

FICTION

E. Nesbit

Lays and legends



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A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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LAYS AND LEGENDS
(SECOND SERIES)

BY
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ETC.

WITH PORTRAIT

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My thanks are due to the Editors and Publishers who
have kindly allowed me to use here verses written
for them.

TO

ALICE HOATSON,

HELEN MACKLIN,

AND

CHARLOTTE WILSON,

In token of indebtedment.

ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY PRESS



BRIDAL BALLAD.

"Come, fill me flagons full and fair
Of red wine and of white,
And, maidens mine, my bower prepare--
It is my wedding night.

"And braid my hair with jewels bright,
And make me fair and fine--
This is the day that brings the night
When my desire is mine."

They decked her bower with roses blown,
With rushes strewed the floor,
And sewed more jewels on her gown
Than ever she wore before.

She wore two roses in her face,
Two jewels in her e'en,
Her hair was crowned with sunset rays,
Her brows shone white between.

"Tapers at the bed's foot," she saith,
"Two tapers at the head!"

two tapers at the head:
It seemed more like the bed of death
Than like a bridal bed.

He came; he took her hands in his,
He kissed her on the face;
"There is more heaven in thy kiss
Than in our Lady's grace".

He kissed her once, he kissed her twice,
He kissed her three times o'er;
He kissed her brow, he kissed her eyes,
He kissed her mouth's red flower.

"O Love, what is it ails thy knight?
I sicken and I pine;
Is it the red wine or the white,
Or that sweet kiss of thine?"

"No kiss, no wine or white or red,
Can make such sickness be,
Lie down and die on thy bride-bed
For I have poisoned thee.

"And though the curse of saints and men
Upon me for it be,
I would it were to do again
Since thou wert false to me.

"Thou shouldst have loved or one or none,
Nor she nor I loved twain,
But we are twain thou hast undone,
And therefore art thou slain.

"And when before my God I stand
With no base flesh between,
I shall hold up this guilty hand
And He shall judge it clean."

He fell across the bridal bed
Between the tapers pale:
"I first shall see our God," he said,
"And I will tell thy tale.

"And if God judge thee as I do,
Then art thou justified.
I loved thee and I was not true,
And that was why I died.

"If I could judge thee, thou shouldst be
First of the saints on high;
But ah, I fear God loveth thee
Not half so dear as I!"

THE GHOST.

The year fades, as the west wind sighs,
And droops in many-coloured ways,
But your soft presence never dies
From out the pathway of my days.

The spring is where you are, but still
You from your heaven to me can bring
Sweet dreams and flowers enough to fill
A thousand empty worlds with Spring.

I walk the wet and leafless woods;
Your shadow ever goes before
And paints the russet solitudes
With colours Summer never wore.

I sit beside my lonely fire;
The ghostly twilight brings your face
And lights with memory and desire
My desolated dwelling-place.

Among my books I feel your hand
That turns the page just past my sight,
Sometimes behind my chair you stand
And read the foolish rhymes I write.

The old piano's keys I press
In random chords until I hear
Your voice, your rustling silken dress,
And smell the violets that you wear.

I do not weep now any more,
I think I hardly even sigh;
I would not have you think I bore
The kind of wound of which men die.

Believe that smooth content has grown
Over the ghastly grave of pain--
"Content!" ... O lips, that were my own,
That I shall never kiss again!

THE MODERN JUDAS.

For what wilt thou sell thy Lord?
"For certain pieces of silver, since wealth buys the world's good word."
But the world's word, how canst thou hear it, while thy brothers cry scorn on thy name?
And how shall thy bargain content thee, when thy brothers shall clothe thee with shame?

For what shall thy brother be sold?
"For the rosy garland of pleasure, and the coveted crown of gold."
But thy soul will turn them to thorns, and to heaviness binding thy head,
While women are dying of shame, and children are crying for bread.

For what wilt thou sell thy soul?
"For the world." And what shall it profit, when thou shalt have gained the whole?
What profit the things thou hast, if the thing thou art be so mean?
Wilt thou fill, with the husks of having, the void of the might-have-been?

"But, when my soul shall be gone,
No more shall I fail to profit by all the deeds I have done!
And wealth and the world and pleasure shall sing sweet songs in my ear
When the stupid soul is silenced, which never would let me hear.

