

SONNETS

FOR EVE

and Other Poems



Clara Aiken Speer

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WILLIAM-FREDERICK POETS : 93



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THIS BOOK
IS
MOST OF ALL
FOR MY
GRANDCHILDREN

PHILIP, JANICE, SUSAN, MARY, JULIA,
ROBERT, ANDREA, MARTHA, KEITH,
STUART, CLARA, RUTH,
GEORGE, AND HELEN

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AROUND the edges of a busy life as homemaker, church worker, political worker and state legislator, I have managed to find time to put some of my thoughts into verse. Now at past three score and ten, it seems desirable to some who have found a bit of interest and perhaps profit in my verses, that I gather the best of them together in a book. I wish especially to acknowledge the help of Velma West Sykes — herself a poet — without whose friendly and persistent prodding this book might never have seen the light of day. I hope it will be the thought of those who read these lines that her efforts, and mine, have not been entirely in vain.

— C. A. S.

EXPIATION

*P*oor untaught Eve whose brief, persuaded sinning
Brings still upon her head the stern disdain
Of heavy-domed philosophers, the grinning
Sly knowingness of fools, and all the pain:
And even, sometimes, too, a sense of hurt
And disapproval from her numerous brood
Of daughters. Is there no one to assert
That earth's All-Mother merits gratitude?

She squandered Eden, but with all her might
Sought to rebuild it with two burdened hands;
And from her eyes there never faded quite
The light they carried in the Blessed Lands.
*So that her children though wrong may entice,
Like her are homesick for Lost Paradise.*

SONNETS FOR EVE

FIRST SEWING

“AND NOT a thing to wear!” The plaint that would
Through endless ages rise to woman’s lips
Voiced Eve’s reaction as appalled she stood
In that new life with which she was at grips.
But wait! Fig leaves are plentiful — and near
Are quick-grown thorns. Soft underneath, the leaves
Placed thus and so, and fastened there and here
. . . A garment for the making she perceives.
But thorns yield stubbornly, and tender hands
Are pricked. She sucks her fingers to allay
Their hurt: eyes fill, sometimes, to overflow;
Yet patiently the garment she expands,
Thus pioneering for a vast array
Of little girls-to-be, learning to sew.

PENALTIES

“COME THEN,” said Adam, “Paradise is done
And food, now strictly come by, must be found:
I shall plant grain and snare the hares that run
Beneath the hedge. Game must be dressed, corn ground:
The care of herb and lentils falls to you —
The children, too, of course . . . and all such stuff
As weaving, spinning, which you like to do.
But work we must if we would have enough.”
Thus did they toil, sometimes with song, sometimes
With aching weariness and drooping head.
And when the day was ended, Eve ground grain,
Cooked, spun, soothed babes with little songs and rhymes:
*And wondered sometimes if the Lord had said
That Adam’s was the sweat and hers the pain.*

STEADFASTNESS

THE WIND blew, edged with ice, and Adam's brow
 Was furrowed as he nursed a darkling mood;
 While young Eve nursed their child. Too flimsy now
 He knew his work to be; too frail and crude
 Before the furious blast the hut which he
 Had thought quite strong, and warm, and dry
 For any weather. "Eve," cried he, "you see
 How I fail always? There's no use to try."

But Eve bent low her head above the child
 Against her breast and held him close, and wound
 Him with her own thin robes to keep him warm.
 "We did not know," she said, "winds blew so wild —
 But we will stuff the chinks the cold has found,
 And thatch a stouter roof, after the storm."

THE PET

FROM HUNTING Adam came one snowy day,
 A wolf cub in the crook of his left arm.
 To Eve he said, "I found her on the way
 Toward home. She was too weak to take alarm
 As I drew near. But starving as you see
 And shivering with cold, she gladly let
 Me pick her up: I thought that she could be
 A playmate for the children, and a pet."

So Eve brought milk and bits of pounded meat,
 And helped the small waif lift a trembling head
 To eat and drink. Then, near the hearthstone's heat
 She spread a sheepskin for a warm, soft bed:
 And there the puppy slept, thus to acquire
 For her leal kind a place beside man's fire.

SONGS OF THE LOOM

THIS is an aptitude of Eve, and all
 Of womankind, that they must seek and find
 All sorts of strands and fibers, vegetal
 And animal, that can be carded, twined,
 Spun, woven, twisted, knit — in any way
 Made into fabrics which in turn may be
 The stuff of garments suited for array,
 And coverings for warmth and artistry.

What myriad cloths have from Eve's fingers flowed!
 What endless textures have her daughters wrought!
 What comfort, hope and rhythmic song have glowed
 Through all such toil, through loss of Eden brought!
 How unremembered have been ancient dooms
 In rich outpourings from unnumbered looms!

