood and impotence ; and now
He came, poorly consoling his despair,
To lend the emperor's mind the darling splendour
Of his invention ; to watch it in the act,
Radiant, dilating, though in another ;
Its passion welling liberal as the sun
Utters his flame, but shapely in delight
And crystalline as vapour caught by frost :
The one perfectly calculated sin
Performed at last, no longer secret vision.

" But nothing could be done of this : no words
Could pass, no understanding. There they stayed
Fixt in a quivering gaze while yearning ached
In both like perishing, the dream to teach,
The dreamer to be taught. Still the sea's eyes
Burn'd at the emperor ; the man knew in them
That science blazing which his heart so long
Had of his brain implored ; the Perfect Sin

Twelve Idyls

Was there, beseeching to be known and loved.
He had a thundering vision of himself
Shuddering and grinning, sighing and clenching,
In a torment of bliss ; and like pufft flame
The glimpse went out; and there the staring sea
Croucht dumb and baffled ; the green rage of his
eyes

Grew to a glaring flood of icy fire,
Drowning the man in horrible flaming water ;
And vast malignant green roar'd over him
Till all was deaf and blind.

" The emperor woke ;—
To labour his old dull routine of evil,
And drudge in habits of familiar sin."

She : This is just havoring. My old peevisish aunt
Is guinea-gold with jaundice, and her sight
Stains the whole world about her dismal yellow ;
Your emperor was like that. There's no real evil.

He : Pah ! How the sea-fret thickens !

She : And the chill
Now coming through it !

He : Choking thick ! It seems
To deafen now as well as blind.

The Six Men of Calais

Eustache Saint-Pierre the Mayor

Jacques de Wissant

Pierre de Wissant '

Jean d'Aire

Jean de Fiennes

Andrieu d'Andres

The Six Men of Calais

Eustache Saint-Pierre

HAVE done, Jean de Fiennes : loosen her arms !
Leave go, you wench ! Do you want him
blubbering ?

Death ! if there's any good thing to be done
The women put their meddling in and spoil it.

Jean de Fiennes

She's my sweetheart.

Eustache Saint-Pierre

You should have thought of that:
We can't go snivelling to the English camp.—
Stand back, you folks ! And hold your howling, do !
No need for you to tell the grinning English
We're on the road.—Now form up, two and two :
I will go first with old Andrieu d'Andres,
Then the two brothers, Jacques and Pierre de
Wissant,
Last the two Jeans, d'Aire and de Fiennes.

Twelve Idyls

So : here's some kind of order. Now, sirs, tramp,
Tramp and look steady : and hold your halters up,
Else if you trip on them you'll jerk your necks
Before the time.—The devil bite these people !
Gangway, there, for the Lord's sake ! My bare
feet

Ache on the stones and my legs are shuddering
In this cold wind.—Step along briskly, now :
Let's get outside this caterwauling town ;
I'd liefer far be hanged than cried upon.

Jacques de Wtssant

You'll be hanged soon enough : the scaffold's ready.
I watcht them from my window framing it.

*Andrieu d*Andres*

Much to be said for a formal mind, Saint-Pierre.
Here am I now, chanting over and over
Inside my head like a child with a nursery rhyme,
" This can't be me, and by God, it is, it's me ! "
And wondering what a hanging may be like :
And all the trouble for you is, how to make
Six chilly men with only shirts to wear
Walk like a procession.

The Six Men of Calais

Eustache Saint-Pierre

You're out of step.

Andrieu d' Andres

Ay, we must keep in step ! That's the great thing
For men who are mightily afraid they'll feel
The swooping fear of death land on their shoulders.

Pierre de Wissant

Speak for yourself : I think nothing of death.

Jacques de Wissant

No ; you're too busy play-acting to think.

Pierre de Wissant

Is it play-acting that this halter makes me
A prouder man than a king's jewel could ?

Jacques de Wissant

O keep all that for your speech to the king of
England.

Eustache Saint-Pierre

His speech ? I'm spokesman here, mind ; I'm
the Mayor.

Pierre de Wissant

Citizens of Calais, weep not for us.

Twelve Idyls

Enough for us we save you ; you shall see,
Once we are past this little cloud of death,
Our names are launcht on such a towering flight
The sun goes not so high.

Eustache Saint-Pierre

Come on, come on.

What death is I don't know ; but a cold wind
Lifting my shirt and trifling round my belly
I'm knowing now too well.

Jean cTAire

To have us come

Half-naked, with halter'd necks ! These barbarous
English !

Jacques de Wissant

Good hangmen, though.

*Andrieud*Andres*

Yes, queer how sharp a score
Small things will make on the mind of a dying man.
This creeping of the wind along my skin,
Like icy moths pushing the hairs aside—
It might be diamond cutting a mark on glass,
I note it so : and vastly more somehow

The Six Men of Calais

It means to note this now, even than to be
Marvelling how I got my mind made up—
Or why—to let an English hangman choke me.

Jean d'Aire

Half-naked, with halter'd necks ! Barbarous
people !

Eustache Saint-Pierre

Look out, behind ! The street's a patch of muck.

Andrieu d'Andres

Ah, you remind me: they are still mine down there,
Those feet—and what a long way down they are,
Picking their steps so gingerly ! I'm sure
That's not my doing : myself, I should not bother
To go so nicely on my way to be hanged,
But barefoot stamp ahead as if I were shod.

Jacques de Wissant

Old Andrieu will be talking. The wise man
Is Fiennes : he knows there's nothing to be said,
And keeps his mouth shut.

Eustache Saint-Pierre

Ay, there was a girl ;

I had to pull him from her.

Twelve Idyls

Andrieu d'Andres

O let him go !

Nothing should ever get the better of love !

Saint-Pierre, can you not let him go ?

Eustache Saint-Pierre

Too late.

Jean de Fiennes

Too late ?—Ay, too late I knew she was mine.

Andrieu d'Andres

The worst thing yet!—Pierre's gone very quiet.

Jacques de Wissant

Yes, the play-actor finding the play real.

Pierre de Wissant

I am ashamed.

Eustache Saint-Pierre

What's that ? Ashamed ? And cheeks

Grey as my beard !—Now dear God send we have

No trouble with the fellow !

Pierre de Wissant

I'm going to spew.

Andrieu d'Andres

Good lad ! Why not ?

The Six Men of Calais

Jacques de Wissant

For God's sake mind my legs.—
He has no business here ! It was all wrong
To take the young fool!

Andrieu d'Andres

Nonsense : he's as hearty
As any of us now.—But you know, Pierre,
That was a nobler stuff than all your speeches.

Jacques de Wissant

Who's splashing now ?—Why, look at the Mayor
Trampling the puddles dry like a man blindfolded !

Andrieu d'Andres

There's some remarkable study going on
Behind that frown, Saint-Pierre : what are you lost
in?

Eustache Saint-Pierre

Trying to make out what the deuce to say
To the English king ! I talk like a simpleton
Unless I have my speech square in my head.

Jacques de Wissant

No pleading with the beast! I'll give you all
The speech you want: tell him to go to hell.

Twelve Idyls

Eustache Saint-Pierre

I'll sting him, if you'll hold your tongue a little.

Jean cTAire

To have us come half-naked, with halterM necks !
Barbarous ! These barbarous English !

Asmodeus in Egypt

Asmodeus in Egypt

STUPID on the sand, like a stoned bird,
With his limp wings languishing, lay Asmodeus;
The vast dazzling grey of desert ground
Like a speck took the size of the sprawling spirit.
A brindled locust, when its brittle membranes
Flames of the bonfires the brass-beating farmers
Kindle, have caught and crippled with shrivelling :
Such a lame locust the demon lay.
And such a scorching, that sent him tumbling,
Ecbatan to Egypt, in ungovernable flight,
Such a withering and blasting, till his blunders
ended
In a stunning fall furrowing the sand,
Such bitter passion as a burnt thing passes through—
The smell of the smoke of smouldering fish :
Suffocating frenzy to the sensitive fiend,
Ransacking agony and ruin like flame.
But long time lying in the sunlight of Egypt
And odourless air of the empty place,

Twelve Idyls

From the wreck of his members and his reeking
memory

The drench of the poison was purified, and past.
Shuddering out of senselessness the swoon'd life
crept;

But lamentable life now, for all it was cleansed :
His grief still a story astonishing his mind.

" I saw them coming, I saw the young men
Rejoicing in their journey, and jolly with their dog,
I sitting on the roof above' Sara's room.

I knew not their minds, they were nothing to me :
Handsome young men, in the honey-yellow light,
With Median evening mingled in their hair,
Making pelt for pebbles the pretty shock dog.

I lookt at their beauty and boasted lazily :
Seven such fine fellows have these fingers strangled,
Seven bride-grooms lie buried in graves,
Seven such glitterers are secrets in the garden ;
No housing for you here, you handsome young men !

" But were they wizards, that my wantoning
mood,
Chattering within me, could challenge like a voice ?
Did a magical hearing quiver in their minds,

Asmodeus in Egypt

As through to them my thought thrill'd along the
light ?

For they came marching in. They made a marriage.
And I knew nothing, I knew not their mastery ;
Nothing I reckoned but the rage in me again
To deal like a demon with the flesh that dared
Come lusting for the slenderness of my delight, my
Sara.

So I laught and I waited ; I lookt through the
window,

And in the dark garden lo ! the digging of a grave :
Raguel making ready where to roll the morning
corpse,

Like a sensible father, seven times instructed.
Ay, old sir, said I, more strangling to be done,
More mould to be stampt down before the market
stirs !