"And if a void there should be
I shall not feel it or know it; it will be nothing to me!"
It will be nothing to thee, and thou shalt be nothing to men
But a ghost whose treasure is lost, and who shall not find it again.

"But I shall have pleasure and praise!"
Praise shall not pleasure thee then, nor pleasure laugh in thy days:
For as colour is not, without light, so happiness is not, without
Thy Brother, the Lord whom thou soldest--and the soul that thou hast cast out!

THE SOUL TO THE IDEAL.

I will not hear thy music sweet!
If I should listen, then I know
I should no more know friend from foe,
But follow thy capricious feet--
Thy wings, than mine so much more fleet--
I will not go!

I will not go away! Away
From reeds and pool why should I go
To where sun burns, and hot winds blow?
Here sleeps cool twilight all the day;
Do I not love thy tune? No, no!
I will not say!

I will not say I love thy tune;
I do not know if so it be;
It surely is enough for me
To know I love cool rest at noon,
Spread thy bright wings--ah, go--go soon!
I will not see!

I will not see thy gleaming wings,
I will not hear thy music clear.
It is not love I feel, but fear;
I love the song the marsh-frog sings,
But thine, which after-sorrow brings,
I will not hear!



A DEATH-BED.

A man of like passions with ourselves.

It is too late, too late!
The wine is spilled, the altar violate;
Now all the foolish virtues of the past--
Its joys that could not last,
Its flowers that had to fade,
Its bliss so long delayed,
Its sun so soon o'ercast,
Its faith so soon betrayed,
Its prayers so madly prayed,
Its wildly-fought-for right,
Its dear renounced delight,
Its passions and its pain--
All these stand gray about
My bed, like ghosts from Paradise shut out,
And I, in torment, lying here alone,
See what myself have done--
How all good things were butchered, one by one.
Not one of these but life has fouled its name,
Blotted it out with sin and loss and shame--
Until my whole life's striving is made vain.
It is too late, too late!
My house is left unto me desolate.

Yet what if here,
Through this despair too dark for dreams of fear,
Through the last bitterness of the last vain tear,
One saw a face--
Human--not turned away from man's disgrace--
A face divinely dear--
A head that had a crown of thorns to wear;
If there should come a hand
Drawing this tired head to a place of rest
On a most loving breast;
And as one felt that one could almost bear
To tell the whole long sickening trivial tale
Of how one came so utterly to fail
Of all one once knew that one might attain--
If one should feel consoling arms about,
Shutting one in, shutting the black past out--
Should feel the tears that washed one clean again,
And turn, made dumb with love and shame, to hear:
"My child, my child, do I not understand?"

THE LOST SOUL AND THE SAVED.

I.

Oh, rapture of infinite peace!
Many are weeping without;
From the lost crowd of these,
God, Thou hast lifted me out!

Though strong be the devil's net,
Thy grace, O God, is more strong;
I never was tempted yet
To even the edge of wrong.

The world never fired my brain,
The flesh never moved my heart--
Thou hast spared me the strife and strain,
The struggle and sorrow and smart.

The dreams that never were deeds,
The thought that shines not in word,
The struggle that never succeeds--
Thou hast saved me from these, O Lord!

I stood in my humble place
While those who aimed high fell low;
Oh the glorious gift of Thy grace
The souls of Thy saved ones know!

And yet if in heaven at last,
When all is won and is well,
Dear hands stretch out from the past,
Dear voices call me from hell--

My love whom I long for yet,
My little one gone astray!--
No; God will make me forget
In His own wise wonderful way.

Oh the infinite marvels of grace,
Oh the great atonement's cost!
Lifting my soul above
Those other souls that are lost!

Mine are the harp and throne,
Theirs is the outer night.
This, my God, Thou has done,
And all that Thou dost is right!

Lost as I am--degraded, foul, polluted,
Sunk in deep sloughs of failure and of sin,
Yet is my hell by God's great grace commuted,
For what I lose the others yet may win.

I--sport of flesh and fate--in all my living
Met the world's laughter and the Christian's frown,
Ever the spirit fiercely vainly striving,
Ever the flesh, triumphant, laughed it down.

Down, lower still, but ever battling vainly,
Dying to win, yet living to be lost,
My soul through depths where all its guilt showed plainly
Into the chaos of despair was tossed.

