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The New Road
and Other Poems

By the same Author

MOTHER TO SON
THE SCHOLAR
THE QUEST UNENDING
CHANGING HORIZONS

The 'New Road
and Other Poems

by

Geoffrey Johnson

London

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1939

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FOREWORD

THE Author wishes to thank the Editors of the following for permission to reprint some of the poems in this book: *The New English Weekly*; *The Dalhousie Review*; *Voices*; *Queens Quarterly*; *The Jongleur*; *The Phoenix*; *The Observer*; *English*; *The Field*; *The Atlantic Monthly*; *The Sunday Times*; *John O' London*; *The Argosy*; *The Christian Science Monitor*; *The Commonweal*; *The Listener*; *The Saturday Review of Literature*; *The Lady*; *The Spectator*; *Punch*; Messrs. Cape's Best Poems Series; *The Fortnightly*.

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ONCE MORE

SET your face once more to the East wind,
Get over once more the barren wait
For the bright event outside the mind
To change the world's or your own state.

Set your face once more to the long road.
Once more warm dreams of overnight
Are flat as whey, are chill as the toad,
Are ashen-dead in the heedless light.

Set your face once more to the sky's line
Which lithe centurion, pilgrim, friar,
Self-weaned at last of the hoped-for sign,
Set their faces to, with purer fire.

Shut your heart once more to the voice feigning
There's bread in stones and grapes on moors;
Hope nothing, step proudly and uncomplaining:
Time cancelled their grief, as it cancels yours.

Yet, if it should happen, for there's no telling
Where hope abandoned may suddenly glow,
That an hour before the twilight's knelling
The burning Face from the sevenfold bow

Should pierce your heart with a joy like gillies
As the moments beat their gongs of gold,
And rods in the miracle burst in lilies—
Let your heart sing out, let the world be told.

THE NEW ROAD

TRUST your first impulse, run in time for joy
From the dark dreaming house to the wide fields
Tossing in slanted brilliance from the east.
Discover the bright world for the first time, see
The world new-born in its untrodden dews,
And you yourself, your blindness washed away,
A wonder leaping in its miracle.
Now feel it is for joy, for very joy
That the stream flows, that the cock crows, the child
In his irradiated bedroom wakes
Between his sleeping parents, and begins
His matin prelude to himself, alone.

Trust your first impulse. Though your brain was
worn,
Crowded to weariness like burial grounds
With tales of human follies in the past;
Though aeon on aeon of man's feverish dream
Was dominated by the nightmare, war,
And not a yard of earth but wears the stain—
Behold how, now, despite the critic owl

And the lewd comment of the coupling worm
That wriggles earthward at the tread of day,
The light of life in one miraculous night,
Filtered through layers of the centuries
Wells irrepressible, and pristine-pure
Tosses its fountains to the paling stars,
And bids the souls of men begin again
As on the first of mornings, and rejoice
With all the day before them.

Joy, O joy

It is that drives these windy glittering swallows
And semicircle of low silver light
Like an incoming sea of flowered foam
Round the green gardens of the sleeping houses.
And out of stately ships of cloud, like shadows
Leaping the furrows of the meadow-flowers,
Immortal spirits seem to disembark
And crowd the dreamers' doors with news, with
news
Almost too lovely for the hold of words.

I catch from tones, from their enkindled faces
Some way to speak their language of the sun:
Arise and see, O dear and dreaming comrades,
Arise and see your new discovered country
Washed clean of hate, the future at your doors.

And trusting my first impulse, like a boy
I sing, I bless the sleepers unawares.

THE REACTIONARY REBELS

THEIR pride mistakes the turbid for profound
And scorns as shallow what is jewel-clear,
As if all clarity were tinkling sound,
And noise a proof that Homer will appear.

Deceptive in simplicity, the light
Unfathomable, not the darkness, holds
The flaming secret: from long pain and fight
With chaos rose its quintessential golds.

Yet these, more subtle, find more art in jumble;
Advance, reversed from kingdoms light has won,
To swamps primordial, where the sex-god's mumble
Seems purer-lipped than trumpets of the sun.

They spurn the finished Phidias, praise the raw
Quarries it rose from; spurn the lords of words
Who walked the weltering waves imposing law,
And ape the jargon of chaotic herds.

And for the caveman scrawling in the smoke
Dethrone the Raphaels, rip down aureoles,
And by their songs of lovely dirt invoke
The gods to see the squalor of their souls.

THE SIGNAL BOX

ON dim moth-haunted nights of phlox
And blackly cowed inscrutable sky
All roads look up to the signal box
And the burning lamp, its sleepless eye.

Aloft in his tower of thought, alone,
Gathering in cool and masterly hands
Networks of destinies not his own,
Patterns of lives as a ball of strands,

A figure moves in lustres of levers
That catch their shine from his lucid will;
And the only sound is the heaving river's,
And a bird that cries in its sleep, and is still.