But I knew nothing : not when the new bridegroom,
My frightened Sara faltering before him,
Brought in his nastiness, nothing I knew ,
Not even when he pickt from out his fulsome pocket
His filthy handful of offal of a fish,
And the brown morsel in the brazier's midmost,

Twelve Idyls

With a little prim smile, prest well upon the coals,
I knew not his mastery, I rankling for his murder.

" Ah ! then, then I knew—nay, then I knew
nothing

But anguish and anguish through me like lightning,
And a leap aloft like letting fly a catapult,
And the stink after me up to the stars ;
Then the long crazy glide of me, crumpled and
corroded,

In swerves and somersaults spinning to the ground.

" O my Master ! O manifold Energy
Hallowed in Hell ! Holy one, Beelzebub,
Prince the most popular of power on earth !
Innumerable nature, the nation of the flies,
But one demonic majesty, one multiplying fiend !
Curse me my vanity, come with a vengeance
Of destruction swarming on the strength of my
folly !

Commander and unmaker of all made things,
Lord of the flesh, loosening it into flight
Of vanishing vapour, invisible pestilence :
Putrefy my folly like liquescent flesh,
And let it go wandering in ghost about the world !

Asmodeus in Egypt

Make ministers of rottenness to feed in my mind :
Be a season of flies there, and my sore folly
A festering beast in it ! Be great in me, Beelzebub !
Eat up my pleasure in my one precious sense,
Consume my yearning for a lust beyond it,
Rid me of the dreams that enchanted the darkness
Solomon sealed me in, with the sea's weight over :
Devour the vile dreams that could infect a fiend
With fanatic zeal of desire impossible—
Sensuous pleasure craving more sense to please,
A demon's mind living in that ignominy of men,
Imagination ! But Master, my Beelzebub,
Make thy Asmodeus once more pure breath
Of intellectual being, the boundless simplicity
Of spirit serene above sense and feeling,
Incuriously perfect in pleasureless knowledge.

" For with good words God gave me dismissal ;
Yet crookedly, I doubt, and craftily kind :
' Ay, have thou for holiday awhile my earth ;
Scandalize to thy liking there, be scurrile all thou
canst,
Naught thou wilt devise but like virtue will serve
me:

Twelve Idyls

Nothing on my earth may move in other scope.
But earth must be in thee, lest thou strain my
exquisite

Articulate contrivance, intruding all unearthly.
Thou must learn to go grossly in negotiating sense,
And mix the strange appetite of mortal perceiving
With spirit's speculation. But a single sense
Shall be thy passport of pleasure and pain :
Take thy choice, and I will touch thee with it !'

" I studied ; and the sense of purest pleasure,
The least intelligent, to life of a spirit
Faculty most foreign and remotest amusement,
I chose, I assumed—man's absolute sense :
And for sojourn on earth became a spirit that could
smell.

" Master, I was marvellous ! I loved myself !
And the piercing surprisals of pleasure in my sense
I worshipt—a wild thing, wandering continually
In solitary ravishment, smelling the earth :
Herbage on the hills, in the hedges lilies,
Warm winds at sea, spices in the desert,
Peaks icily sheathed, shadowing pines at noon :
No counting the delights of my lonely flying

Asmodeus in Egypt

Through the fragrance of the earth—the fibres of a
spirit

In delicious stress of the sense of a man,
Tremulous with subtly traversing pulses.

" Ah, but the terror, the tearing amazement,
The dividing of life, the lurch and whirl
Of giddy disgust, the goading for leagues—
Ah, the filthy anguish of stinking places !

" But nothing of that. One notable joy
I found and kept : from cruising daylong
In sunshine odours, and under the stars
Enquiring for scents cool hours entice,
Always at morning I made towards Lebanon,
To drink where a dark cleft drips, confiding
Its secret water (a well as black
And still as the mind of a stunn'd man)
To a noiseless intent conspiracy of cedars.
But the chasm to me, coming with dawn
Smouldering after me, crystalline smell
Of living rock-water would welcoming send—
Message sweeter to meet than sweetness,
Freshening even the mountain morning—
And wash me keen for the morrow's worship.

Twelve Idyls

" But once strange savour seized me returning,
And far off the fright of it stung like fire :
A luxury of fragrance fuming and glowing
Into my mind, tormenting sweetness,
Corrupting the limpid Lebanon twilight.
My spirit, expecting purity of water,
Cringed in the air ; and there crept through the
scent

My loathing, the musty handling of men.
I fled, and my thirst refrained three dawns.
But each day reluctantly longer and nearer
To hover, the dizzying odour drew me :
Till I drank the well—I drained the wine
Crafty King Solomon for a bait to catch me,
Stealing my treasure of water, had stored in it.
Drunk and manacled, down to Solomon
The ruffians carted me for him to question.
But I held my tongue. Like a hound he had me
Still at his heels, standing or following,
His humble animal—Hell's Asmodeus !—
But answering nothing : though I knew well
To loose the riddle his wisdom writhed in,
And give him his temple of great wrought stone

Asmodeus in Egypt

No metal had toucht, mallet or chisel.
I knew, from my nice exploring for novelty
Fragrantly growing in highland ground,
The workman he wanted—the small fierce worm,
Shamir', that rasps rock for his food,
With engraving tongue licking it glassy,
Granite and basalt burnishing and grooving.
But when Solomon perceived I would not speak,
He thrust me in a jar and throttled the mouth of it
With a mystical emerald he moulded like wax,
And wrote his name and anger across it,
And put the sea for a sentry over me.

" Yet crafty King Solomon, cunning fiend-
trapper,

Guesst not my punishment in the pit of the sea.
He found me a fiend with that folly trifling
Men call pleasure—playing with a sense,
And making much of its amusing ecstasy :
I once the dignity of a demon's intelligence,
Undelighted, undiscursive, instantaneously
expatiating.

Did I grieve for my spirit so long degraded
In the small rapture of a sense's greed :

Twelve Idyls

Ay, now through its greed degraded to the grave
Of all event but ineffectual shame ?
Or think you I longed for my darling loss,
Remembering noon meadows, morning on Lebanon,
Salt sea-beaches—all the sweet-breathing earth :
Now an abject sealed for centuries of nonentity,
In the bottom of existence buried by a man ?—
Nay, for a fiend infected he buried me,
Infected by the spectacle of Solomon's pleasure :
Dreams were shut in with me ; when he drowned
 my sepulchre
I was closeted with phantoms. A cloud full of
 thunder
Superbly persuades the mass of a mountain
To imitate the passion electric above it,
Disturbing the sleep of its inmost stone
To thrill like vapour with vehemence unuttered :
So Solomon's happiness with hidden dark fire
Had charged my being ; and it broke forth imagining
Continual lightning of dazzling lust,
Soon as I was fast in my senseless solitude.
My black abysm became a den of dreams ;
I was no cramp in the sea's depth sunk,

Asmodeus in Egypt

But a world of voluble fury of fantasy,
Wheeling apparition of impossible pleasure,
Passage so swift of spectres adorable
In dancing procession, alluring courtesy,
I could take no features of their flying faces.
A globe of incapable glorying desire
My spirit invented in the senseless sea ;
And I its creator like a crazy god
Doating on the inscrutable thing he has done.

" Then the spell broke and the seal burst open,
Solomon's malignity at the last perishing.
The black water quaked, the blind brute places
Roared with my freedom, and my rage triumphantly
Thundering up to be again a demon.
As if the ground of the sea broke, spouting with fire,
And the boiling of the gulf in one grand bubble
Exclaimed its smoke and steam to the air :
So swirling I arose, ravenous to please
My visionary appetite and vastly enjoy
Solomon's delight, a lover of women
Roaming the nations in innumerable marriages.
My scrutinizing quest quarter'd the earth
For my first feasting of my dream's desire ;

Twelve Idyls

And passing over Ecbatan the power possesst me
That Solomon lavisht his life to worship.

A Median girl on a marketing errand
Fixt in me her loveliness, and fetcht me circling
Down from the height of my spying to adore her :
As if a meteor should fall from its fiery curve,
Suddenly sloping the splendour of its mission
To fly low as a pigeon round loiterers' shoulders.

Invisibly obsequious I followed my Sara
Moving a spectre of music in front of me :
Music divined before hearing can feel it,
Promising the beauty my dream proposed,
And now to be loved and known and enjoyed !

" And still no delight ! Still deluded agonizing,
Worse than my dreams now, would not let me go I
I knew of beauty and a bliss calling me
To spend my life on it, spirit and sense :
It was there, the wonder, it was waiting for me
there ;

But beyond me, beyond me ! Detestably useless
My one wretched sense—all that idiot ranging
In pleasures sweet earth bestowed so easily,
That simple alacrity, my life of fragrance !

Asmodeus in Egypt

There was Sara to be loved : and I could not love
her!

No beauty for me, where I knew beauty was :
No meaning for me where marvellous meaning
I knew awaited worshipping sense.

In ravishing torture that took me voluptuously,
My speculating spirit burnt about her
In fiction of the bliss I could not find ;
But always recoiled in baffled concupiscence,
Mere imbecile lust, longing for sense
That could understand that symbol of love,
My inconceivably lovely Sara.

Ay, much that my misery of sense would suffer
Faithfully the odour of female flesh—
Nay, like it at last ! But at least this
I would not bear—bridegrooms libidinous
With senses impudently able before me,
The delighted loving of lusty young men !
But Sara was not loved : my strangling was their
marriage.