Yet not despair. I see far off a splendour;
Here from my hell I see a heaven on high
For those brave men whom earth could never render
Cowards as foul and beasts as base as I!

Hell is not hell lit by such consolation,
Heaven were not heaven that lacked a thought like this--
That, though my soul may never see salvation,
God yet saves all these other souls of His!

The waves of death come faster, faster, faster;
Christ, ere I perish, hear my heart's last word--
It was not I denied my Lord and Master;
The flesh denied Thee, not the spirit, Lord.

And God be praised that other men are wearing
The white, white flower I trampled as I trod;
That all fail not, that all are not despairing,
That all are not as I, I thank Thee, God!

AT THE PRISON GATE.

And underneath us are the everlasting arms.

Once by a foreign prison gate,
Deep in the gloom of frowning stone,
I saw a woman, desolate,
Sitting alone;
Immeasurable pain enwound
Infinite anguish lapped her round,
As the sea laps some sunken shore
Where flowers will blossom never more.

Despair sat shrined in her dry eyes--
Her heart, I thought, in blood must weep
For hopes that never more can rise
From their death-sleep;
And round her hovered phantoms gray--
Ghosts of delight dead many a day;
And all the thorns of life seemed wed
In one sharp crown about her head.

And all the poor world's aching heart
Beat there, I thought, and could not break.
Oh! to be strong to bear the smart--
The vast heart-ache!
Then through my soul a clear light shone;
What I would do, my Lord has done;
He bore the whole world's crown of thorn--
For her sake, too, that crown was worn!



THE DEVIL'S DUE.

A priest tells how, in his youth, a church was built by the free labour of love--as was men's wont in those days; and how the stone and wood were paid for by one who had grown rich on usury and the pillage of the poor--and of what chanced thereafter.

Arsenius, priest of God, I tell,
For warning in your younger ears,
Humbly and plainly what befel
That year--gone by a many years--
When Véraignes church was built. Ah! then
Brave churches grew 'neath hands of men:
We see not now their like again.

We built it on the green hill-side
That leans its bosom o'er the town,
So that its presence, sanctified,
Might ever on our lives look down.
We built; and those who built not, they
Brought us their blessing day by day,
And lingered to rejoice and pray.

For years the masons toiled, for years
The craftsmen wrought till they had made
A church we scarce could see for tears--
Its fairness made our love afraid.
Its clear-cut cream-white tracery
Stood out against the deep bright sky
Like good deeds against eternity.

Like good deeds gainst eternity.

In the deep roof each separate beam
Had its own garland--ivy, vine,--
Giving to man the carver's dream,
In sight of men a certain sign--
And all day long the workers plied.
"The church shall finished be," we cried,
"And consecrate by Easter-tide."

Our church! It was so fair, so dear,
So fit a church to praise God in!
It had such show of carven gear,
Such chiselled work, without, within!
Such marble for the steps and floor,
Such window-jewels and such store
Of gold and gems the altar bore!

Each stone by loving hands was hewn,
By loving hands each beam was sawn;
The hammers made a merry tune
In winter dusk and summer dawn.
Love built the house, but gold had paid
For that wherewith the house was made.
"Would love had given all!" we said.

But poor in all save love were we,
And he was poor in all save gold
Who gave the gold. By usury
Were gained his riches manifold.
We knew that? If we knew, we thought
'Tis good if men do good in aught,
And by good works may heaven be bought!

At last the echo died in air
Of the last stroke. The silence then
Passed in to fill the church, left bare
Of the loving voice of Christian men.
The silence saddened all the sun,
So gladly was our work begun.
Now all that happy work was done.

Did any voices in the night
Call through those arches? Were there wings
That swept between the pillars white--
Wide pinions of unvisioned things?
The priests who watched the relics heard
Wing-whispers--not of bat or bird--
And moan of inarticulate word.

Then sunlight, morning, and sweet air
Adorned our church, and there were borne
Great sheaves of boughs of blossoms fair
To grace the consecration morn.
Then round our church trooped knight and dame;
Within, alone, the bishop came,
And the twelve candles leaped to flame.

Then round our church the bishop went
With all his priests--a brave array.
There was no sign nor portent sent

As, glad at heart, he went his way,
Sprinkling the holy water round
Three times on walls and crowd and ground
Within the churchyard's sacred bound.