BRINGING UP THE CHILDREN

"WE TWO," said Eve, "have toiled through long, hard days
 With none to teach us anything at all,
 But by our errors we have learned of ways
 To live more comfortably; and to forestall
 . . . Adversity. Now, through experience,
 We can teach our children to avoid mistakes,
 And we will show them with all diligence
 What we've been taught by heart and body aches.

You shall instruct the boys to sow and till,
 And teach them both the careful and precise
 Use of your tools; the care of home and baby
 Is mine to teach the girls: I know they will
 Be very grateful for our good advice."
 And Adam, with a quizzing smile, said, "Maybe!"

IN THE COOL OF THE EVENING

But there were times as when young summer lay
 Across the burgeoning fields and when the sun
Had set that these first two, in their doorway
 Sat side by side, each with a little one
Drooping to sleep. In deep companionship
 Their warm and weary shoulders touched. The air
Was soft and cool — grateful to brow and lip
 And throat — and memory was everywhere.

Yes, memory and hope! The garden bloom
Seemed waiting the return of something dear
And long-remembered . . . beyond the flaming sword.
And Eve and Adam, in the friendly gloom
Dared not to look, but almost they could hear
The giant, gentle footsteps of the Lord.

MURMURING SHOALS

IT IS his wont always to chant of pain . . .
Of grief that weights the overburdened soul,
Of suns that set, of stars that rise in vain,
Of fearsome storms that from deep caverns roll.
Why not? He lives too shallowly to know
Real travail, so his idling instinct calls
For not the substance, but the form of woe
— As untouched children hold mock funerals.
For seldom come they willingly to tears,
Who have known pain tears could not mitigate;
Nor choose to chant of grief who have felt spears
Against the heart. No, rather, all their weight —
Knowing the need — they cast upon the side
Of steadfast faith that will not be denied.

TRAIL-BREAKERS

THESE are of that brave breed who ever yearn
 To march with dawn; whose morning shadows fall
 Beyond them on their course, the while they crawl
 Up weary, hostile hills, or tread the stern
 And treacherous desert plains; whose eyes discern
 Mirages under noonday suns, and call
 To heart and soul that these illusions all
 Into a fine reality must turn.

Sunrise behind them, it may be, had decked
 Their heads with halos: this they could not know;
 But when the evening nears they walk erect
 With faces shining in the vesper glow.
 Restless within their veins the west winds run,
 These are the children of the setting sun.

R E S U R G E N C E

Is it a strange thing that the human heart,
 Having endured beyond its strength, should grope
 Into despair, then from that nadir start
 To climb again uncertainly toward hope?
 And is it part of wisdom then to scorn
 And try to crush that nebulous, frail gleam
 Of faith, by calling it a vision born
 Of hunger, a mirage, a wistful dream?

No, this is universal law. The light
 Of day may falter, vanish into night,
 But dawn is sure. Leaves fall, decay, but swing
 Again from twig and branch some later spring.
*Yes, out of earth's most tragic death was born
 The raptured joy of Resurrection Morn!*

THERE IS A LAW

THERE IS a law that ever works toward good
 Through all the universe. Refuse decays
 Into a mellow soil where stately wood
 And herb and flower find root. The waterways
 May be polluted, but they tend to clear
 Themselves with sun and wind. The harshest blare,
 The rankest dissonance come to the ear
 Almost like music through far spans of air.

Oh, hateful, hurting things are real, and pain
 Is not dissolved in tears that fall like rain.
 Yet time and distance and the healing strength
 Of cosmic law will have their way at length . . .
 As layers of stout patience fold and furl
 Around a point of grief to make a pearl.

"COME DOWN PROUD EAGLES"

"COME DOWN, proud eagles, from your sunlit sky,"
 So said the barnyard hens. "It is not right
 That you on mighty wing should soar so high,
 While we can scarcely reach the roost at night.
 Come down, and we will clip your pinions, chain
 Your feet and hood your eyes. It is not just
 That you should touch the stratospheric plane
 While we must grovel in straw-littered dust."

"And you, sleek swans, that float so white and cool
 With mirrored grace, in rippling stream and pool;
 Come walk with us, we find you infamous
 Unless in all ways you become like us."
 Hens do not know that such demands so hurled
 In stupid envy, can destroy the world.

C I N D E R E L L A

OH, what a night of joy it was! The gay,
Soft lights, the throng, the music's swelling beat,
My own strange beauty in a silken gown,
The thrilling steps of my slim crystallised feet,
Beating their rainbowed way, as well I knew,
Into the Prince's thought, the Prince's heart!
A night of matchless, magical delight,
That all my life to come, shall stand apart!

But he whom day's calm thinking brings to me
Is not the Prince in velvet's rich array,
But just a laddie in a peasant's smock
Who smiled at me with loving eyes one day.

A Prince's love brings rapture, for a while,
But might its fickleness bring heartbreak too?
Could I then bear the pain of woeful years
Remembering happiness that once I knew?