" All ended now ! And my worthless sense
Flung with disgusting injury grovelling
Back to stale things at the bidding of a stench.

Twelve Idyls

Those conjurers came ; they caught me unaware
With their filthy mischief; and nothing fortunate
Remains on earth, now they have made me
Abandon my anguish, my beauty's phantom,
My love of unimaginable love, my Sara.

" But take me out of earth ! Take from my
nature

Sense and the mankind curse of pleasure,
The craving of sense ; and my crippled speculation
Restore to a fiend's unfeeling sanity
Of lucidly spacious spiritual knowledge
That knows no desire, for beyond it nothing is.
Beelzebub, my lord ! Let me live no more
In that glamour of men, that gleaming superstition,
Beauty, so shiftily brightening and shaping
The clouds of sense that enclose and bemuse
Man's wistful mind—and my mind, Beelzebub !
The mind of thy demon ! O make me be done with
it!

Out of this earth of appetite desiring,
Beauty pretending, fantasy forging,
Take me, and give me reality again :
Once more the endless unmoved moment

Asmodeus in Egypt

Of pure reality, a spirit's experience
Perfectly circular, icily secure :
The infinite of all things for ever present
In one calm personal point of knowledge,
Itself to all things infinitely known."

So prayed the fiend to his pestilent master :
Who knows how answered ?—But if, of an evening,
In a thicketed place where thrushes and primroses
Celebrate spring, or in summer morning
When burnet-roses sweeten sea-breezes,
And the space of the dunes blows honey and spice,
You feel a spirit has fled before you :
It may be Asmodeus was modestly there
Smelling his solace ; but swift to shy
Continents away, if a man comes near.

Ham and Eggs

Ham and Eggs

A SKY like a dirty canvas tilt
Close on the earth hangs weighing down,
Where water heavy with inland silt
And filth of many a factory town,
Brown river mingling with drab sea,
Laps on the grey sand lazily :
The tide far out on the flat shore,
Slack sea and current come to terms.
A pier of a quarter mile or more,
On stilted footing splayed out wide—
Like a giant kind of those hated worms
With a fringe of legs on either side—
Steps wading through the soft mud-banks
On a hundred iron spindle-shanks
To the fairway where the ferries ply.
The listed boats, nigh toppling
With the press at the gangways, begin to bring
The Saturday-afternoon parade,

Twelve Idyls

With a few free hours and wages paid,
Jostling ashore on its way to buy
Some hasty pleasure. It throngs the pier
And mobs the turnstiles, crammed as tight
As bolting fish shoaled in a weir ;
Then out through the clicking brasswork jets,
Twitching its rumpled jackets aright,
And a dozen ways the current sets,
Everyone for his fancy bound :
Dancing, switchback, giddy-go-round,
Or to buy good luck at the gypsies' tent,
Or to muse, with a lordly blank content,
Upon three mangy slouching bears
In the dank bucket of their pound,
Padding the round theyVe padded for years.

But most of the holiday troops decide
For the coastwise pathway. On one side
They have, as they take their sauntering ways,
An endless reach of shallow tide ;
And sunlight filtering through fawn haze
Draws streaks and knots of glistering pale
Slippery lustre of mother-of-pearl

Ham and Eggs

On the paved expanse of airless sea :
Like the vagaries of loop and curl,
The faint bright varnish aimlessly
Trackt on a flagg'd walk by a snail.
But on the left side the path goes
Past tumble-down and shabby rows
Of sheds and booths and old marquees,
For dealing in stale gaieties :
Where a giggling crowd for a penny stares
At an oily nigger saying his prayers ;
Or in the clanging shooting-stalls
They fire skew rifles at little balls
Jumping about on water jets ;
Or cheer their glee when a girl upsets
Head-over-heels at end of her ride
Down the slope of the taut wire, slung
For the trolley to race its headlong glide,
She like a sack on her pull'd arms hung.

But eating-shops are commonest ;
And whether there be a special zest
In ham and eggs, their only fare,
Or some more potent trade thrive there,

Twelve Idyls

These flourish more than all the rest.
Frowsy within, dingy without ;
But mouldy finery litter'd about
On mantel-piece and table-top—
Knacks on fancy mats, and a crop
Of tufted grass dyed yellow and pink,
Busts of the King, and glass hand-bells—
With plush-framed panels of glued sea-shells
Pinn'd to the walls, seem meant to make
The munching customer rather think
He eats in a parlour than a shop.
At every door a girl, to take
Her daily gossip, lolls at ease,
Painted to make a parson blink,
And scented to make a foxhound sneeze.
Soon, when the loitering crowds begin,
With female clamour the air will shake,
Harsh as the sound of beaten tin,
Announcing tea and plates of fry ;
Lest heedless hunger ramble by
And lust for ham should not awake.
Let a young man one instant give
Notice to these fierce syllables,

Ham and Eggs

A wench will have him by the sleeve,
Whisper seriously in his ear,
And deftly show her petticoat frills.

But there is no trade yet come near.
The girls, posted to draw it in,
Idle awhile, and akimbo lean
Against the jambs of the doors, and throw
Cheerful scandalous banter about
In a reedy metallic effortless shout ;
Or vacantly watch the steamships go,
That forth into empty oceans glide
Like gods on placid grand affairs,
No more aware they coast beside
Small gazes at the water's edge
Than any thoughtful traveller cares
For ants and beetles in the hedge.

The girl, though, of the meanest shanty there,
Was late to lounge on duty, and the shop
Open'd without her its crazy blister'd door
Wide and inviting to the table laid.
Already news of frying ham crept out

Twelve Idyls

Hissing and savoury rank, and a slut bustled
In and out of the lean-to den at back
That served as kitchen. Even the music now
Struck up a jaunty racket : this was a neat
Black-drest black-bonneted meagre upright old lady,
With grey shawl tight across her shoulders scimpt,
Sitting, straight as a rod and iron-stiff,
Her back towards the door (" 'Tisn't your face
I'm hiring," she'd been tojd ; " turn on the tunes
And keep your face turned off : mind that.") She
held

The rigid corner of her skinny knees
As fixt as limbs fetter'd together ; and straight
As her spine was, her head was always leant
A little sideways, and one shoulder shrugged
Immovably up to it ; even her elbows prest
Firm on her waist as they'd been lasht there close ;
But nimble were her wrists and spry her fingers,
Never a moment flagging in their chase
Of imbecile gaiety. To and fro her hands
Went jangling wolfish chords and tinkling out
Silly flourishing airs ; while she herself,
Fast in her stiff black trance, her tilted head

Ham and Eggs

Held up in an unchanging muse to stare
Six inches over the piano-top at nothing,
Took from her wiry busily trifling hands
Not so much as a shiver.

A door bounced
Clattering open beside her at the back ;
It gave upon a flight of upward stairs.
The wench came flurrying in and slammed it to :
A plump pert rattling merry-hearted thing,
Bright with her own good fortune ; and that was,
To be alive. She skipt across and laid
Firm hold on the old lady's bony shoulders
And shook her stubborn pose ; but the gay hands
Went playing on. So the wench screwed her round ;
Those faithfully frivolous hands were only stopt
When the lean body they were jointed to,
But hardly seemed belonging to, was slued
Right from the key-board ; then they lay in her lap
And twitched uneasy fingers, as a dog
That lately hunted sleeps with jerking paws.

The Wench : The bone of you !—Remind me, the
next time

Ham and Eggs

The Wench : It would be somebody else if it
wasn't me :

I said, have sense.

The Old Lady : Will you never have sense
How this painting your face and dressing up
Makes your life, that should be your very own,
Common as open ground ?—When workmen cut
A short way to their jobs over a field,
It's very soon the grass is trodden dirt.

The Wench : You skeleton ! Calling me dirt !
And who
Keeps the procession brisk with rousing tunes ?

The Old Lady : No need for that taunt : hot
and bitter to me
As scalding poison to be doing this.

The Wench : O look ! Tribes already !—While
we're in talk
Good money's slipping past us, running to waste
Round you go and vamp us a spanking piece.

A slap and a twisting push left the old lady
Instantly stiffen'd into her posture again,
Her thin back turned severe against the door

Twelve Idyls

With canted head and slightly lifted gaze,
And arms tucked in ; her diligent weaving hands
Might never have paused : back in their dainty pace
Off tript her fingers impudently jingling
Tinsel music to brighten the seduction
The wench was hoarsely busy with outside,
Snatching at likely passengers and shrugged
Laughingly off a dozen times before
She found her game. A young man, cap awry
To show his grease-lickt forelock, let her grasp
Stay a few seconds on his arm, and felt
Somehow a vague and pleased importance from it.

She knows him hers before he is sure
Himself what his mind is ; and towards the door
She has him dragged, and is whispering,
Hugging him down, some cockering thing.
The delicate bloom of her bared arm greeting
His skin with its fine warm youth, her scent,
Her side against him, her merriment,
Set his heart dizzily beating
Burning blood through every vein ;
And, startling along his nerves, delight

Ham and Eggs

Flashes trembling into his brain.
Flesh clothes his spirit in flame star-white
One lightning moment—flame of the fire
That carries splendour of worlds like flakes
Of darkening slag ; and swift as it came
The brightness dulls—a moment slakes
Flesh that wrapt him in thrilling flame
To flesh that is earth and mere desire.
Now it is easy work, and she
May bend as she likes his waxen will ;
He yields, but he goes sulkily,
And makes her seem to hale him still.

The Wench : Come along, innocent.