MOUNTAIN PERSPECTIVE

BY one lean talon-root the single tree
Clings and endures above the precipice,
Which seems the edge of the blue burning world.
Far off, two mountain towns through cypresses
Glitter like twin eyes of the horned snail.
Far off, the mighty river, which we know,
Is a white filament of airiest nerve,
And, in perspective with the world of tree,
Is no more stable than one real root

Fast in the rock, and having for stray friends
Of reassurance, rivalries in play,
The chamois dodging chaos by a beard,
The sunward eagle balanced on a hair.

VILLA D'ESTE, TIVOLI

FOUNTAIN with delicate fountain interlaces;
Ledge over bowery ledge, pure sound and radiance
Sparkle from moss-rich pipes of this multiple organ
In curves as varied as hues of leaf:
Now starrily bright and hanging on night-dark
 cypresses,
Now silver-swirled on a level with twisted olives,
Now falling finer than rain on the cheeks of cyclamen
That burn with the pity of all things brief.

Gone is the world-throned Roman, the gods of the
 Roman;
Gone is the ravaging Goth; the cultured Cardinal
Building from classical woes the world's new
 wonder
Is a new Antiquity, is gone.
But he whose mind, as lively and clean as water,
Devised this welling joy for the desert Campagna
Now strewn with the ruin of empty tombs and
 empires,
Lives on, like a lovely thought lives on.

THE PICNIC

LYRICAL day, clean-sanded bay,
Blue-green and sparkling ocean, spray
Crisping in curves to curves of gulls,
Sea-music filling the laughter-lulls
Of two quick sisters quizzing a third,
The youngest, who, so their wits divine,
Has found a lover . . .

How liquidly shine
Their eyes in tone with the candid sun
And the fore-shore's overflowing fun.
Like note from throat to throat of bird,
Caught and sent spinning, like irised balls
Cresting a jet that crystallly falls,
Yet keeps the glittering wonder in air,
Is their play of phrase:
"Is he dark, is he fair?
Studious? No? How furtive you are!"

I shall see them ever, sitting, delighted
As children, their back-blown hair united
By the wind, their features keened with stress
Of joy, and woman's inquisitiveness,
Probing the daylight to find a star—
And the youngest, standing, her back to them,
Half-pleased to drop from a careful hem
A crumb of conjecture, drinking the sound
As they build surmises on nearer ground

And laugh as it falls. I see day sink,
And a hint of battle in her eyes,
If only a breath should criticise;
Her look of one descending to prank
From a distant world, of one who drank
The sea-line up, and still could drink.

EAST OF EDEN

SHREWD as an animal, no more at bay
To doomful angels and their burning thrust,
Adam sat watching his two sons at play,
And felt their loveliness was more than dust.

The cloudwrack smoothed to gold, his brow once
wrinkled

Shone furrowless and virginal; behind
His visual joy in limbs that curved and twinkled
Like perfect fruit, a fruit of glowing rind,

Breath-taking, paradisal, went and came.
"What are you thinking of?" said thoughtful Eve.
"The apple you gave me once. Their limbs aflame
Bring back, full-flooded, that Tree's delicious heave

In the bright wind. These balance every doom
Borne, or to bear: in them we shine and run
Unflawed of mould and unimpaired of bloom,
Spirits yet worthy of unsetting sun. . ."

"Balance?" Her voice trailed limp from far away,
The while she followed with unswerving eyes
Her first-born, naked in a fiery ray
Throwing and catching javelins juggler-wise

On cool and stainless palms; his laughter whirred
Like his who fools with monstrous implications;
Endlessly butcher-bird and mocking-bird
Spun patterns of his murderous cachinnations.

Adam arose in anger: his drift was missed.
And like a wind withholding its proud rain
Eve called and called through deepening red, and
 kissed
Shuddering, she knew not why, the brow of Cain.

THE MILKY WAY

ALL day that phrase of Chaucer's childlike tongue
Lisped at my heart, of how when faith was young
Pilgrims would fare to Galice at Saint Jame.
Then chimed associations, name by name,
Evoked in snatches like some wistful air
That lovely legend I had read somewhere
Of how on any starry night you may
Behold the Blessed down the Milky Way

Streaming from land to sleeping land to gain
That ocean-haunting light of Western Spain.
Then trebled by recoil, that horror rose
Of kinsmen burning, bombing kinsmen-foes
To the last man; orgies of stabbing, raping,
Whose naked fact there was no more escaping
Than the white spate of light through which they
screamed.

What terrible maniac-mockeries leered and teemed
In place of gentle faith so fondly dreamed,
When, let alone in heaven, not even in man
The faintest vein of milky mercy ran ...

Yet in between my tortures in those hells
Of carnage, still like broken chime of bells
That legend floated, would not give me peace
Nor even with darkness granted heart's release,
And as in vision over Spain I stood,
I suddenly thrilled to wings of a great brood,
I thrilled, then shrank, from choirs of plaintive
singing

Purer than trebles in clerestory ringing
And most like homeless birds high over corn
Through which from dawn to dark the blade has
torn.