Should I seek humble but more lasting joy?
Or glad days flawless but perhaps more fleet?
Or *is* there perfect joy? I mind me now
Those lovely flashing slippers hurt my feet.

And so I shall forget — You say the Prince
Is here with my lost slipper in his hands?
. . . I go with throbbing heart Could ever maid
Refuse obedience when a Prince commands?

POEMS ABOUT PEOPLE

DREAMS

THIS is when the heart takes
Deepest joy: when done
Are its toil and travail
And its dear dream won.

This is when the heart aches:
When the dream eludes,
Must be changed, and hard shift made
With pale similitudes.

This is when the heart breaks:
When whole and heavy on
It lies the fabric of its dream,
With all the glory gone.

SERENE THE BLIND GO

SERENE the blind go, as they make
Their way through a world without daybreak.
For them must be no hasty guess,
Nor arrogant imperiousness,
No ill-considered step, no gust
Of rage, no blustering distrust.

But calm and studied is their tread,
And steadfast courage is the thread
That weaves the weft of every day
With gentle faith as warp. So may
They walk with men in their own fashion,
In the parentheses of compassion.

SUMMER INTERVAL

HERE in the indolent-seeming heat
Of summer, I would rest replete
With thought and act; would cancel out
The body's weariness and doubt
And wait to feel myself within
The tide that makes all nature kin,
The pulse that beats in Mother Earth
And breathes the miracle of birth.

We have our secrets, Earth and I,
Hers, grain to hide and multiply,
And mine, a child to have and hold
When autumn turns the hills to gold.

MEMORIES

MY JOHN sits now an old man
With a grandchild on his knee,
And softly pipes for her a song
He used to pipe for me.

He used to pipe for me, ah!
When I was fair and young,
And all the joy of springtime
Was in my heart and tongue;

And in my merry feet, too,
As I danced upon the green,
The while John piped as if he were
The piper to a queen.

Now John sits old and quiet
With a grandchild on his knee,
But when he pipes the old song
He smiles across at me.

*Then I know he remembers
When I danced upon the green,
The while he piped as if he were
The piper to a queen.*

POEMS ABOUT PEOPLE

DISCRIMINATION

"For black is black, and white is white,"
My mother used to say;
I scoffed at narrowness and said
That sometimes both were gray.
But strangely, she at eighty-odd
Can still new colors find;
While I, at less than half her age
Am almost color blind.

H A T E

I WIELED my sword with a lusty strength
And a grim delight in the wounds I made;
But not till my hand fell bleeding and maimed
Did I know I had fought with a shaftless blade.

S H A D O W

WHEN ALL the world was bright and I
Walked in the sunshine unafraid,
My shadow clung so close it seemed
Its fealty never could be swayed.
But swiftly, once, a lonely night
Came down; did then my shadow lend
Companionship? No! For it shared
With the dark and pain: a faithless friend.

THE MOON-KING'S DAUGHTER

WHEN I was a brash young lad I said
I would never with a mortal mate,
But a bachelor I would live
And die, unless I could conjure fate
To give me the Moon-King's daughter
... The Moon-King's lovely daughter.

Now I am to marry Susan Brown,
And she, they tell me, is own child
'To a neighbor farmer and his wife,
And they laughingly say I've forgot my wild
Sweet dream of the Moon-King's daughter
... The Moon-King's winsome daughter.

But they never have seen my Susan's eyes
When the moon shines in them full and fair,
Nor known how fitly its pale rays light
The dusky halo of her hair;
Or they would avow, as well do I,
That my boyish oath I do not forswear,
For she is the Moon-King's daughter
... The Moon-King's witching daughter.

TO BE OLD

THIS, then, is to be old: To take
Out once again the dreams that long
And long were cherished, and to find
Desire of them still sweet and strong;
But realizing now in peace,
Or bitterness, that no endeavor
Can bring them true; to lay them by,
Knowing, this time, it is *forever*.

YEARS

Slowly the years crept
 For a small lass,
 Tarrying endlessly
 Did the months pass;
 Hours were slow,
 Slow the clock's ticks,
 But she was **five**
 Then she was **six**,
But oh, would she ever, ever be seven?

Swiftly the years fly
 For a frail old
 Lady whose story
 Soon will be told:
 Sixty years yesterday,
 Eighty today,
 But flinch she does not
 As the years pass away;
One has no need for years in Heaven.

MAKING FRIENDS

IF YOU would make friends with a child
 Be not too eager nor demand
 A quick response; nor ever hold
 Too firmly to a little hand.
 Be busy elsewhere but alert
 For shy approach or overtures,
 And wait; quite likely you will find
 A small hand slipping into yours.
*The same rules hold no less, no less
 . . . For making friends with happiness.*

THE BELL TOLLS ON

THE BELL tolls on so harsh, so slow,
As if of purpose it would throw
A weight of sorrow and despair
Upon the circumambient air.