The Youth : I'm not innocent.

The Wench : You won't be so stand-offish after
tea.

The Youth : I don't want any tea.

The Wench : You'll want plenty

Once you have bitten into our ham,

The Youth : I don't
Fancy your fry.

The Wench : Are you in dread of thirst ?

Twelve Idyls

The Youth : Ay, in a teashop.

The Wench : You wait till you sniff
The tea I'll brew you, and see if you don't wish
You'd shipwreckt in the tropics and brought home
The thirst of it undamaged. And the thing is,
What's cooking in the kitchen now is just
The image of that thirst, the spitting image.

The Youth : Tea's not my style.

The Wench : O, I can size you up.—
How's that ?

The Youth : Whatever have you put in it ?

The Wench : Look in the milk-jug.

The Youth : Whisky !

The Wench : You didn't think
To meet your old friend here !—Now for the fry :
Chew it up well and get the good of it !

The Youth : By God ! The good you call it !
Brim me my cup,
Sharp, with the whisky, for a cool long drink.

The brine in deep-sea shrimps were sweet
To the smart pickle of that meat ;
The thirst of labour in blazing sun

Ham and Eggs

Were cool and smooth to the rage begun
With the first bite, in gullet and mouth ;
And soon a tingling parching drouth
Flayed his throat as though it had been
Dried with quicklime, raspt by shagreen.
And cup after cup laced generously
Liquor'd his nettled palate, till he
Grew easy-minded and talkative,
And often sprawled aside to give
The wench a fondling slack caress,
Twixt mouthfuls of his salty mess.

And still that gaunt demure old lady, set
In visionary rigour, kept her mind
Averted, and her awkward figure still
As ebony carving, while her active hands
Danced lightly over the notes in trivial airs.

The Youth : Does she go by steam ?

The Wench : She's a curio.

But she can play.

The Youth : Pretty well, pretty well.

Who put the poker down her back ?

Twelve Idyls

The Wench : She's daft.
She's hazed herself with hours of sitting still
And strumming in black clothes. If I slid out
And left the lights full on she'd play till morning.—
And where do you work ?

The Youth : I'm in a builder's yard.
I'm in the joinery-sheds, where saws and planes
And moulders and the rest spin the whole day,
Chattering and growling and squalling.

The Wench : Are they machines ?
I thought such things were tools you carry about.

The Youth : We're all machinery in the sheds.
The roof
Is full of rumbling axles, and you walk
Dodging the flapping criss-cross of the belts
That bring the power slanting to the benches.
I run a morticing machine myself.

The Wench : Are any Jews in your shop ?

The Youth : Ay, there's one.
I'm down on Jews ; I owe them something bitter.
This one cuts wood-blocks at a circular saw ;
A dirty Jew ! Dirt ? There is just one spot
That he keeps clean. Where do you think it is ?

Twelve Idyls

Swore black was white, that I was at my bench.

The Wench : Well, shall we go upstairs ?

The Youth : Here's to free love !

For tipsy enough she reckoned him by this
To let her sneaking hands unheeded go
Ransacking through his pockets while he bent
In earnest all his mind on fuddled lust.
She steadied him across the floor and steered
His lurches to the stairs, cuddling so close
That her embrace, before they were half-way,
Learnt the likely pockets for her to rummage.
They had a giggling scuffle to get through
The doorway ; and for all she dipt him firm
And braced herself to hold him, he reeled off
So wide, he nearly stagger'd in her chair
That wistfully unalterable old lady
Keeping her tunes cheerily jigging along
Like clockwork ; but no flicker changed her gaze
Yonderly upward at the wallpaper,
No muscle for the scrimmage at her side
Slackened a moment in her angular
Steadfast unconcern. And still she sat

Ham and Eggs

In the same empty unmoving speculation,
And still her fingers went the same glib gait,
Pouncing delicately, after the wench
Had hauled her sot upstairs.

A little girl
Ran frightenM from outside into the shop,
Calling as she ran, " Miss Cissy ! Miss Cissy ! "
Her breath, from racing there, caught in her throat,
And her voice hardly shrilled above the old lady's
Never-ending trickle of giddy noise.
But the wench heard and hurried down ; the youth
Came lungeing after her, tripping himself
At every step, and loutishly stood by.
And still the serene old lady prettily played.

The Wench : Didn't I tell you never to come
again ?

The Child : But it's your mother, miss.

The Wench : Now you trot back :
Tell her from me Til not be harried here.
I've had enough of her to-day.

The Child : But, miss,
She's dead.

Ham and Eggs

Til pick up easy money on my own.
Keep up your heart and give them lovely tunes.

And she and the child were gone. But looking like
Bewilder'd terror now the old lady gaped
After them, and a gleam of frantic passion
Leapt to her eyes swift as a spark from steel ;
Then quencht. And gently to herself she said,
" So she's the one to escape. She would, of course."

The young man suddenly roused out of his daze :
Where was free love ?—He'd lost his chance somehow!
He shoved himself upright away from the wall
Where he had propt his swimming shoulders, stood
Quavering, and then propt himself again
With arms in front, leaning over a table.
He shouted, " Do you mean to swindle me ?
She'd made me pay her, up there on the stairs.
I'll tell the police ! I'll have the law on you ! "

Then the old lady, clenching her lips, and staling
With wide pale eyes at him, slowly stood up,
Decent and black, and very lean and tall.
She must have clutcht her head, for, if it was

Twelve Idyls

The first time in her life, her bonnet now
Tipt ridiculously awry. She reacht
Her hand out for a pot of scarlet grasses,
And poised it ready to shy. " Get out ! " she said,
Very quietly. But 'twas the look of her
That startled him like drenching icy water :
" God love me ! I've lit among the maniacs ! "
He stumbled out, anxiously eyeing her.

So she sat down again. As if she had been
A puppet carefully lower'd on to the chair,
Her limbs folded themselves precise and stiff
Back into her strict attitude again :
With shoulders huncht a little, leaning head,
And elbows squeezed tight in against a waist
Straight as a plank. Unmoving she sat on,
Lonely and prim, lost in a gaze at nothing.

" Another one will come to take her place ;
And I shall still be here, luring them in."

Her hands strayed to the keyboard, hesitated,
Fumbled softly, and then ran off in trills
And graces of a skipping flighty tune

Ryton Firs

For
David, Michael, Ralph

Ryton Firs

DEAR boys, they've killed our woods : the ground
Now looks ashamed, to be shorn so bare ;
Naked lank ridge and brooding mound
Seem shivering cowed in the April air.

They well may starve, hills that have been
So richly and so sturdily fleeced !
Who made this upland, once so green,
Crouch comfortless, like an ill-used beast ?

There was a fool who had pulled fierce faces
At his photographer thirty years ;
He swore, Now I'll put you through your paces,
Jaegers, Uhlans, and Grenadiers !

Was he to blame ? Or the looking-glass
That taught him his moustachioes ?
How could that joke for an Attila pass ?
Who was to blame ? Nobody knows.

He but let loose the frantic mood
That toppled Europe down pell-mell;
It rippled against our quietude,
And Ryton Firs, like Europe, fell.

Twelve Idyls

Now the axe hews, the bill-hook lops.
The owls have flown to Clifford's Mesne,
The foxes found another copse ;
The badger trotted to Mitcheldean.

But where is our cool pine-fragrance fled ?
Where now our sun-fleckt loitering hours,
Wading in yellow or azure or red,
Daffodil, bluebell, foxglove flowers ?

Where is our spring's woodland delight
To scatter her small green fires like dew ?
Our riding, a blade of golden light
Cleaving our summer shade in two ?

The wind comes noiseless down the hill
That once might just have left the sea,
And would our Glostershire windows fill
With a sound like the shores of Anglesey.

The poor trees, all undignified,
Mere logs, that could so sing and gleam,
Laid out in long rows side by side
Across the sloping ground, might seem

A monstrous inarch of rugged brown
Caterpillars, gigantically
Over the hill-top swarming down
To browse their own lopt greenery.

Ryton Firs

The last we saw of our lovely friends !
Cannibal grubs !—Then came the wains
To cart them off ; their story ends
Not upright still in the winds and the rains

(As tall trees hope to end) at sea,
In graces drest that whiter shine
Than glittering winter : no, but to be
Props in a Glamorgan mine.

So come : where once we loved their shade,
We'll take their ghost an offering now.
Here is an image I have made :
Guarini and Tasso showed me how.

.

Ryton Firs are alive again ! And I
In the heart of them am happy once again !

All round the knoll, on days of quietest air,
Secrets are being told : if it were high wind,
And the talk of the trees as loud as roaring drums,
Still't would be secrets, shouted instead of whisper'd,

There must have been a warning given once :
" No tree, on pain of withering and sawfly,
To reach the slimmest of his snaky toes

Twelve Idyls

Into this mounded sward and rumple it;
All trees stand back : taboo is on this soil."—

The trees have always scrupulously obeyed.
The grass, that elsewhere grows as best it may,
Under the larches, countable long nesh blades,
Here in clear sky pads the ground thick and close
As wool upon a Southdown wether's back ;
And as in Southdown wool, your hand must sink
Up to the wrist before it finds the roots.
A bed for summer afternoons, this grass ;
But in the spring, not too softly entangling
For lively feet to dance on, when the green
Flashes with daffodils. From Marcle way,
From Dymock, Kempley, Newent, Bromesberrow,
Redmarley, all the meadowland daffodils seem
Running in golden tides to Ryton Firs,
To make the knot of steep little wooded hills
Their brightest show : O bella eta de l'oro !
Now I breathe you again, my woods of Ryton :
Not only golden with your daffodil light
Lying in pools on the loose dusky ground
Beneath the larches, tumbling in broad rivers

Ryton Firs

Down sloping grass under the cherry trees
And birches : but among your branches clinging
A mist of that Ferrara-gold I first
Loved in those easy hours you made so green.
And hark ! you are full of voices now ! as if
Ferrara day-dreams had come back to earth
In Glostershire, transforming to a troop
Of lads and lasses, and presently a dance,
Those mornings when your alleys of long light
And your brown rosin-scented shadows were
Enchanted with the laughter of my boys.