"Mock me no more," I begged, "Grant me this
mite

Of peace, to me who can no more delight

In God or man. For though I have beheld
On either side courage unparalleled
(To wit, yon score of lads at their last tether
Self-bound by oath to stand and burn together)
I must lament the more the strength misplaced,
The heart's magnificence rilling out to waste
On gladiatorial sands, and none to cry
From the spectator lands or arching sky,
'Butcher your hopes no more.' "

But they replied,
"We still are here, the Pities you deride;
Cut off from human hearts and lost like you,
We know not where to go; and what to do
We know not, but to circle in mid-air.
Yet radiant hosts of help are everywhere,
If men would look."

And as I looked, the stars
Flashed in and out like golden swinging bars
Admitting as to masque and pomp of flutes
All the great souls who lifted men from brutes,
Poet and martyr, painter and musician,
Founder of law and state, nurse and physician.
Tracker of germ, and watcher of the night,
Makers and healers all in steady flight
Above the battle streamed seraphic light;
But still below, destroyer and destroyed
Spilled the rare gains of ages on the void,
And, still awaiting human hearts, remained
The Pities, and through night with me complained.

PHILOSOPHERS

Six roan bullocks with a black one in the middle
Chew the cud solemnly, wag the lower jaw;
Couched in a pensive gloam the late rays riddle,
They behold the majesties of metaphysic law.

Everything is horn and hoof in their bovine heaven:
Man, the comic biped, forking down their hay,
Struts, a shape unreal to the Mystic Seven
Dreaming of the Mangold that passes not away.

KITTY

I BEGIN at the great High School for Girls next week,
And don't you forget it.
I shall ride my bicycle, new and shining-sleek.
No rain has wet it,
Nor road-pools either. But I love as I ride by
In the jolly blue weather
To watch the reflected Scholarship girl that's I
Poised like a feather.
A thing all freckles and teeth and sunburnt knees,
Says the winking water
With a grave mock-frown like father's, trying to
tease
His dunce of a daughter.

Attractive, yes in the mouth (when shut), says Fred—
That's the wit of a brother;
One bright idea lost in a jungle of head—
That's my wag of a mother.
But I shall show them, girls and mistresses too,
The stuff I am spun of,
When I ride in greatness through crowds up our
avenue
Who now am made fun of,
I am not quite beautiful, nor yet quite plain,
And would scorn to be pretty,
But I have a merry heart, and I have a brain—
And the Will, sings Kitty.

SHAFT REPAIRS

I HEAR and see, as childhood heard and saw,
The huge coal braziers roaring in a flaw
Of night-wind at the pit-head; by the rails
Ponies lift Scythian manes and Scythian tails,
Or flame like horses in Apocalypse,
And silhouette canals and then eclipse.
Large forms in stained fawn flannel, reeking damp,
Yet faintly nimbused by the hanging lamps,
Airily mount the plate; the banksman rings,
And the dark cage descends. My thoughts are wings
Fluttering in grip of iron-fisted fear;
I am the child, thrown by his father, sheer

Up in the air, and frightened of descent
From such a perilous peak of dazzlement,
As I look over, wits aw whirl, and see
Through dragon-fumes of earth's hostility
Those men suspended in a double night,
Hanging upon a word or wire pulled right,
Yet merrily tapping trowels at the shaft
And bright as men inspired, or danger-daft. . .
There is no other sound in all the wide
Blackness of space but their blunt message, cried
And through the ghostly stillness magnified,
"Lower, Lower." The words sound bravely on
Even from the very bowels of Acheron,
Charged with that other-world significance
Of lips veil-hidden, speaking in a trance,
Of souls who having passed the bounds of Hell
Have still the strength to cry that all is well.

Throughout all time those forms of majesty
Descend, descend, and search; eternally
"Lower, lower," that disembodied cry
Floats undefeated to a starless sky.

FURNACE WHARF

BRISK as a plague of frogs, the pale-skinned lads
Who have no pool splash in the green canal,
Which summer sunset and great forges puffing
Under the water their long coils of steam
Have warmed to the luxurious feel of spas.

Some dive, some dog it, and some brightly souse
The shrinking milksop while he gasps revenge,
And all intensely happy, unaware,
Blessedly so, of what abides their play—
The blind Machine more terrible of maw
Than any oriental idol, Siva
Or Moloch, that will take them, body and soul,
Even as it took their fathers, body and soul,
Then cast them from it with its mounds of slag.

Still let them play and dream. Seal in your heart
Your bitter mood; glide like a ghost, be gone.
Leave them at least illusions: the great coal-barges
Lining the wharf are to their kindled eyes
Lovelier than all Venetian gondolas.
This is their only river, yet more a marvel
Than fabulous Hydaspes, holy Ganges;
And those cloud-cupolas, fretted in sharp fire
On wizardries of smoke that branch like palms,
Are poised on spells which one bleak word would
 shatter,
Are their last joy before their daylight dims.