*"Death is so terrible," it sighs,
"Death is the end of all," it cries.*

But he who waits for overtones
Can hear beyond the tragic moans,
Faint melody. As stern notes fade
Into silence, they are made
Ineffably, though not for long
But yet for certain, into song.

THE FAINT-HEARTED

GOD pity those with minds so soft
And souls too weak to think of pain
For others or themselves, who grieve at toil
That tries the sinews; see no gain

Worth ever weary hands and feet;
Who weep at stumbling blocks, see still
Their harshness although these were made
A stairway, by a sturdier will.

God pity them, so faint of heart!
How can they contemplate the brave
Devotion of that One who reached
His goal by way of cross and grave?

POEMS ABOUT PEOPLE

TIME

TIME passes? No! Man passes, time
Is passed, and neutral and inert
 Has being only in man's need
 A little while — that he concert
His days and deeds! Beasts, seasons, tides
 Fill out their cycles with no thought
Of yesterdays or morrows. Only
 Upon the walls that men have wrought
 Are dials and clocks and calendars;
 And he alone counts suns and stars
To chart his course — half bold, half lonely
 For a land where time is not.

SEARCH FOR INFINITY

MAN plants his footprints on the sand
And flings his voice upon the wind,
 Accepting such impermanence.
His daily needs are disciplined
Into a world of time to which
He clings, because it is a land
 Familiar, as a waif might clutch
A wanted but ungracious hand.
But all the things by which men live
Have rootage elsewhere. None would give
 Sincere devotion to a fact
That he thought fleet or relative.
Within the search for novelty
And reckoning of style and trend,
 There is a core of deep desire
For grace and line that will not end
When their creating hand is dust.
And love, all love cannot dis sever
 Itself from baser things unless
Its phrases center in "forever."

I AND NINE

I AND nine beside me
 Set out to climb the way
 That tops the Hill of Happiness,
 One young and golden day.

We went with song and laughter
 Until I drew apart,
 Lest I confess a panting breath,
 A strained and laboring heart.

But on we went, still climbing
 And then, appalled, I came
 To an impassable abyss
 And in distress and shame

Through rising night I faltered
 Back down the path and cried,
 That I must fail; while others all
 Went on with unchecked stride.

*Then with a strange emotion
 I counted, gray and still,
 Nine shadows slipping past me
 Down the beautiful, sad Hill.*

WAITING

I HAVE gone up the hill again
 To the place where we loved to go,
 To press as solace against my heart
 The beauty we used to know.

The path is our old familiar trail,
 The trees are green and tall,
 The brook still cascades over the rocks
 In a rainbowed waterfall.

The sky is blue as skies can be,
 And upward the white clouds foam,
 But there is no beauty, O my dear,
 Nor will be till you come home.

THE FIRST RED ROSE OF SUMMER

I'm thinking now of how we always laughed
 At old Aunt Mary's sentimental ways,
 Her breathless wonder as the seasons changed,
 Her trite observances of times and days.

Especially, I think of how she walked
 In middle springtime by the old rock wall
 Where her loved roses clambered, seeking out
 The spot where southern sunbeams earliest fall,

To find an opening bud and pluck it from
 The vine and bear it tenderly; to say,
 As she arranged it — just so — in a vase,
"The first red rose of summer blooms today."

For now I walk along that old rock wall
 And peer among the tangled, thorny strands
 Of living green, to find the first red rose—
That I may lay it in her folded hands

EMPTY BASKETS

THE VILLAGE half-wit goes round the town,
 On his arm a basket, upside down;
 For, as he says with a knowing grin,
 "Somebody might put somethin' in
 If t'were t'other side up, then I'd be bound
 To have a load for to tote around."

"Poor chap!" said one wisely, "it makes me glad,
 Seeing one like him, that I've never had
 Chick or child . . . What if I had a son
 Like that poor addlepatented one?
 . . . I wouldn't risk it." — And he never knew
 He carried an empty basket, too.

M I D G E T

FOR FIFTY YEARS she met the public gaze
 From sideshow tent — or with more dignity,
 From formal stage; and answered careless stares
 With unafraid and elfin coquetry.

To those who knew her, in her piping voice
 She often said, "How fortunate am I!
 For I am sound and well in every way
 Except in being tiny; and the high

Reward of tininess is that the throngs
 Who come to call on me have brought me ease
 And wealth and fame for being just myself ——
 Rich recompense for doing as I please."

So she spoke always, and when she retired
 To a fine home especially designed
 And built for her, still did she speak
 Of fate as having been to her most kind.