Then--but ye know the function's scope
At consecration--all the show
Of torch and incense, stole and cope;
And how the acolytes do go
Before the bishop--how they bear
The lighted tapers, flaming fair,
Blown back by the sweet wavering air.

The bishop, knocking at the door,
The deacon answering from within,
"Lift up your heads, ye gates, be sure
The King of Glory shall come in"--
The bishop passed in with the choir.
Thank God for this--our soul's desire,
Our altar, meet for heaven's fire!

The bishop, kneeling in his place
Where our bright windows made day dim,
With all heaven's glory in his face,
Began the consecration hymn:
"Veni," he sang, in clear strong tone.
Then--on the instant--song was done,
Its very echo scattered--gone!

For, as the bishop's voice rang clear,
Another voice rang clearer still--
A voice wherein the soul could hear
The discord of unmeasured ill--
And sudden breathless silence fell
On all the church. And I wot well
There are such silences in hell.

Taper and torch died down--went out--
And all our church grew dark and cold,
And deathly odours crept about,
And chill, as of the churchyard mould;
And every flower drooped its head,
And all the rose's leaves were shed,
And all the lilies dropped down dead.

There, in the bishop's chair, we saw--
How can I tell you? Memories shrink
To mix anew the cup of awe
We shuddering mortals had to drink.
What was it? There! The shape that stood
Before the altar and the rood--
It was not human flesh and blood!

A light more bright than any sun,
A shade more dark than any night,
A shape that human shape was none,
A cloud, a sense of winged might,
And, like an infernal trumpet sound,
Rang through the church's hush profound
A voice. We listened horror-bound.

"*Venio!* Cease, cease to consecrate!
Love built the church, but it is mine!
'Tis built of stone hewn out by hate,
Cemented by man's blood divine.
Whence came the gold that paid for this?
From pillage of the poor, I wis--
That gold was mine, and mine this is!

"Your King has cursed the usurer's gold,
He gives it to me for my fee!
Your church is builded, but behold
Your church is fair for me--for me!
Who robs the poor to me is given;
Impenitent and unforgiven,
His church is built for hell, not heaven!"

Then, as we gazed, the face grew clear,
And all men stood as turned to stone;
Each man beheld through dews of fear
A face--his own--yet not his own;
His own face, darkened, lost, debased,
With hell's own signet stamped and traced,
And all the God in it effaced.

A crash like thunder shook the walls,
A flame like lightning shot them through:
"Fly, fly before the judgment falls,
And all the stones be fallen on you!"
And as we fled we saw bright gleams
Of fire leap out 'mid joists and beams.
Our church! Oh, love--oh, hopes--oh, dreams!

We stood without--a pallid throng--
And as the flame leaped high and higher,
Shrill winds we heard that rushed along
And fanned the transports of the fire.
The sky grew black; against the sky
The blue and scarlet flames leaped high,
And cries as of lost souls wailed by.

The church in glowing vesture stood,
The lead ran down as it were wax,
The great stones cracked and burned like wood,
The wood caught fire and flamed like flax:
A horrid chequered light and shade,
By smoke and flame alternate made,
Upon men's upturned faces played.

Down crashed the walls. Our lovely spire--
A blackened ruin--fell and lay.
The very earth about caught fire,
And flame-tongues licked along the clay.
The fire did neither stay nor spare
Till the foundations were laid bare
To the hot, sickened, smoke-filled air.

There in the sight of men it lay,
Our church that we had made so fair!
A heap of ashes white and gray,
With sparks still gleaming here and there.
The sun came out again, and shone

THE SUN CAME OUT AGAIN, AND SHONE
On all our loving work undone--
Our church destroyed, our labour gone!

Gone? Is it gone? God knows it, no!
The hands that builded built aright:
The men who loved and laboured so,
Their church is built in heaven's height!
In every stone a glittering gem,
Gold in the gold Jerusalem--
The church their love built waits for them.



LOVE IN JUNE.

Through the glowing meadows aflame
With buttercup gold I came
To the green, still heart of the wood.
A wood-pigeon cooed and cooed,
The hazel-stems grew close,
Like leaves round the heart of a rose,
Round the still, green nest that I chose.

Then I gathered the bracken that grew
 In a fairy forest all round,
 And I laid it in heaps on the ground
With grass and blossoms and leaves.
I gathered the summer in sheaves,
And pale, rare roses a few,
And spread out a carpet meet
For the touch of my lady's feet.