.

" Follow my heart, my dancing feet,
Dance as blithe as my heart can beat :
Dancing alone can understand
What a heavenly way we pass
Treading the green and golden land,
Daffodillies and grass."

" I had a song, too, on my road,
But mine was in my eyes ;
For Malvern Hills were with me all the way,

Twelve Idyls

Singing loveliest visible melodies
Blue as a south-sea bay ;
And ruddy as wine of France
Breathths of new-turn'd ploughland under them
glowed.

'Twas my heart then must dance
To dwell in my delight;
No need to sing when all in song my sight
Moved over hills so musically made
And with such colour played.—
And only yesterday it was I saw
Veil'd in streamers of grey wavering smoke
My shapely Malvern Hills.
That was the last hail-storm to trouble spring :
He came in gloomy haste,
Pusht in front of the white clouds quietly basking,
In such a hurry he tript against the hills
And stumbling forward spilt over his shoulders
All his black baggage held,
Streaking downpour of hail.
Then fled dismayed, and the sun in golden glee
And the high white clouds laught down his dusky
ghost/'

Ryton Firs

" For all that's left of winter
Is moisture in the ground.
When I came down the valley last, the sun
Just thawed the grass and made me gentle turf,
But still the frost was bony underneath.
Now moles take burrowing jaunts abroad, and
 ply
Their shovelling hands in earth
As nimbly as the strokes
Of a swimmer in a long dive under water.
The meadows in the sun are twice as green
For all the scatter of fresh red mounded earth,
The mischief of the moles :
No dullish red, Glostershire earth new-delved
In April ! And I think shows fairest where
These rummaging small rogues have been at work
If you will look the way the sunlight slants
Making the grass one great green gem of light,
Bright earth, crimson and even
Scarlet, everywhere tracks
The rambling underground affairs of moles .
Though 'tis but kestrel-bay
Looking against the sun."

Twelve Idyls

" But here's the happiest light can lie on ground,
Grass sloping under trees
Alive with yellow shine of daffodils !
If quicksilver were gold,
And troubled pools of it shaking in the sun,
It were not such a fancy of bickering gleam
As Ryton daffodils when the air but stirs.
And all the miles and miles of meadowland
The spring makes golden ways,
Lead here ; for here the gold
Grows brightest for our eyes,
And for our hearts lovelier even than love.
So here, each spring, our daffodil festival/'

" How smooth and quick the year
Spins me the seasons round !
How many days have slid across my mind
Since we had snow pitying the frozen ground !
Then winter sunshine cheered
The bitter skies ; the snow,
Reluctantly obeying lofty winds,
Drew off in shining clouds,
Wishing it still might love

Ryton Firs

With its white mercy the cold earth beneath.
But when the beautiful ground
Lights upward all the air,
Noon thaws the frozen eaves,
And makes the rime on post and paling steam
Silvery blue smoke in the golden day.
And soon from loaded trees in noiseless woods
The snows slip thudding down,
Scattering in their trail
Bright icy sparkles through the glittering air ;
And the fir-branches, patiently bent so long,
Sigh as they lift themselves to rights again.
Then warm moist hours steal in,
Such as can draw the year's
First fragrance from the sap of cherry wood
Or from the leaves of budless violets ;
And travellers in lanes
Catch the hot tawny smell
Reynard's damp fur left as he sneakt marauding
Across from gap to gap ;
And in the larch woods on the highest boughs
The long-eared owls like grey cats sitting still
Peer down to quizz the passengers below."

Twelve Idyls

" Light has killed the winter and all dark dreams.
Now winds live all in light,
Light has come down to earth and blossoms here,
And we have golden minds.
From out the long shade of a road high-bankt,
I came on shelving fields ;
And from my feet cascading,
Streaming down the land,
Flickering lavish of daffodils flowed and fell ;
Like sunlight on a water thrill'd with haste,
Such clear pale quivering flame,
But a flame even more marvellously yellow.
And all the way to Ryton here I walkt
Ankle-deep in light.
It was as if the world had just begun ;
And in a mind new-made
Of shadowless delight
My spirit drank my flashing senses in,
And gloried to be made
Of young mortality.
No darker joy than this
Golden amazement now
Shall dare intrude into our dazzling lives .

Ryton Firs

Stain were it now to know
Mists of sweet warmth and deep delicious colour,
Those lovable accomplices that come
JBefriending languid hours."

THE DANCE

It is known to the world what a sight may be seen
In Herefordshire and Glostershire
As soon as earth remembers how to flower ;
In a flood running over the fresh of the green
The daffodils pour like a cool fire :
Keep off and mind your manners, you young man.

It is like as the morning were spread on the ground
In Herefordshire and Glostershire,
And we were dancing on the golden hour ;
Such a shimmering gleam is on meadow and
mound,
And giving our minds such bright attire :
Leave eyeing me so bold, you forward maid

Twelve Idyls

We will call for a sorrow to pester her, she
Who's robbing us for the market-buyer,
The crone who strips the field our dances scour ;
And especially everyone spoiling our glee
With trouble of love and love's desire :
Keep off and mind your manners, you young man.

And a sorrow the farmer shall have for his spite
Who scythes at our gold before it tire,
Because the blue leaves make his mown grass sour ;
And another who brings on our shining delight
The tarnishing moods sweethearts require :
Leave eyeing me so bold, you forward maid.

The Olympians

The Olympians

THIS was in Crete, and many years ago :
A lonely hut high on a mountain-side,
Under a peak that strained in icy stone
To thrust an endless gesture at the stars.

Two peasants in the hut, mother and son,
Were talking ; and it sharpen'd their dispute,
That often it was troublesome to speak
Above the sound of rain, driven so hard
It smackt the walls like pebbles thrown in volleys,
And above surges of the sound of wind
That tore itself among the crags above them,
And made the mountain hollows and ravines
Snore like jars of bronze in its monstrous breath.

Yet it was time for pleasant days. The earth—
Her ground like tinder after the crumbling frosts—
Waited for spring to touch her and unseal
Her secret nature like the birth of fire.

Twelve Idyls

Full time it was for the woods to toss their flame,
Burning with every green that water knows :
From oaks green-gold like waves against the sun
That roll a golden gleam in their green mounds,
To birches like the quiet depth beside
Sheer downward cliffs, where surface of green light
Is mixt with blue from under. And already
Flowers began to hire the flight of bees
At a delicious wage to carry love,
Golden negotiation, to mates unknown.
But the storm came, and with its trampling rain
Trode out the first green sparks of the spring's fire.

Not heeding the loud air, these peasants talkt.

Son : But 'tis a trade despised.

Mother : By tongues that go
Like tails of cows in summer, flicking the clegs.
A trade despised ? I ask you, is man a beast,
Or is he man ?

Son : He's man until he's dirt ;
And aren't they rightly scorned who deal with dirt ?

Mother : The kitten miaows his scorn of the old
cat!

Twelve

Beacht by the tide ? And what the breath of a man
Can do with the marred and shabby thing, you know :
He can blow such a call of trumpeting through it,
No thundering of the surf can roar him down.

I am a mean old crone ; but in my trade
There is a great use made of me : I bid
The power of death make room for the pride of man.

Son : You give it out a fine thing. But I'm sure
It's a vile business you were best be quit of.

Mother : Nay, there's an art with corpses ; and
I enjoy it,
Like a shaper of good statues. And the mourners
Thinking themselves important with their crying,
I enjoy them, I knowing all the while
Death would have none of their howling ceremony
Without my skill. And I will eat their sins
Sometimes. 'Twere pity if my corpses lookt
Proud to be dead, while all the company round
Felt cowering in the midst the spectre of sin.

Son : Who cares what a scavenging dog eats ?
Nothing to them
That you, the corpse-straker, should be defiled
By meals of their rank evil, so low they think you.

The Olympians

Mother : Let them be thinking. They give me
their sins
Like children laying pranks of mischief on
Their easy nurse, who smiles to bear the blame.

Just as a sudden astonishing shatter of din
Will stun the speech of those who talk in quiet :
So these who talkt amidst unheeded rage
Of noises, were struck speechless when there smote
Upon the hurlyng outcry of the storm
About them, hugely and heavily a silence
Down like the shock of a hammer. No smallest
whine
Of sound was left : though strangely in their ears
The tyrannous silence rang like jarring metal.
And in that breathless pause, fearfully startling
It was to hear a pushing at the door,
And the latch rattle : and feebly blundering in
An old man came, a hideous bent old man,
Barefoot and limping, foul to his knees with mud,
In sopt and tatter'd beggarly clothes. He stood
And bleared upon the candle, stoopt and gaping,
The tremble of his spare neck thrusting forward

Twelve Idyls

The weight of his head, poised like a baboon's.
From pucker'd clefts as red as wounds his eyes
Lookt weeping ; but behind the mask of age
The bone of his brow and face was framed to hold.
Majesty and decree of mighty spirit,
Superb above control of common fate,
Before the scorching years such horrible skin
Had stretcht upon it. A little while he strove,
Remembering some old royal way of standing,
To right the crooked warping of his spine ;
But could not. Then he spoke. His voice
Came like a trumpet when the brass is flawed :
Such resonant muster in that noble skull
Of tones that from such fretted strings began.