But when she came to die, the brave pretense
 Of laughter from her, like quick twilight fell;
 With a long, trembling sigh she breathed, "*I hope
 In Heaven I shall be tall as Gabriel.*"

WINGS

*B*UT wings are wings, whatever sort they be,
Falcon's or hen's. The falcon's wings can bear
Their owner far aloft till he can see

The unveiled sun, and with a proud heart dare
Strong mountain winds to lift him to the sky
By making their upblast for him a stair.

But feeble are hen's wings, too weak to fly
Afar. And yet they can be stretched out wide
And flapped with vigor — as in a dream of high

And distant places, or in wistful pride.
And in great need they make flight, strange to see
And difficult, grotesque; but not earth-tied.

Even such flight has power to thrill and free:
For wings are wings, whatever sort they be.

SONGS FOR THE OUT-OF-DOORS

EAGLE

THESE are the things for which an eagle gives
His avian thanks: a sturdy heart, an eye
That is unblinking in the noonday sun;
Great wings that lift majestically high,
Above the earth where men dispute and strive
To conquer peoples or to keep them free.
He builds a nest protected only by
Its utter inaccessibility —
Assured that lesser courage, lesser strength
Before his jagged crags must early stop,
He lives apart — high hermit of the hills —
And dies alone upon his mountaintop.

F. L. M. S.

FOR elm trees grow like earnest men
Who in their youth
Grow narrowly, tall with desire
For skies of truth.
Grown older, they reach out broad arms
Well-leaved with sympathy
To throw a gracious, grateful shade
Of heart-deep charity.
Then, after years of sun and rain,
Unconscious of their majesty
The old trees wear the coronal
Of grace — humility.

TREE-LOVER

HE LOVED the forest as a lad, and all
His memories of happiest days
Of hunting, fishing, idling, play, went back
To an enshadowed woodsy maze.

And then life led him to a new, raw land
Where endless clear horizons tried
His patience, as he thought of plumèd hills
Back home. He labored to provide

His bread, then pressed his tired limbs on to plant
And till small trees, with hoe and spade,
While deeply, though half-consciously, he scorned
A land without the grace of shade.

Then from his plow he came one warm noonday
And noticed with a quick surprise
How tall the maple by the gate had grown,
How full of leaves. With shining eyes

He came within its shadow, bared his head
And screened from sun, stood there content:
For here at last was home, since trees could lend
This prairie their ennoblement.

MOUNTAIN BROOKS

A GIANT mastiff, the gaunt hill rests
At ease; but bearing still
The dignified aloofness of
Great bulk and strength and will.

Gazing afar with thoughts, perhaps,
Of winds and stars and tides;
While brooks like fluffy kittens play
At tumbling down his sides.

SONGS FOR THE OUT-OF-DOORS

DRY SUMMER

THROUGH ALL the summer, morning came without
A hint of mist or haze; the noonday sun
Was like a great and naked light-bulb in
A squalid room. And when the day was done
A dust-red ball of fire sank in the west
To rise again with hot, unclouded beams
Inexorable, on slowly withering fields
And cattle lowing by the lessening streams.
Our bitter hearts that summer did not know
That fields need to lie fallow; that the sun
Was not a demon but an alchemist
Bringing to weary lands that had begun
. . . To be depleted, new fertility;
That Nature so safeguards her earth that men
A thousand years from now may still
Bring in a harvest as they plant again.

OCTOBER

NOW COMES again, like something learned and loved
From long ago, the pattern of the days
That spell for us October — Sunny noons,
Crisp mornings, and on all the hills a haze
Of blue that softly fills the spectrum else
Distilled in myriad red and yellow tints
On every shrub and vine and tree and on
What once were weeds; and there are golden glints
In sunlit spots until the twilight comes
To mute the colors. Then a brief dusk yields
To greater splendor, as a harvest moon
Pours liquid silver on the garnered fields.

“A LATE BIRD SINGING”

I HEAR today a late bird's song within
The thinning branches of an autumn tree;
Not full and strong as when the leaves were green
But soft and very clear: *It seems that he*
May be recalling how one time he sang . . .
So gay he had been then, so confident,
Till he knew care and grief — and no song came
From his bright head, in toil and sorrow bent.
But now, in chastened joy, he lifts his head
Again, forgetting — and remembering.
And, for a weary heart these few soft notes
Are worth a thousand of the songs of spring.

SETTING SUN

HE STANDS upon the world's far edge
In smock of gold, with matched beret,
And with a brush of magic, paints
Upon a canvas blue and gray.
His hues are yellow with saffron tints,
A green like the palest buds of spring,
The shaded pink of an opening rose,
And a crimson gay as a redbird's wing.
With touches of silver and gleams of gold
The picture is lighted; now it glows
With splendor, then begins to change
And softer, grayer, paler grows;
Till over its quietude and peace
Night's primal curtain is unfurled;
Then swiftly is the artist gone
Adown the dark rim of the world.

FISHER LAD

THE SUN is a fisher lad going home,
Over his shoulder a gleaming pole
Bearing the catch of a warm, sweet day
From some supernal fishing hole.