DELIGHT

I WILL make songs for sheer delight
Rippling like any boy's or thrush's,
Or frolic wind in withered rushes.
I will be glad in scorn's despite.

Life has dark sorrows—well, too well
I know them, as the shivering starling
Knows the long winter gaunt and snarling,
Yet keeps uncracked his merry bell.

The festering alleys—much, too much
Men know them; they have also vision
Beyond the dirt and foul derision:
They know, as I, the pain from such.

I will make songs for their delight,
For them who lost it, never knew it:
The splendour of life shall sparkle through it
A fountain leaping day and night.

TONYDRYBONE

DOURLY determined not to be surprised,
Old Tony Drybone, gaitered in prunella,
Holds up that dripping world, his huge umbrella,
Panting, "It's raining nails—as I surmised."

In that black circle moving with his tread,
He takes his gloomy pleasure in the notion
That he is target for the winds' commotion,
And holds the weight of heaven on his head.

"Good for the character, to grin and bear"—
So rapt in stoic joylessness is Tony
He still plods hooded, clenching fingers bony
Long after flocks of light are back in air,

And holly mirrors twinkle with sun-dapples,
And the clear pavement-pools are coral-pinked,
And shopgirls, lightly laughing, arms enlinked,
Dance from a west of tossed Hesperian apples.

SOLITUDE

THIS, then is solitude: to stand assailed
On every side by doubt, desire, regret;
To live with jostling passions closely gaoled,
To magnify in quiet the mouse's fret
To teeth of tearing demons; to be flailed
By the remorseless minutes, till no husk
Of pride is left; to contemplate till dusk,
And then from dusk to dawn how poor the
wheat;

To writhe and wrestle, like Sebastian nailed
To Time, the tree, invoking the blank cloud,
While any fool escapes among the crowd
The volleys of self-truth he dare not meet . . .

And this her triumph for one strong enough
To tread deliberate on her floor of swords:
The blades burst into lilies at his feet;
The cool, the spring, the wing of mountain swards
Are in his heels and in his heart who dares
Unflinching knowledge of his worst despairs,
Alone. And what for souls of weaker stuff
Were deep imprinting steel of prison bars
Is lightlier worn than moonlit shadows of trees
That write their vanishing legend on a wall.
The self surmounting self is lord of all
That seeming chance which works a nation's fall
Or whirls the just man in catastrophes;
He shares that ordered freedom of the seas
And winds, which move to their majestic ends
By widest circles; these he comprehends
And those august processions of the stars.

IT MAY BE

IT may be as the doubters moan
And steely logic would conclude,
That man must fight his fight alone,
A mite in blind infinitude;
That man but fashions of desire
A throned divinity who hears
Beyond the Pleiads and the Lyre
His exultations and his tears;

That when most mortally he grieves
He has no refuge but a lie,
Tales of a God-man who achieves
Miracles the bitter facts deny;
That prisons broken up by glory
And saints who sing and pass outside
Are wishes in a childhood story,
Are sops for his defeated pride . . .

And yet, though dead men come no more,
Once gone with sound or wind or gleam
And pagan myriads gone before,
It may be as the dreamers dream.
For, whatsoever else is fable,
This tale is true, as I have seen:
The man with will enough is able
To throw his fear and live serene.
Whether divinity wells within
Or stoops from heaven to his trust,
The wrestler with the will to win
Compels a victory from the dust—
And, miracle, not less but more,
A man, self-gaoled in triple cells
Of sense, and deader than his door,
Shall hear a cry as clear as bells,
Shall see his fetters melt in sun
As fall the bastions of the night,
Shall clap his hands, and sing and run
In floods of unimagined light.

CIVITAS DEI

THE blind, whose sharpened powers of hearing
Catch a prophetic music from a reed,
The deaf and dumb, whose sharpened eyes interpret
The living word before the sound's appearing;
The starved in garrets, the lame man in the litter,
Who know too well how they would dance
If only given the chance
Of limbs and powers we daily, hourly fritter—
They marvel at us, whose health and wealth abound,
They marvel at us, who stagger deaf with sound,
They gesture to us, who fumble blind with sight,
To see the new world towering into light,
To hear its brave bells ringing all around,
And in our midst, and waiting to be found.

SUMMER ALTERNATIVES

PILLOW your head and dream in summery nook
On that high-tension battery, Shelley's book—
So, disconnected from your vital look,

It sleeps in uncreation; the tight-stored
Powers of immortal mind lie all ignored,
The heights and depths of music unexplored.

But marvel more: a stone beneath your head
Is just as packed and charged, and just as dead
Till sight with true imagination wed

Sees it from heaven's side: the touch that clings
From hand and foot of countless hinds and kings
And Stardust of empyreal wings.

Dream on; or wake, when vision, sharp from sleep,
Unhooded, snaps in instantaneous leap
Creation ever rising from the Deep;

Then take the stone: you touch on marvellous lands,
The lightnings of spent suns are in your hands,
Seas of ethereal fire reined in by strands.