" O Cretans, he is dead ! "

He stumbled back,
And then came burden'd in again. He bore,
Lapt in a goatskin bundle, some small weight
A boy might swing in single-handed play ;
But gasping work for him to be its porter.
Then like a thing to be tenderly used, he set
His parcel on the bench ; and to his hosts

The Olympians

Turned the absurd deformity of grief
Tormenting age : with dropt jaw quivering,
Eyebrows curved high-pitcht over their sockets
In anxious bridges, pushing his forehead rugged
Up to his pate in creases like half-rounds
Of ripples held by a buttress in a stream.
And leaning over the small thing that lay
Wrapt up before him, at last he spoke again.

Old Man : He is dead now, and you must be
with me
In burying him.

Mother : A baby ! And by your speech
You're some outlandish vagabond. I'll be bound
You've made some demon happy with the blood
And burnt fat of the child : ay, it has been
Some wizard's murder.

Son : You go too hard on him.
Look how his ancient mind peers from his face
To make your meaning out. He brings no harm.

Mother : What, no harm for a tramping rogue to
bring
Out of a fiends' holiday of a storm,

Twelve Idyls

A dead baby ? I warrant he deals in them,
A sorcerers' body-monger. And the wind,
When he came in, fell headlong down to quiet,
Down like a drunk man bawling over a cliff :
Be sure there is some wickedness leagued with him.—
Whose is this baby ? Have you strangled it ?

Son : The grasp, see, of those tremulous hands
would scarce

Strangle a worm.

Old Man : You said the storm had finisht ?
I should have noted that. Indeed, it has done
The work they meart, ay, they would whistle it back
To kennel, nov it has worried him to death.
Soon as I pickt.him up to carry him here,
They loosed o;l us that baying storm to hound
My stumbling the whole way. With a hundred jaws
It tore at him to snatch him from my arms
Where he lay whimpering ; and terror at last
Of all that hatred yelling in his face,
Mad to have him and savage him, wrung his heart
So hard, life could quiver no longer in it.
All's ended now ; and now it is for you
To bury him. And will you eat his sins ?

The Olympians

This was an eager question ; and the consent
She nodded, seemed to be somehow startled from
her.

But, to assure herself she gave it freely,
She chatted some stock wisdom of her trade.

Mother : O I will eat the sins of the poor bairn :
An easy mouthful that. The killjoy death,
To come so soon ! Who knows, if he had grown,
What lusty wickedness I might have had
To swallow for him ? But as it is I think,
Baby, your little secret spawn of sins
Will trouble me with no heartburn. This is the
way.—

And you, boy, be stirring : undo the brat.

She took a crust, sopt it and salted it,
And gave it to the crouching man ; and he
Over the bundled thing upon the bench
Handed the morsel back. She muncht it down ;
Then went about the things her skill would need.
Truly she was unwilling ; but in their minds
The look of his tarnisht eyes strangely thrillM,

Twelve Idyls

As if invisibly burning rays were piercing
Among their thoughts, and gathering them to shape
The act of his desire, like dust of iron
Drawn into pattern of a magnet's power.

Yet as she turned from bolting down that crust
Her casual rite had made bitter as tears
For the reproach of sin : to see her go
Busily searching in her corners and cupboards,
Arrested him in a staring blank of wonder ;
Like an astonisht plowman at a fair,
Who gapes after a juggling tightrope-walker,
Seeing him, when his risky show is done,
Push unconcerned and whistling through the crowd :
In such a puzzle the old man stood, to find
She made so little of those eaten sins.

Meanwhile, she ferreting for cloths and pans,
And the doddering man lost in his feckless gaze,
The son was fingering the knots that kept
That sorry luggage fasten'd. Loath though he was
To open it, he could not fumble long,
Such folly was the slack and feeble tying.

The Olympians

A stealing cat, left in a room alone
Where supper's on the table, smelling out
A dram of milk low down in a narrow jug :
Careful not to be noisy and not to spill,
Her dainty paw dips in and soaks her fur,
Then daintily draws out again and licks
The dripping theft. Even so gingerly
Into the bundle's folds his hand went loosening.

She heard, the mother bustling with her things,
Suddenly heard, from where she left her son,
Such a harsh force of desperate breath as comes
From lungs coopt in hard agony of terror,
When muscles fiercely clench about the ribs
Like a red-hot tyre shrunk on a smoking wheel.
She turned, and saw her boy in palsy, his arms
Fixt half-way raised, and eyes that could not wink
But only glare into the open'd pack.
She scurried to him ; and a grim thing lay
For her to see : no baby, but a man
Unbelievably wither'd into age,
The cinder of a man, parcht and blasted
As puny and brown as the mummy of a baby,

Twelve Idyls

His body all drawn up into a fist;
The pined legs, crooked as burnt candle-wicks,
So taut with perisht sinews that their knees
Thrusted the shrivelled belly ; and his arms
Hugg'd his chest with little twisted hands.
But nothing babyish the great famisht head
Contorted down : the sharp edge of the jaws,
With thin beard scanted to a snowy wool ;
The lean nose peaking like a puffin's bill ;
And brow and brainpan glistening like wrought
wood,
And vaulted for a god's imagination.

But he, the wretch who brought that dreadful
parcel,
Still lookt towards where the woman had been busy,
A standing shivering swoon. They turned on him ;
The life in them broke loose from pausing aghast,
And clamoured like a stream bursting a weir.
Angrily afraid, she wrung his shoulder :
" Leave off your doating, you horrible old man ;
What's this you've brought us ?" Then again he tried
To brave the burden of his years and stand

The Olympians

Upright before their question ; and again
He summon'd from his wreck of royal life
Commanding voice : five words were toil enough
•Now for the voice of his greatness to endure
Before it broke :

" Zeus ! It is Father Zeus ! "

Grief humbled him to the ground. Down he fell
As low as worship before these poor folk,
Hiding his face, sobbing for shame, and muttering :
" The thundering Zeus ! His favour was the prayer
Of gods and men, his sentence was their lives :
And now that little loathsome thing ! And I,
This dying misery of crippled age,
I am Apollo, I am Apollo."

A long while, breathing shrill and quick, he lay ;
At last, a little raising his abasement,
And giving something of Olympian manner
To the poor dwindled voice, that yet must rasp
Laborious whisper like the drag of a rope
Over a whining pulley when he that hauls
Pauses often for breath—he told his tale.

Twelve Idyls

Apollo : We were upon the mountainous height
of the gods

That has the whole world under it; and thence—
Like purity of mountain-water streaming
Down to salt seas from crags that gleam in heaven—
Our divine life down from that lofty quiet
Descended to the brackish tides of men :
Fresh heavenly water sweetening the vast salt,
A shining song into the helpless roaring.

Yet it may be sometimes, ages of water
Will grind a steep of ancient rock to soil,
And soil will flourish into moss and weed,
Till where bright water plunged, a sloth of moisture
Soaks down from ledge to ledge of sodden turf:
Had some change grown betwixt our height and men,
To hold the speed and plenty of our gift,
And we knew nothing of it ?—And to our sight,
Lightly scanning the haze of things to come
(For scope we had in time as easily
As in the distance of the earth), appeared
Low down, like darkness charged with slumbering
fire,

The Olympians

The far-off patience of some grand event
Biding its time, dreaming itself set free
In dreams that made its darkness suddenly blaze.
We glanced at it as feasted men will look
At lightning, when the storm is so far off
The winking glare burns noiseless as the stars
Along the rim of pale sweet summer night,
Casting a moment's shadow from the trees.
Or if fear toucht our minds, it was as light
As tickling threads of spider-work will touch
The face of one who loiters in the evening.

Zeus the Father assembled us, and spoke :
" Not only our divinely streaming mountain,
But gods like wandering rains into that brine,
The life of man, have poured replenishing purity.
Bacchus we found conferring himself on men
Out of the flying winds of unknown spirit :
Dying into them like a rain at sea,
Shedding divine fresh water of his life
Over their salty unrest, and thence again
From out the depths of them rising a ghost
Pure of the bitter earth they have dissolved,

Twelve Idyls

Again to pour down in immortal sweetness.
Him we entreated to dwell here, and take
A heavenly name, and be our Dionysus.
So we did well, and he."

We turned to smile
Brotherly pleasure on our lovely guest.
He was not in his place ; he was not found
In heaven that day, the last of heaven's days.
Where had he gone, our belov'd Dionysus ?

Zeus spoke again : " And now another god
Begins. Despise him not, Olympian gods !
We will persuade him too into our league."

We bent our gaze to earth. Our eager sense
Devoured the height that made the life of man
One swaying tide of motion to and fro ;
We saw it in its swarming particles—
Multitudinous atoms of passionate will
Seething in separate purposes. But one place
We noted, where the wrangling little lives
Were ruled by some great passage of event,

The Olympians

All packt one way : as when there have been floods
'Sweeping across the meadows, twigs and straws
Lie combed and matted by the vehement water.
So-stroked together were these lives, amasst
Towards where, aloft against the cloudy flame
Of s'carlet evening, three of their kind they had
Hung up on gallows crosses. A bare mound
Lifted those tall black spikes into the sky,
So that it seemed the nave, and the gaunt poles
The jutting spokes, of a great ruih'd wheel
Sunk to the axle and rotting in a fen.
But in the heaven behind it, the sun's rays
Had made another wheel, with white-hot gold
For nave, and spouted fire for whirling spokes,
The blazing pillars of a wheel that seemed
Gloriously travelling over the earth.