Such brave fishes they are, of gold,
Silver and saffron, pink and rose;
Over the sky his bright catch spreads
As into the graying west he goes.

WEATHER BREEDER

IT IS TOO EARLY for such balmy air,
For sun so warm and bird-song everywhere.
It may be that forsythia's golden bell,
With sound too soft for human ears to tell,
Has rung, and Spring has answered for a day,
To bring to March the lyric touch of May.

We know it cannot last and sigh that brief
Must be such gladness. Yet our unbelief
In permanency makes our joy more strong
In perfect respite. Even the redbird's song
Is sweeter than tomorrow (*he may know*)
He will be silent, hunched against the snow.

THIS DAY.

THIS DAY has been an idle sullen lad
 That would not stir to any slightest breeze,
 Too indolent to shake the roadside dust
 From off the withering shrubs and stifled trees.

But evening brings stern punishment: a cloud
 Rolls up in frowning wrath; the pouting day
 Is shaken by indignant winds, and lashed
 By light but stinging whips of rain that play
 About his shoulders. Loud the thunder scolds
 As jagged lightnings their reproaches fling;
 Then cleansed and chastened he is put to bed
 With bright stars lighted for his comforting.

STREAM IN THE DESERT

*Somehow it twists the heart to see
 A river in a lonely land.*

So long has been its journeying
 From that high place in which the bland
 And melting snow gave it a glad
 Beginning, where small other streams
 Came tumbling in to swell its flow;
 Where tall trees screened it from the beams
 Of sun too hot; where it could play
 Without restraint, while gay bird-trills
 Accompanied its laughter as
 It ran — spoiled darling of the hills.

Now it moves barely: torn by winds,
 Consumed by sun, robbed by the harsh
 Dry land to which it carries life;
 Crushed in gorges, lured by marsh,
 Yet patient, yielding, giving still,
 Giving always with no demand——

*Somehow it twists the heart to see
 A river in a lonely land.*

CONSTANCY

THERE is a fault in narrowness; and yet
A stream that bears life to a panting land
Must stay within its channel jealously,
Or lose its purpose and itself in sand.

DISTANCES

A THOUSAND light-years distant there are stars
That pierce the curtain of the night;
Then how, if I seek them as guide or light,
Do they seem near, and instant to my eye?
Because since first their orbits flamed in space,
Before my earliest thought, before my birth,
Before the racial form was struck from clay,
Their light was flowing, flowing toward the earth.
Beyond, oh, far beyond the farthest star
Is one whose distance is infinity;
As far above my thoughts as stars above
My finger tips, is He, eternally.
But like the light of stars, His pouring love
The unimagined distances has spanned;
*I cannot reach Him, but He reaches me,
And holds my life within His gentle hand.*

STAR OF BETHLEHEM

THEY who with eyes made magic search the skies,
Who chart the comet paths, and lay beside
The lineaments of suns their measuring rods,
Who count the hosts of stars, yet far and wide
See not the Star of Bethlehem — are they
Not very empty at the Christmastide?

WIND - B O R N E

HERE where the memory of man had known
No slightest fall of rain, five days ago
A heavy shower fell till hollow spots
Were pools of water filled to overflow.
Today the desert plain is green; strange plants
And grass are springing from long-barren sands.
Whence came the life that makes the arid waste
Look for a little like the kindlier lands?
Now we remember winds that blew for months
On weary months, and know how much amiss
We judged the dust that carried seeds of life
With ageless patience, for a time like this.

THESE THINGS I LOVE

THESE three things I truly love,
Yea four things count most dear:
The song of a bird in the early morn
In the springtime of the year;
The slow, vague smile of a wakening babe
When half from slumber free;
The ring of truth in a strong man's voice
. . . And moonlight on the sea.

LINES AND LYRICS

I F

O, THIS might be a world still
 If no bird ever sang,
If no flower ever blossomed,
 If never rainbow sprang

Across the sky; *if* sunsets
 Were always drab and gray,
If never children shouted
 And sang in happy play;

If never lakes were mirrors,
 Nor grass a velvet mat,
If all the brooks were silent,
 And all the mountains flat;

If there were no great oak trees,
 Nor sycamore, nor pine;
But it would not be God's world,
 Nor could I wish it mine.

F I R E

WHEN YOU asked for my love I gave it,
 Glad it was you who could win,
I carried my fire to your hearthstone,
 But you — you locked me in.

Then the flame which had burned serenely
 Flickered in startled shock,
And flashed its reply to the insult
 . . . Of that flung lock;

And died away in the ashes
 Of the house you had built for me,
While I fled, scarred and tortured,
 But *free . . . free*

RIDING UP TO LONDON

MY TRUE LOVE is riding,
Riding blithe and gay
Up to mighty London
On his dapple-gray.