I waited; the wood was still;
 Only one little brown bird
 On a hazel swayed and stirred
With the impulse of his song;
And I waited, and time was long.

Then I heard a step on the grass
In the path where the others pass,
And a voice like a voice in a dream;
And I saw a glory, a gleam,
 A flash of white through the green
 (Her arms and her gown are white);
And the summer sighed her name
As she and the sunshine came:
O sun and blue sky and delight!
 O eyes and lips of my queen!

What was done there or said
 No one will ever know,
 For nobody saw or heard
 Save one little, brown, bright bird
Who swayed on a twig overhead,
And he will never betray;
But all who pass by that way,
As they near the spot where we lay
 Among the blossoms and grass
 Where the leaves and the ferns lay thick
(Though it lies out of reach, out of sight
 Of the path where the world may pass),
 Feel their heart and their pulse beat quick
In a measure that rhymes with the leaves and flowers,
 That rhymes with the summer and sun,
 With the lover to win or won,
With the wild-flower crown of delight,
 The crown of love that was ours.

THE GARDEN.

My garden was lovely to see,
For all things fair,
Sweet flowers and blossoms rare,
I had planted there.
There were pinks and lilies and stocks,
Sweet gray and white stocks, and rose and rue,
And clematis white and blue,
And pansies and daisies and phlox
And the lawn was trim, and the trees were shady,
And all things were ready to greet my lady
On the Life's-love-crowning day
When she should come
To her lover's home,
To give herself to me.

I saw the red of the roses--
The royal roses that bloomed for her sake.
"They shall lie," I said, "where my heart's hopes lie:
They shall droop on her heart and die."
I dreamed in the orchard-closes:
"Tis here we will walk in the July days,
When the paths and the lawn are ablaze;
We will walk here, and look at our life's great bliss:
And thank God for this".

I leaned where the jasmine white
Wreathed all my window round:
"Here we will lean,
I and my queen,
And look out on the broad moonlight.
For there shall be moonlight--bright--
On my wedding-night."

She never saw the flowers
That were hers from their first sweet hours.
The roses, the pinks, and the dark heartsease
Died in my garden, ungathered, forlorn.
Only the jasmine, the lilies, the white, white rose,
They were gathered--to honour and sorrow born.
They lay round her, touched her close.
The jasmine stars--white stars, that about our window
their faint light shed,
Lay round her head.
And the white, white roses lay on her breast,
And a long, white lily lay in her hand.

They lie by her--rest with her rest;
But I, unhonoured, unblest--
I stand outside,
In the ruined garden solitude--
Where she never stood--
On the trim green sod
Which she never trod;
And the red, red roses grow and blow,--
As if any one cared
How they fared!
And the gate of Eden is shut; and I stand
And see the Angel with flaming sword--
Life's pitiless Lord--
And I know I never may pass.

Alas! alas!
O Rose! my rose!
I never may reach the place where she grows,
A rose in the garden of God.

PRAYER UNDER GRAY SKIES.

O God, let there be rain!
Rain, till this sky of gray
That covers us every day
Be utterly wept away,
Let there be rain, we pray,
Till the sky be washed blue again
Let there be rain!

O God, let there be rain,
For the sky hangs heavy with pain,
And we, who walk upon earth,
We find our days not of worth;
None blesses the day of our birth,
We question of death's day in vain,--
Let there be rain!

O God, let there be rain
Till the full-fed earth complain.
Yea, though it sweep away
The seeds sown yesterday
And beat down the blossoms of May
And ruin the border gay:
In storm let this gray noon wane,
Let there be rain!

O God, let there be rain
Till the rivers rise a-main!
Though the waters go over us quite
And cover us up from the light
And whelm us away in the night
And the flowers of our life be slain,
O God, let there be rain!

O God, let there be rain,
Out of the gray sky, rain!
To wash the earth and to wash the sky
And the sick, sad souls of the folk who sigh
In the gray of a sordid satiety.
Open Thy flood-gates, O God most High,
And some day send us the sun again.
O God, let there be rain!

A GREAT INDUSTRIAL CENTRE.

Squalid street after squalid street,
 Endless rows of them, each the same,
Black dust under your weary feet,
Dust upon every face you meet,
Dust in their hearts, too,--or so it seems--
 Dust in the place of dreams.