For we had found the new god : and once more
A dying god. His death was while we lookt :
And instantly his deity arose
And blinding stood above his death, and scorned us.
In fierce obedience close behind him croucht
That black and hungry hour we long had seen

Twelve Idyls

Far *off*. He pointed at us ; and in a leap
Darkness was perfect over us. It was
Time, the whole disaster of time compact
In one dense moment, that from the heart of it
struck

Accumulated fire, the vengeance stored
For all the debt we had not heeded owing ;
And then withdrew, and left us charred with age
To feel our misery awhile. But I,
When I saw Zeus sunk to that infant shape,
Rocking his head and twitching helpless limbs,
Set out to nurse him hither, bearing him
To end where he was born, in Crete.

He stopt.

He was so still they thought it was his death ;
But presently they saw his shuddering hands
Work on the floor as they would dig their hold
Clutching into it ; and stealing a pace forward,
The woman found his eyes wide and appalled
And fixt upon the door. She turned and lookt :
Something was shining out there in the darkness
Shining and coming nearer ; swords of light

The Olympians

Into the room at sill and lintol pierced,
And lances where the warping boards had parted.
Ever closer and brighter it came, as white
As winter stars, eager as morning sun,
And jetting like the force of a weight of water.
They thought the timber would have shaken and
 given,
Such pressure of light burst through at every seam ;
And now the door's whole wood was full of light
As if it were thin paper against the glare,
The grain like a fine web of glowing threads.
And suddenly there was no door, but space
Of insupportable light, and in the midst
A presence like a beautiful young man.
He stood among them, lookt at Apollo, and laught.

Apollo : Unhurt, unaged ! Dionysus ! Thou !

Bacchus : Call me no more the Olympian name.

I am

All Bacchus now again, and have put off
Olympian name and nature. Ay, and wisely,
Now that I study you ! To bid farewell
To you and what is left you of your heaven,

Twelve Idyls

I come. It seems you have not learnt the art
Of dying divinely, you Olympian gods.

Apollo : I am disguised to thee, Bacchus, I think.

Bacchus : I know you, cripple, easily as I know
That curl of husk yonder was Father Zeus.

Apollo : And thou hast mightier divinity !

Where hast thou been ? How art thou grown so
radiant,

Escaping our destruction, thriving in it ?

Bacchus : You never understood me in Olympus.
Your bland and ignorant friendship grew to me
More tiresome than a wheedling fondling love
To one in whom love sickens. You courteous
gods !—

What ailed me, siding with that refuse there,
Your Zeus ?—Those serene feasts of yours !—And I
Scarcely able to hold in my dark heart
The hatred tugging there to hunt you down
The slope of heaven to graves in the base earth.
You to think yourselves the life of the world !
Not even now you know why death to you
Is the disgraceful end, and I can die
A thousand times and still be living god.

The Olympians

Apollo : Why must we die ? O Bacchus, why
must we die ?

Bacchus : Why must the phantom music of a dream
Break, and the lovely colour of its light
Be known no more ? You gave no life to the world ;
But 'as the sleepless spirit in the brain
Of a sleeping man fashions delicious dream
Out of the dull pulses of his body :
So the imagining spirit sealed within
The murmuring life of the world, charms its rumour
Into the story of a dream—the life
Of gods, the life uncertain of a dream.

Apollo : Then what art thou ?

Bacchus : Ay, know me now at last I
A dream dreamt by the world I am indeed :
But yet a dream of what is not the world.
I am the rapture of the measureless force
For ever passing into and beyond
The measured form of the world. The form abides ;
But wavering, inconstant, variable :
Even as on the surface of a stream
The whorl of an eddy shifts and slides and totters,
And yet the whorl remains. But like the water

Twelve Idyls

Incessantly supplied, continual haste
Pouring through the frail round of the eddy,
Eternally impetuous is the force
Narrowed into the world and thence escaping.
I am the dream of that unchanging energy,
You of the eddying pattern of the world.
Must there not be, between your dream and mine,
Enmity unappeasable : between
My infinite element that would be nothing
But its own speed forever, and the small
Shapeliness of your world that catches it
Into a spinning circle : between my dream's
Unseizable joy and unendurable woe,
And your stately manners of order'd feeling,
The graceful pleasure and the decent grief ?
Ay, but that is finisht ! The Olympian dream
Vanishes : mine is the dream that triumphs now !
The shape of the whorl has stirred and changed :
 the world
Is no more what it was when you were dreamt
Its images. But what is that to me ?
For I am always dreamt and to be dreamt,
I the nameless force that runs for ever.

The Olympians

Apollo : And will there never be our like again ?
Surely again the dream of the world will be
Of gods in whom the shapely measure of things
Lives adorable in its present beauty,
Loving the appointed bounds as songs their music.

Bacchus : Nay, I am rid of you now : the mind of
the world
Is mine ; and I will ravish it with desire
Anguishing to be out of the world, despising
All you could give of beauty for the hope
My passion in its flight beyond all nature
Gives of amazing and incredible freedom.
And let your new gods come : I shall be there
Discrediting them ; the world will shift again
To some new manner, and their dream will end ;
And I unharmed, the everlasting dream,
Once more shall bid to the departing gods,
Even as now to you,—is it Fare well ?
Fare as ye may, dead god and dying god !

He spoke and laught again and was not there.
The glimmering room came back about them like
The blackness of a cavern : and they stood still.

Twelve Idyls

At last that old Apollo, without words,
Bade their blank minds be his. The woman washt
The crumpled thing that had been Zeus ; the son
Gather'd it in the goatskin to his breast ;
And in the quiet night the three went out
To climb the Cretan mountain. " Haste ! Before
I see the sun, bring me and my business
To the last height of the peak " : so the god's
thought

Workt in their minds and drove them. Misty dawn
Was known already by the crags, that seemed
To watch each other in their lonely frosts,
While all the earth beneath still slept in cloud.
These peasants and the god at length had climbed
The top of Crete ; and like a usual task,
To throw aside the loose and weather'd stones
The son bent down, scooping a shallow hole,
The grave of Zeus ; and there the panting woman
Laid in its package the Olympian corpse.

Apollo spoke to them across the grave.

Apollo : You and these desolate rocks and some
few minutes

The Olympians

Are all the world to me now. But it is still
Apollo's world, and the voice of the god is in it,
Announcing, as heretofore, a divine thing.
Hear you the last, ay, and the first and greatest,
Of the Olympian truths : we lived in it,
And out of it our majesty arose,
And that we perish is the witness to it :
Whatever seems, is true ! This was our glory,
This is our doom. Not as these cliffs now stand,
Cut off from the earth by cloud, may we survive.
Like the endeavour of arduous faculties
To reach sublime experience, the earth
Exalted them ; but now there seems no earth,
Nothing but cloud, and these unfounded crags
Issuing from it, for themselves alone
Maintaining their remote and lofty honour.
So may it not be with the gods. Our world
Required us, and we were. A change has come ;
Our world has clouded, and we cannot see it ;
The ground of our existence seems annulled :
And to the gods, whatever seems is truth.
The world is ours no more, and we must go ;
You look your last upon the broken gods.

Twelve Idyls

Bacchus remains : I know not what new Bacchus,
But what his godhead in your minds will be
I know—the uncreated passion taking
Vengeance on that which holds it in creation,
You, the living world : and you yourselves
Shall worship the revenge he takes on you.
" I the real, the true, the eternal,"
Thus will he cry to you, piercing and thrilling you,
" I am your rescue from the seeming world ;
Follow me out of seeming, and I will give you
Inconceivable things." This is the god
Henceforth : and a breath of the infinite of being
Will touch your minds ; and you will scorn to be
 here
In your mortality under the stars ;
And to adore your god you will make yourselves
Worthless lives, the dupes of a worthless world :
And you make Bacchus happy in his revenge !
How long before whatever seems become
Olympian truth again ? How long before
You know again the miracle you are,
You minds that master that same infinite being
Into the seeming of establisht world ?—

The Olympians

And if it seems, it is !—Here find your gods,
Or be your own contempt : here in your world
Of measured fires rejoicing in the law
That fills the sky with glittering certainty ;
The times of earth, and waters in their turns
Of seas and rains and rivers, varying sound
And varying colour of glee ; the commonwealth
The exquisite habits of living things contrive ;
And that most marvellous creator, thought.
Will you be life once more that loves itself,
And justifies its being to itself ?
Then of your world seized into bounded seeming
In midst of flux, let there be gods again :
Zeus, and another son of Zeus, a new
Apollo, god of the life that knows itself
Made of eternal being, but made with power
To overcome the infinite and shape it
Into the beauty of mortality.

But now the warning came : the sun arose,
And struck on him a dreadful finger of light.
He quailed beneath it in a wretched kneeling ;
His mouth gaped as if to be speaking still,

Twelve Idyls

But only choked ; his hands went to his throat,
Like crazed self-murder at his windpipe gripping ;
And then he bowed his head, and tumbled down
Beside that other. Quickly the peasants moved,
Released from him, but not from fear of him,
To load his death, piling a cairn of boulders.