Riding up to London
For to see the king,
Riding up to London,
How my heart does sing!

Once he went a-riding
To the distant war,
Then my eyes were weeping,
Then my heart was sore.

But he fought so bravely,
Won such great renown
That the king has summoned
Him to London town.

There the king will honor
Him with all delight,
And with pomp and glory
Make of him a knight.

O, my lips are singing,
O, my heart is light,
My true love is coming
Home to me a knight.

Then on one glad morning
He and I shall wed,
Mid the blooms of springtime,
Mid the roses red.

O, the golden future
Bright with gladness stored,
I shall be his lady,
He will be my lord.

Riding up to London,
For to see the king,
Riding home to marry,
How my heart does sing!

I M P A T I E N C E

HAD YOU but waited till the quick flood passed,
The rocks between which now small waters run
Would have been steppingstones; and where you lie
We might have stood together in the sun.

L O S T M U S I C

I WAS a wild enough child no doubt,
With a hand-wrought lute to twang,
Simple and crude were the words I knew,
Untrained was the voice that sang.
But the sound of brooks was in my songs,
And the cadences of birds,
And love and faith were in my heart
And in my rustic words.
Then you who said you were my friends
Enrolled me in a school
Where my voice was tempered and refined
Like a microscopic tool;
You gave me a fine lyre fashioned by
A master of his art;
You taught my hands a smooth technique —
But you gave me an empty heart.
You laughed away my eager faith;
Made love seem blundering
O blame me not that my lips are mute,
I have no song to sing.

S H I P S

I SEND my brave ships out to sea
With strong and well-laid beams,
With sturdy masts and clean, white sails,
And laden down with dreams.

And some are lost afar at sea,
Beneath the wind-lashed waves,
And some are pillaged and destroyed
By ruthless pirate knaves.

Some sail laboriously back
By wave and tempest tossed,
With broken masts and ragged sails
And all their cargo lost.

And of the ships that went away
So few, so very few
Come sailing back with flying flags
And load of dreams come true.

But still I send my ships to sea
With strong and well-laid beams,
With sturdy masts and clean, white sails,
And laden down with dreams.

*For O, the lifting of the heart
When cutting through the foam,
With untold treasure in its hold,
A gallant ship comes home!*

W O U N D E D

I WILL heal my hurt
But I must
Have time;
For when trust is slain,
The wound
Is wide;
And there will be scars
. . . To hide.

But I shall make a
Wreath of light,
Stiff words like flowers
Which are bright,
But odorless; and of stout laughter
Like leaves whose green lasts ever after
The flight
Of years
. . . And tears.

And if some laugh
At my blatant wreath
They shall not scoff
At the scars beneath

WAITING, WAITING

ON EVERY HILL and valley lies the snow
As if it would deny the recollecting
Of flower and warmth and fruit, and roots that hold
Another spring. Denying? No, protecting.

And in the hollows where snows deepest lie
Are purplish shadows, as day is abating,
To indicate to wary eyes a pledge
That underneath are lilacs waiting, waiting.

LINES AND LYRICS

CLOCKS

THE LITTLE clock seems
To me to say:

*"You must hurry, hurry,
Don't take all day
... To do your work.
Time goes so fast
And you cannot use
An hour that's passed."*

But the big clock seems
To me to say:

*"There's work to be done
But you have the day
For your daily task.
Don't strain and puff,
Live calmly, serenely,
There's time enough."*

A LESSON IN FIRE-BUILDING

IT TAKES three logs to make a fire,
More if you wish, but less
Will never do. One log alone
Dies of its loneliness.

Two together will char a bit,
But go out as they fall
Apart. Try as you may, one log
Or two won't do at all.

If you want a big fire, pile logs on,
They will crackle and roar in glee;
But if you would have any fire
Your logs must number three.

COUNTRY FIRES

IT'S NICE to turn a knob and get
 A quick, hot blaze on which to set
 One's pans; and handy is the heat
 In silvered pipes. Yes, nice and neat
 Are city fires, and nothing spent . . .
 Till later, or concealed in rent.

My fires are made from cobs brought in
 From field and lot; and wood that's been
 Tall trees which by strong hands were dropped
 To earth and duly sawed and chopped
 To firewood lengths. I like to see
 Them catch on fire, in eager glee
 To mingle with the air; and flame
 And snap as if a merry game
 Of leap and crackle were the height
 Of any worthy wood's delight.

A fire you see and hear is part
 Of homey ways, and warms the heart
 As well as toes, and brings a mood
 Of deep content to cooking food.
 And there is something good and fit
 In fire that's earned before it's lit.

CAT BY THE FIRE

HE UTTERS no thanks for his drink and his food,
 But quietly sups, as if thinking it crude
 To mention small favors between good friends
 Who share what a kindly Providence sends.