Spring in her beauty thrills and thrives,
 Here men hardly have heard her name.
Work is the end and aim of their lives--
Work, work, work! for their children and wives;
Work for a life which, when it is won,
 Is the saddest thing 'neath the sun!

Work--one dark and incessant round
 In black dull workshops, out of the light;
Work that others' ease may abound,
Work that delight for them may be found,
Work without hope, without pause, without peace,
 That only in death can cease.

Brothers, who live glad lives in the sun,
 What of these men, at work in the night?
God will ask you what you have done;
Their lives be required of you--every one--
Ye, who were glad and who liked life well,
 While they did your work--in hell!



LONDON'S VOICES

SPEAK TO TWO SOULS--WHO THUS REPLY:

I.

In all my work, in all the children's play,
 I hear the ceaseless hum of London near;
 It cries to me, I cannot choose but hear
Its never-ending wail, by night and day.
So many millions--is it vain to pray
 That all may win such peace as I have here,
 With books, and work, and little children dear?--
That flowers like mine may grow along their way?

Through all my happy life I hear the cry,
 The exceeding bitter cry of human pain,
And shudder as the deathless wail sweeps by.
 I can do nothing--even hope is vain
That the bright light of peace and purity
 In those lost souls may ever shine again!

II.

'Mid pine woods' whisper and the hum of bees
I heard a voice that was not bee nor wood:
Here, in the city, Gold has trampled Good.
Come thou, do battle till this strife shall cease!"
I left the mill, the meadows and the trees,
And came to do the little best I could
For these, God's poor; and, oh, my God, I would
I had a thousand lives to give for these!

What can one hand do 'gainst a world of wrong?
Yet, when the voice said, "Come!" how could I stay?
The foe is mighty, and the battle long
(And love is sweet, and there are flowers in May),
And Good seems weak, and Gold is very strong;
But, while these fight, I dare not turn away.

THE SICK JOURNALIST.

Throb, throb, throb, weariness, ache, and pain!
One's heart and one's eyes on fire,
And never a spark in one's brain.
The stupid paper and ink,
That might be turned into gold,
Lie here unused
Since one's brain refused
To do its tricks--as of old.
One can suffer still, indeed,
But one cannot think any more.
There's no fire in the grate,
No food on the plate,
And the East-wind shrieks through the door.
The sunshine grins in the street:
It used to cheer me like wine,
Now it only quickens my brain's sick beat;
And the children are crying for bread to eat
And I cannot write a line!

Molly, my pet--don't cry,
Father can't write if you do--
And anyhow, if you only knew,
It's hard enough as it is.
There, give old daddy a kiss,
And cuddle down on the floor;
We'll have some dinner by-and-by.
Now, fool, try! Try once more!
Hold your head tight in your hands,
Bring your will to bear!
The children are starving--your little ones--
While you sit fooling there.
Beth, with her golden hair,
Moll, with her rough, brown head--
Here they are--see!
Against your knee,
Waiting there to be fed!--
I cannot bear their eyes

I cannot bear their eyes.
Their soft little kisses burn--
They will cry again
In vain, in vain,
For the food that I cannot earn.

If I could only write
Just a dozen pages or so
On "The Prospects of Trade,"
 or "The Irish Question,"
 or "Why are Wages so Low?"--
The printers are waiting for copy now,
I've had my next week's screw,
There'll be nothing more till I've written something,
Oh, God! what am I to do?
If I could only write!
The paper glares up white
Like the cursed white of the heavy stone
Under which *she* lies alone;
And the ink is black like death,
And the room and the window are black.
Molly, Molly--the sun's gone out,
Cannot you fetch it back?
Did I frighten my little ones?
Never mind, daddy dropped asleep--
Cuddle down closely, creep
Close to his knee
And daddy will see
If he can't do his writing. Vain!
I shall never write again!
Oh, God! was it like a love divine
To make their lives hang on my pen
When I cannot write a line?



TWO LULLABIES.

I.

Sleep, sleep, my little baby dear,
Thee shall no want or pain come near;
Sleep softly on thy downy nest,
Or on this lace-veiled mother-breast.

Thy cradle is all silken lined,
Wrought roses on thy curtains twined,
Warm woolly blankets o'er thee spread,
With soft white pillows for thy head.

Much gold those little hands shall hold,
And wealth about thy life shall fold,
And thou shalt see nor pain nor strife,
Nor the low ills of common life.