Take it, or take the book, or merely stare,
Or dream again, it matters not: the air,
The ground, the space dividing flower and tare

Are charged with burning and seraphic gyres
Ecstatically fingering lutes and lyres,
As a June orchard of invisible choirs.

THE SOURCE OF THE DANUBE

HERE in a florid basin worn with weather
Began, begins, is evermore beginning
In seven fine crystal bubbles upward spinning
The Danube that shall bring far lands together—

The water that outlives all Caesar's eagles,
Kaiser's or Czar's, and with unwounded sweep,
Ignores all frontiers and the hates they keep
Still baying for blood like closely kenneled beagles—

Here at this point of time, too, is beginning,
If Powers would read the small but visible signs,
The Purpose that shall fuse all boundary lines
And march brow-kindled to a great goal's winning,
And never look back to form and creed outdated.
The rumour of far-off waves is part a river's,
But more the Peoples', who in knit endeavours
Thunder for joy through barriers iron-gated.

HER DAUGHTER

THE years flow over where ravage has been,
And emotion's battles are hidden in healing green,
And Time that took away youth has given again,
Has given a love of fairer rarer mould
Than when I burned to be her man of men
And saw her, a bride, trip over another's fold.
The door that took her and closed with a sound like
doom's
Has become by grace of alchemizing Time
A light like glass, opening on infinite rooms
Tender with flowers untouched of mire or rime.

The simple altar men lose their lives to find
Lies hidden from carven court and elaborate bend;
The tortuous pattern of music men weave and wind
Resolves to one pure and lucid chord in the end.
And love, that was ever mine of flourish and smoke,
Self, jealousy, pride, desire in a cloak,
To one of essential flame, is now sheer light
Where the soul sings over the past's despoite.
As all men come to a little child in the end,
As the wisest narrow their heaven to one bright
star,
I touch the mother (whose beauty still could rend
Like a too-bright sun) in this rare cool star of hers,
This child by another, her little innocent maid.

Self is no more, and passion never blurs
The prismatic light and the April-scented glade
Of the spiritual country Time confers—
The sweeter because the fountain murmurs afar.

TWO EPITAPHS

I

SHE went like dew from the forest,
Like snow from the stony firs,
When the world's dry heart had sorest
Need of that freshness of hers.

She passed, as the gleam from the cavern,
As a fall of song on the air,
When the warring world was a tavern
Shouting to hide despair.

The daisy mown in the meadow
Rises again as before.
She stepped but once in the shadow
And comes to the light no more.

II

Let neither clods nor stones
Cover her tender bones.
Lie lightly, Earth, for she
Tripped elfin-light on thee.

Her breathing made less noise
Than blossom-stir or poise,
Or west wind when it dies
To its own lullabies.
Tread softly, Earth, we pray;
For her who like a sprite
Found in herself delight
Abundant for the day;
Sing softly, Earth, and keep
In dewy-lidded sleep
This borrowed bloom of ours,
This flower among thy flowers.

THE SPANIEL

THE spaniel at hedge-bottom gaps
Puffs and slows, bluffs and blows,
Hoping some rabbit-patriarch
Or partridge-king will warm his nose.
Not one of his lop-eared tribe, in spite
Of clever wheezes ever seizes
Anything more than goose-grass garlands,
Bramble-motley, fool's parsley cheeses.
Rabbits a yard off laugh in quorum
At nose and ears close as shears;
Partridges whirr, an inch from whiskers
And lion-pads which no one fears.
Yet never he flags: he runs and wags,
Slows and puffs, blows and bluffs,
Burning with dreams of end-all slaughter
Decreed for turnip-feasted chuffs.

GARDENS UNDER THE RAIN

STEADILY, like myriads of minutest bells,
Rain from the day's dim towers has chimed for hours
Over men's dusty gardens and hidden seed-cells
Thirsting to liberate their lovely flowers.
Not mine is grief in this gray monotone,
But rather release
Back to instinctive joys I long have known:
That all one piece

Is human nature, forget it how I would;
That all, as I,
Seeded with powers that yearn to come to good,
Must feel and love, or separately die.

Crumble the dead-rot reason, the clods of pride
Till the senses revel at their mysterious core;
Dance on my heart and the withered heart of the
 world,
O blessed forerunners of pity so long denied:
Open for all men's flowers, and mine, the door.

BY STILL WATERS

DEEPER, as light declines, seaweed and tangle
Fringing the loch's edge, burn. The rose-red heather
Deepens to kingliest purples; pool and spangle
Darken together.

The pencillings of birch on granite boulders
Are silvered smokes. The sleeve of dark erases
Veinings of sheep-tracks; giant mountain shoulders
Blur into hazes.

Yet clearer, now that sight has done with seeking,
We hear the gannet plunging like a plummet,
The voice eternal of the torrent speaking
Lore of the summit.