He does not beg for a place by the fire
 But placidly takes it, as if to inquire
 Concerning so patent a comfort were not
 In the very best taste. Of course, any spot
 Not pre-empted by me must surely be meant
 For him; our long friendship assures such consent.

He stretches, then sleeps, tail wrapping his feet,
 And in compliment subtle but fully complete,
 And most unrefusable, purrs his content
 With a mistress so wise and beneficent.

A WOMAN TOO MUCH LOVED

SHE WAS a woman too much loved.
Always between her and all care, all pain,
Stood some strong man. If she reached forth
Pale, slender fingers unto life,
Ever a firmer hand met hers, and folded it
Upon her shallow breast again.
So she remained a child, but not possessed
Of childhood's greatest charm — its power to grow.

Much was she like some costly collic dog
Which, for its beauty, may not go
With weary feet and panting breath
But jubilant heart
Afar through field and thicket, wood and moor,
To do great deeds of shepherding:
But restless in its pen, lies down at length,
To snap at flies.

Denied a woman's rightful load
Of service and self-giving love,
Borne gladly by a soul grown strong,
She heaped up little sorrows, petty griefs,
Vague nuances of pain,
And smothered at the last
Beneath a load of straw.

LOST TEARS

ONCE tears were but a tiny streamlet flowing
 Within the spillway of the dam;
 And laughter was the sand upon the shore:
 A thing to trickle through one's fingers
 And rest upon in gay content.

But flood came and the spillway roared
 A torrent that could tear away the dam itself
 And let the pool run dry.
 So, desperately, I packed my laughter into bags,
 And piled them on, below, against the dike . . .
 Till they held water, all the waters, back.

Thus evermore light tears, all tears, are done
 Lest they become again a frantic flood;
 And all my laughter lies unchanging . . .
 In firm, deliberate, piled-up bags
 Against the dam.

IN THE VALLEY OF AJALON

(*Joshua 10 : 12*)

SOFT BLOW the winds in the Valley of Ajalon,
 Warm lie the slopes of the Valley of Ajalon
 When noontide is high.

Ever do the winds remember
 Ever do the green meads yearn
 For the long day they once knew
 When the world was stout and young.

Sunrise, noon, and sunset and the night —
 Dawn and day and twilight —
 Follow in ceaseless rhythmic order
 In the Valley of Ajalon.

The winds ask the hillsides,
 Will it come again,
 The long day, the strong day
 When all God's world stood still?

And the hillsides wait and wonder . . .
Wait and wonder

PIONEER

THIS IS, they say to me, a paradise,
 A house impervious to heat and cold
 Where I can never know
 The north wind's howling or the east's complaint;
 A garden walled and tended, where
 No withered leaf is seen, and no
 Imperfect bud can bloom.

But is there not somewhere an apple I can taste
 To win my banishment to sterner climes?
 There I would build
 A snug, rough cabin that would feel
 The norther's fury, and should laugh
 To hold it back.

There, land untrammled since creation's dawn
 Would yield to rich, smooth furrows;
 There, raw, strong Nature I
 Should fight as enemy, and labor with
 As friend; would serve as bondsman
 And yet rule as master. There I could claim
 Perhaps a stinted living, but
 A generous life.

REMEMBERING

I SHALL GO softly all my days
 Remembering
 That you whom I thought base
 Have since you went away
 Been proved to be
 Utterly selfless and entirely kind.

I shall not grovel in remorse,
 Knowing
 You would not have it so;
 Hoping
 Somewhere you understand.

But softly, softly I shall go
 All my days,
 Remembering.

THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED

SOME SAY He still is dead,
 That His strong, gentle voice that spoke
 As never man did speak was hushed forever;
 That hands once stretched in healing, invitation, prayer,
 Have never, since the harsh nails pierced them through
 Been whole again; that His transcendent power
 Which drew all hearts, which calmed wild seas
 And men turned mad, which brought back Lazarus and
 The little maid, itself was conquered; that in Judea's hills
 Somewhere His body fills an unknown grave, or blows,
 Dust of the very dust, before the winds
 That sweep His ancient land.

But how, then, does His work go on?
 Why are the lepers cleansed, the blinded made to see?
 Why do dead men and nations rise
 To life again, and call upon His name?

He is not dead. Death had, but could not hold Him,
 And He walks today through all the world,
 Unseen, but not, O, not unknown;
 Living, and bearing life, *forevermore*.

C R E D O

*This is my credo, then:
 That though I fall,
 Yet fall with hands outstretched
 And face turned toward the goal,
 That though I weep,
 Yet, through my tears, press on;
 That though I flinch and fear,
 And though my feet go slowly, slowly, yet
 Don't turn back or even turn aside;
 Sometime I shall find the long trail's end,
 And there, I know not how,
 Find joy for all my sorrow,
 Rest for my weary feet,
 And peace forever.*