Back in their hut, son and mother no word
Had for each other a long while. At last
The woman, stirring about dinner, spoke :
" Well, you shall have your way. From to-day on,
Let no one come to me for washing corpses :
Nor for sin-eating.—Boy, do you understand
What I have done ?—I have eaten the sins of Zeus ! "

Zagreus

Zagreus

I AM the tortured god who lies in hell
Imagining mankind. Before I fell
Down to this purposeless unholy place,
To sink in mortification and disgrace,
On the great height of the wheeling world elate
I dwelt, a god sublimely fortunate.
The invisible spirit for ever passing on,
Turning the world with thoroughfare unknown
Of flying power, such golden mood on me
Poured, that divine delight of fantasy
Went forth of me creating loveliness
Of life about me, mortal images
Of a god's blissful mind, rejoicing throngs
Enchanting me as may its own sweet songs
The heart of music. Even so now in hell
My tortured mind lives indestructible
Imagining mankind, the busy insane
Detested dream wherein my helpless pain

Twelve Idyls

Beholds itself. For now the slow world's weight,
Eternally disturbed in circular fate,
To depths that like malignant waters drown
The joyful use of being, has borne me down ;
And still I must create, and make my night
Of darkness and dishonor quick and alight
With spectacle of life, the swarming fire
Of a god's imagination, a god's desire
Blazing forth in impotent mutiny.
Thus in perpetual vision I must see
Man's life enact itself : that life accurst
Which knows the best and must achieve the worst—
Creature and symbol of my anguish here !
He thinks of beauty and freedom, and there appear
His towns, his factories, his furnaces,
His squalidly elaborate wretchedness.
With power to shape his fate I see him stand ;
He who can out of ancient stone command
Metals and secret forces, and make these
His marvellous intelligent slaveries,
Gleaming obedient demons, exquisite skill
And thundering strength, as sensitive to his will
As his own joints to thrilling of his nerves ;

Zagreus

He whom the very nature of things serves,
Man who has made Machines, he is my dream
Of the power I have lost—my impotent dream,
Man who has made himself a misery
With his Machines, and still the more must be,
The more his power, the idiot of his fate :
And hating my dream of man, myself I hate.

But this is not my master : stifled here,
Even my own self-hatred I can bear,
Nay, for myself have still insatiable
Desire, knowing there burns within me still
The sleepless virtue of the mind divine
That feeds on all event and makes it mine,
The manner of my life ; and can abide
Even in agony strangely satisfied.

And I am not to end in hell:
It has been before, in the world's change,
That tides of darkness over me fell,
To make remember'd heaven as strange
As to the waters buried deep
In bitter darkness of the sea,
Their fresh delighted springs must be

Twelve Idyls

That down the sunny hills would leap.
And it has been that at the last
The night of waters past :
For still the changing world went round,
Out of the depth where I lay vile and drowned
Lifting me on high again
To shine above forgotten pain.
Then in a smooth and sapphire floor,
Firm beneath my feet and bright,
The perilous waters of existence bore
Courteously the journeying of my restored delight.
Out of that favorable sea
Arose like an enchanted land
The fortune that awaited me,
In noble heights where I might stand
Surveying my prosperity.
Thence a delicious welcome came
From forests that, in fragrant flame
Of scarlet blossoming, hung between
Pinnacled splendour of carven snow
And ocean luminous below
With purple depth and shallows green.
Forth for my feet in curving bays

Zagreus

The beaches spread their golden ground,
Inviting me up to grassy ways
And meadows of pleasant summer beyond :
And I ran over the light of the sea,
And took the world prepared for me.
Sauntering inland as I went,
In floods of flowers I must wade,
Held in many a sweet delay
To hear the birds such joy invent,
Or note the whispering shiver made
In spinneys of willow silver-grey,
Their delicate bright leaves answering
The stirring airs like flying away
Of sunlit smoke. But I must climb
Above the warm bewitching leas,
Above the droning of the bees
And silvery crickets' throbbing ring ;
Above the slopes of vetch and thyme,
Past broom and birches shadowing
Green mountain water in fall and pool
Where musing air dwelt moist and cool;
Towards where from out dark fell of pine
Towering peaks raised sharp and fine
Their gleaming speculation high :

Twelve Idyls

And with my rocks I stood to share
The heavenly space of light and air ;
And once again in lonely glee,
Soared out of joy's perplexity
The pure immortal ecstasy,
Perfection of the god in me.
I knew my radiance of joy
Like flame that knows the light it makes :
My joy was round me in winds and seas,
Shone over earth in grass and trees,
And ran in rivers ; with fiery flakes
Of infinite joy I starred the night;
And in high clouds my joy was white,
And stately joy beneath them stood
Mountainous in great attitude :
Everywhere colour and shape and sound
Of joy divinely mine, my own,
I knew encompassing me round.
But in the midst of this,
Distinct in singular central bliss,
I to myself was known,
The maker of joy, the flame within :
My soul erect and burning keen
In supreme spire of consciousness

Zagreus

Uttering its own marvellous place,
The world that round about it glowed,
As a flame in light makes its abode.

Then was I in that ecstasy
Such music of intelligence,
That uncontainable beauty thence
Went out in power ranging free ;
And sang itself forth circling sweet and clear
To shape, like mastery of sound in air,
Life in my world—energies numberless
Formed in one perfect chime of happiness.

This was : and what has been, will be again.
The god that has no power but in vain
To dream of power : himself a hated thing,
Bound down to hate in turn the posturing
Procession of his creatures round about
His darkness—that old story of long drawn out
Pretentious blundering in a mystery,
The life of man : this very god is he
Whose bliss its own excess shall contemplate
In the image of beautiful life it must create,
And thereby crown himself once more sublimely
fortunate.

Miscellaneous

Inscriptions

I¹

THESSE, who desired to live, went out to death ;
Dark underground their golden youth is
lying.

We live ; and there is brightness in our breath

They could not know—the splendour of their
dying.

II²

Mountains and stars, clouds and the white sea-foam,
Flames, snows, and children—should not these
suffice,

But this heart-breaking loveliness must come

Gleaming through all—life that willingly dies ?

¹ For the Roll of Honour of the University of Liverpool.

² For the First Anniversary of the Armistice.

Twelve Idyls

III¹

They died for us : they left this blessed fortune of
the light,
And gave themselves to darkness, to our love
returning never.
But lo, presiding over us like stars over the night,
Quiet and lovely and supreme, lives their death
for ever.

¹ For the War Memorial of the Liverpool Post Office.

R. B.

BEAUTIFUL life ! As air delights to find
The white heat of a fire and to be flame,
The eager world throng'd into his glowing mind
And flame of burning beauty there became.

All things were turned to fire in him, and cast
The light of their transfiguring round his ways.
His secret gleamed upon us ; where he past
He shone ; he brought with him a golden place.

It was the purest fire of life that shone,
This angel brightness visiting our mould.
Life knew no way to make life lovelier, none ;
But then came Death : " I know the way.
Behold ! "

White Love

(Out of Sidi Hammo.)

SOME day a white feast I will hold,
When I am white through being old,
And over my soul have built a height
Of speculation marble white,
Towering holiness, and bright prayer ;
Whereunder I at last shall dare
To entertain all secretly
My desire ; yea, there shall be
Goblets white as that body of thine,
And white as thy spirit shall be the wine.

The Nightingale

(From the Old English Riddle.)

I THROUGH my throat the thronging melodies
Delicately devising in divers moods,
Let my little breath lavishly chime,
Still the bestower of unstinted song.
Of old to all men my evening enchantment
Brings blissful ease ; they, when I bind them
With my thrilling sweet troubles, enthralled in
their houses
Lean forward, listening. Learn now my name
Who cry so keenly, such quivering glee
Peeling merrily, and pour such musical
Ringing welcome to returning warriors.

The Stream's Song

MAKE way, make way,
You thwarting stones ;
Room for my play,
Serious ones.

Do you not fear,
O rocks and boulders,
To feel my laughter
On your grave shoulders ?

Do you not know
My joy at length
Will all wear out
Your solemn strength ?

You will not for ever
Cumber my play ;
With joy and a song
I clear my way.

The Stream's Song

Your faith of rock
Shall yield to me,
And be carried away
By the song of my glee.

Crumble, crumble,
Voiceless things ;
No faith can last
That never sings.

For the last hour
To joy belongs ;
The steadfast perish,
But not the songs.

Yet for a while
Thwart me, O boulders ;
I need for laughter
Your serious shoulders.

And when my singing
Has razed you quite,
I shall have lost
Half my delight.

Elizabeth's Song

SHINING white clouds in the cherry trees
tangled,
And over the orchard snowing ;
Silver wild cherries on the hill-side spangled,
And bright among bronze oaks blowing :
So white, so bright, so fragrantly
Heart's delight blossoms in me.

Swallows come back to their endless careering
In love and in finest feather ;
Swerving down, close to the cowslips nearing,
Then high in the golden weather :
In air so bright, with such a flight,
Dances on wings my heart's delight.

Epitaph

SIR, you should notice me : I am the Man ;
I am Good Fortune : I am satisfied.
All I desired, more than I could desire,
I have : everything has gone right with me.
Life was a hiding-place that played me false ;
I croucht ashamed, and still was seen and scorned :
But now I am not seen. I was a fool,
And now I know what wisdom dare not know :
For I know Nothing. I was a slave, and now
I have ungoverned freedom and the wealth
That cannot be conceived : for I have Nothing.
I lookt for beauty and I longed for rest,
And now I have perfection : nay, I am
Perfection : I am Nothing, I am dead.

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