THE FLITTING

THEY were so poor, the hurrying tribe I saw,
They could not hire a cart, but went by night
With chair and palliase of peeping straw,
Dodging accusing fingers of lamplight.
Tired parents winced, as faces wince in sleep
Shifting their posture on a bed of pain,
In the wan hope that a hovel found more cheap
Meant change of destinies with change of lane.
Swift as on quicklime stepped their eldest girl,
Swift as a deer, an arrow in her side;
Her eyes were a deer's eyes of mother-of-pearl
Brimming with tears that would not fall for pride.

Where is she now? Her dumb appeal should make
The very archangels quarrel to have the honour
Of leaping down at wrongs which pressed upon her.
But if light fails of champions for her sake,
And dusk looks down, stony, without a stir,
May Night's Madonna-mantle comfort her.

BEGGARS

THOUGH beggars may defraud, and more parade

 Their catastrophic woes by voice or strings,
We have no subterfuges to evade

 The men who sit like broken bards or kings,
Speechless in market-places, caps on knees,

 Their eyes half-opened—door on door ajar
Through which their sorrow-sharpened vision sees
 Our naked souls, not as we think we are.

Though they condemn not, in their inner light

 They muse so long on Justice that they wear
Her majesty suffused; their looks indict

 The world that we conspire with and accept;
Our guilt implied is more than we can bear,
 And the heart weeps apart, as Peter's wept.

GREATNESS

DEBATE no more what human greatness is.

 We cloud its meaning, but we know it still
 By the swift shiver and electric thrill
And the soul's chime to instant harmonies.

It chooses many mansions, Poesy's,

 Music's, or lonely shepherd's on the hill;
 Distinct in kind, yet fashioned by one will,
They are all divine in their affinities.

The steeple-jack, a fly that flecks a spire,
Is cynosure and lord of space with Wren.
The Cape Horn shipboy hung in the hurricane's
ire
Reaches Magellan's stature, assumes his ken;
The miner burnt alive saving his men
Is Dante's peer rapt in cyclonic fire.

THE BUILDERS

I SAW or dreamed this heart-uplifting thing:
A new and statelier City is begun;
And, lightly poised on skiey scaffolding
Whose filaments fuse in torrents of bright sun,
Brave builders make their mallets flash and ring
In a sure rhythm, where dream and will are
one;
So high and lonely is the risk they run
The very clouds seem of their chiselling.
They are not blind to rural peace; they read
That simple map, the past below. It is
Not scorn of life, but most compelling need
Of fuller, laughs at old securities;
They must aspire to the sun's mysteries
Whose spirits are of his celestial breed.

GALE WARNING

"THE clouds are dark, the winds of doom
Moan in the flue," the fearful say.
Resuming trivial task or play,
They mumble through an airless gloom,
"Only a fool would fly today,"
And I could moulder, if I would,
Like them, and waste dear life in waiting
For heaven to do what mortal should
And can, instead of doddering and debating.

For now or never life is felt,
And he who climbs and climbs on wings
Shall find at last a cloudless belt
For full release of the coiled springs—
Where what seemed adverse turns to oar him,
And sick-eyed doubt shall never find him,
The dazzling berg of sun before him,
The whales of wind charging for joy behind him.

MORNING VISTA

LIKE a great ball of molten gold
The sun from dusky doors was rolled.
Level with earth, it rayed its lances
In challenge to the rimy cold.

Dilated through white smoke of frost,
Like furnace-figures lit or lost.
Street-workmen swung their picks and shovels
That seemed at whiles to carve a cantle
From the bright ore; their torsos tossed
The night off as a worn-out mantle;
Their muscles, as if bursting thongs,
Out-sinewed the bare boughs of beech;
Their motion was heroic speech.

In magnified reverberate gongs
Of sound, as if gigantic tongs
And hammers rang on golden anvils
Between high mountains, dings and dong
Made merry in my heart, and woke
Behind the veils of light and smoke
Echoes in hosts, ringing responses,
Clear reedy trebles of young-eyed angels
In rhythm to taps of velvet mallets
On silver dulcimers, a chanting
Down deepening light and distance: "Higher
And happier will our wings aspire
When all men stripped of custom's cloak
Behold the light, that it is good. . . ."

Between a gleam of pick suspended
And flint-spark where its motion ended
All this had happened. Still I stood
At fringe of the receding choir

Of golden-misted music: "Higher
And happier shall we climb the fire
When all men wake and see their splendid
World reborn from hate and mire
And shape its gold to our desire. . . ."

And once again the picks descended.

HEARTHSTONE

NOT vainly have all ages held divine
The hearth, the vestal chastities of thought;
There nightly is the holy battle fought
By dark primeval and the soul a-shine.
The stones are hallowed as the stones that sign
A spot among the mountains where men wrought
And fought to keep their freedom. There, un-
bought
At last, the heart may murmur: this is mine,
It is most strange that from a square of light
Below tremendous heavens man should dare
To hurl rebellion down the throat of night,
Should make the phalanxes of stars despair,
Should trip the thundering darkness with a sleight
And hang its lightnings, trophies in his lair.

THE WORDSWORTHS

As one in crisis, though he loves his kin
Will often take from strangers the sure draught
Of vital faith, I turn from wars and graft,
From money and bankrupt creed, and all their din,
To my Saint William—strong and slow to win,
But human, most endeared when flawed in craft,
Making dark walls, while wit and worldling
laughed,
A mountain-temple, by radiance from within
His mind's magnificence. Plain-song cool and spare
His music, till whirled up in eagle-gyre
To burn our baseness in majestic fire.
Not less, his dawn-sprite sister, nun-coifed, fair
As April cherry, or beck that trips through rare
Odour of mountain flowers to mill and byre.

THE PIPERS

MOTHER Piper, Father Piper,
Bare-armed daughters firm as cherries,
Sons as live and lit as berries,
All alike, except in ages,
Down to singing Baby Piper,
Nine in number, dine on Sundays

With the lusty pagan gusto
Found alone in Homer's pages.

And all the while, like unsluiced water
Battling, clucking down one funnel,
Or a truck-train through a tunnel,
Endlessly the topics jostle,
Run in rhythm to the wassail,
To cock-canary's lyric spate,
Knife and fork that give no quarter,
Arriving and departing plate.
Joy in living, scorn of fate
Peals like bells and bursts like bubbles
Only to begin again
From shrill singles to chimed doubles,
Triples, quadruples; then eight together,
Like missel-thrushes in the rain
Prophesying jolly weather
And the jolly worms and snails
Still to come when language fails,
Invoke the Sweet, which Baby Piper
With roguish mouth and rattling spoon,
With feet that jig, and eyes that swoon
For very bliss of vision, hails. . . .

Mother Piper, Father Piper,
Sturdy sons and chubby daughters,
Pd give all if I could give it,
Pot and pan, tureen and trivet,

Boundless plains of perfect wheat,
London's hosts of morning loaves,
The whole Atlantic's herring droves,
To come again, and see you eat.

A PLACE OF QUIET

THE star-browed mares, necks linking by the stile
Where the crab-apple parts its heavy screen;
The dogs who scampered many a dewy mile
With mushroom-hunting lads in morning keen
And now sleep sprawling, dead to speed or guile
Right in the middle of the road; the sheen
Of dove's neck on the pool, the glossy green
Of farm-roof mosses fledging tile on tile;
The popped thatch of the black-timbered barns
Which sleep knee-deep in nettle of afternoon;
The shafts upturned of horse-hoes crossed by yarns
Of gossamer, glinting with one hung cocoon,
Are not so deep in peace as she who darns
For sons returning by the harvest moon.

THE COCK

THE cock, all pride and battlemented crest,
Mounts battlemented walls, and struts, and crows,
Shutting his beaded eyes. A flame of jewels
Barbaric, he flings a bonfire on the snows.

Straight at his knife-keen cry the red wine gushes
Out of that bursting pomegranate, the dawn;
The scarlet widens and the rinds collapse,
The seeded stars of heaven beshower the lawn.

As fierce of heart and walnut-small of brain
As Agamemnon on his rocky throne,
He sees drop sheer his crystal-frosty ramparts
That ring his world and leave him king, alone.

A thousand valleys off on mountain-strongholds
His chieftain-rivals clarion, and are drowned
By him who pales the moon, puts day in motion,
Tosses its hosts of oriflammes with sound.

Then he descends, and shakes his rubied turban,
And stalks the muttering harem of his hens;
The light all day's a scintillating diamond
And he the moving focus of its lens. . . .

What fun it were just for one hour to be
So narrow of wit, and so self-blind to all
Ephemeral cocks of present, past, and future—
Lord of a cosmos bounded by a wall,

To feel all fiercely vital blood and body
And bounce and tiptoe dominance of ill,
And the great sky itself a barren egg-shell
Till impregnated by your sovereign will,

SWALLOWS DEPARTING

PATTERNED somehow in every tiny head,
Sure as the forest curled within the seed,
Are Channel and vines of France and Alps that
lead
To Mediterranean homes. From where they bred
To where the white and sapphire waters shed
Their myriad-clapping welcome, waits indeed
Like a recorded symphony of speed
For landmarks to unravel thread by thread.
As marvellous are the wires whereon they hang,
Down which in swift and coded pattern urge
All sounds of human drama, passion's pang,
The glory of life, its will-power to emerge . . .
And the wings rise, vibrating in quick twang
Mysterious worlds impinging to diverge.

GRASS

SOFTER than wool, yet stronger than iron is the
sinewy grass;
Upon its anvils pound in vain the noons of molten
brass.
In the seven-times-heated furnace, where the rock is
a powdery clod,
It walks in the clean cool garments of the terrible
Son of God.

There is not a heart or brain or cranny that shall not
know its creeping;
Terrible are its billows of green oblivion onward
sweeping.

Yet Charity herself, alone, has a mantle as wide, to
cover
The noble beside the base at last, the hater with the
lover.

The first-born city, Ur, is sleeping; and the youngest,
London, cries,
And the last of cradle-songs of the grass is the first of
lullabies.

Softer than wool, yet stronger than iron, the sinewy
grass is made,
For the Son of God and the Mother of God are in
its tiniest blade.

THE SEVEN TREES

SENTINELS marking my every mood are these
Seven sharply pruned and wintry damson-trees
Against the sky, in line.
They rib my waking world, and darkly score
The bluish blackness; on the morning's hoar
And gold they pencil soft design
Of joys, evoking mine.

They lace with black the twilight's windy rose
When other flowers have failed. When no song
 flows,
And only cold philosophies are left,
They bring the day to close
With consolations from the small white owl
Hunched in a forking cleft,
Bemused, like me, at the world's roar and howl.

Beautiful enough are they, and yet I know
They have surprise in store, their crowns of snow
In Spring—like friends who hurt us by excess
Of sudden joy at the heart's loveliness.
And I half wish that they might never bloom,
For though I share,
As they do mine, their moods of shine and gloom,
I shall have nothing half so fair
In recompense to show.

HOUSE IN THE GALE

LET the Night howl and do her worst
Dart her cold like cockatrice,
Fang of frost and tooth of ice
Snap the sapling like a vice;
Let the Night hiss until she burst.

A man, his wife, and house built sure
Hold all mystery like a seed;
Though the world were spilt indeed,
They could fashion at their need
Its miracle from miniature.

Let the world harden and contract,
Split the pavement, crack the beech.
Driven closer each on each,
They will clasp too glad for speech
Their world of wonder more compact.

Sealed in the iron dark, no less
Burns their two-fold miracle,
Leaps with leagues of daffodil,
Clothes with heather every hill
And acheful thorns with loveliness.

For how shall envious Night surmise,
Being blind with hate and fear,
Whether dock and danel here
Wait to breed and choke the year,
Or germ of time-long beauty lies?

Yet here Imagination, wed
With the Will, one fearless mind,
May conceive and throng the wind
With new vision for the blind,
And living laughter for the dead,

SIMEON

WHO would have thought this tender lyric mood
Of memory chiming her elusive bells
In the dark under-self of sounds and smells
Could so surprise midwinter solitude?
With an old hound's delight I sniff the mould
Where the bulb peers with tiny tongue of green;
My sight drinks up the walls of dripping gold
Where lantern-yellow jasmine halts between
Likeness of light and light's embodiment,
And in blue-shadowed corners moistly burn
Violets, in turn of darker blue, in turn
Pale as drowned sapphires where the skies are
rent . . .

Such visionary moods that shine and sing
Old men awake with on the midnight hour,
And ponder long before they turn to sleep
With the revolving earth: so calm, so deep
Flows an assurance to their broken power
That what has been will be again, like Spring.

CAROL

EVEN cold-blooded Caiaphas—
So holy the night, so pure the star—
Somewhere is stirred like frozen grass
By a flowering impulse blown from far.

Young, yet the great High Priest to be—
Sopure the star, so holy the night—
He dooms no man to the felon's tree,
But roams in a forest of dream, snow-bright.

Even the heart of Herod the king—
So holy the night, so pure the star—
Is moved by the wail of a viol-string
And the face unseen of a Child afar.
The lyre-boys, drowsed on their instruments—
Sopure the star, so holy the night—
Haunt him with looks of the Innocents,
He steals like a ghost to the courtyard white.

The young scamp Judas who robs the till—
So holy the night, so pure the star—
Feels the dark boughs of his mind grow still
Where thoughts of evil like weasels are;
And like the Glastonbury thorn—
Sopure the star, so holy the night—
Though roads are iron and birds are horn,
It flowers in a sudden marvel of white.

Young James and John by Galilee—
So holy the night, so pure the star—
Awake from a dream of fishing at sea;
They lie on a net and a bolster of spar.
"Was that you, brother?" cries little John—
Sopure the star, so holy the night—

"Or another's breast that I lay on?
For I dreamed of a bosom all of light."

Good merry men all, now stirred to good—
So holy the nighty so pure the star—
Betray not the Child in a later mood
For silver and gold and the powers that are.
But stirred as James and John were stirred—
So pure the star, so holy the night—
Keep fast your faith and true your word
When roads are iron, and ice the height.

THE SOWER

I HAVE sown fair seed this bitter day,
And now that light and strength are spent,
Let double dark of night and clay
Hide what will spring. I am content,

And leave to Earth's arbitrament
What bloom shall perish by the way,
And what, if any, shall present
New colour to the common ray.

It may not be, and yet it may,
That men unborn, some kinder Lent,
Will make rich variations play
From one rebellious bloom's intent,

And walk in glory, where I went
Lonely yet hopeful through the gray.
But come what will, I am content:
I have sown fair seed this bitter day.