These little feet shall never tread
Except on paths soft-carpeted,
And all life's flowers in wreaths shall twine
To deck that darling head of thine.

Thou shalt have overflowing measure
Of wealth and joy and peace and pleasure,
And thou shalt be right charitable
With all the crumbs that leave thy table.

And thou shalt praise God every day
For His good gifts that come thy way,
And again thank Him, and again,
That thou art not as other men.

For 'midst thy wealth thou wilt recall--
'Tis to God's grace thou owest it all;
And when all's spent that life has given,
Thou'lt have a golden home in heaven.

Sleep, little baby, sleep,
Though the wind is cruel and cold,
And my shawl that I've wrapped thee in
Is old and ragged and thin;
And my hand is too frozen to hold--
Yet my bosom's still warm--so creep
Close to thy mother, and sleep!

Sleep, little baby, and rest,
Though we wander alone through the night,
And there is no food for me,
No shelter for me and thee.
Through the windows red fires shine bright,
And tables show, heaped with the best--
But there's naught for us there--so rest.

Sleep, you poor little thing!
Just as pretty and dear
As any fine lady's child.
Oh, but my heart grows wild!--
Is it worth while to stay here?
What good thing from life will spring
For you--you poor little thing?

Sleep, you poor little thing!
Mine, my treasure, my own--
I clasp you, I hold you close,
My darling, my bird, my rose!
Rich mothers have hearts like stone,
Or else some help they would bring
To you--you poor little thing!

Sleep, little baby, sleep--
If some good, rich mother would take
My dear, I would kiss thee, and then
Never come near thee again--
Not though my heart should break!
I could leave thee, dear, for thy sake--
For the river is dark and deep,
And gives sleep, little baby, sleep!

BABY SONG.

I.

Sleep, baby, sleep!
The greeny glow-worms creep,
The pigeons to their cote are gone
And, to their fold, the sheep.

Rest, baby, rest!
The sun sinks in the west,
The daisies all have gone to sleep,
The birds are in the nest.

Sleep, baby, sleep!
The sky grows dark and deep,
The stars watch over all the world,
God's angels guard thy sleep.

II.

Wake, baby dear!
The good, glad morning's here;
The dove is cooing soft and low,
The lark sings loud and clear.

Wake, baby, wake!
Long since the day did break,
The daisy buds are all uncurled,
The sun laughs in the lake.

Wake, baby dear!
Thy mother's waiting near,
And love, and flowers, and birds, and sun,
And all things bright and dear.

LULLABY.

Sleep, my darling; mother will sing
Soft low songs to her little king,
Nobody else must listen or hear
The pretty secrets I tell my dear.

Sleep, my darling, sleep while you may--
Sorrow dawns with the dawning day,
Sleep, my baby, sleep, my dear,
Soon enough will the day be here.

Lie here quiet on mother's arm,
Safe from harm;
Nestled closely to mother's breast,
Sleep and rest!

Mother feels your breath's soft stir
Close to her;
Mother holds you, clasps you tight,
All the night.

When the little Jesus lay
On the manger's hay,
He was a Baby, if tales tell true,
Just like you.

And He had no crown to wear
But His bright hair;
And such kisses as I give you
He had too.

Mary never loved her Son
More than I love my little one;
And her Baby never smiled
More divinely than my little child.

Sleep, my darling, sleep while you may--
Sorrow dawns with the dawning day;
Sleep, my little one, sleep, my dear,
All too soon will the day be here.



AN EAST-END TRAGEDY.

You said that you would never wed:
"My love, my life's one work lie here,
'Mid crowded alleys, dank and drear,
Where all life's flower-petals are shed!"
You said.

I heard: I bowed to what I heard;
I bowed my head and worshipped you--
So brave, so beautiful, so true--
How could I doubt a single word
I heard?

My sweet, white lily! All the street,
As you passed by, grew clean again;
The fallen, blackened souls of men
Looked heavenward when men heard your feet,
My sweet.

But one came, dared to woo, and won--
He heard your vows, and laughed at them;
He plucked my lily from its stem--
Sacred to all men under sun,
But one!



HERE AND THERE.

Ah me, how hot and weary here in town
The days crawl by!
How otherwise they go my heart records,
Where the marsh meadows lie
And white sheep crop the grass, and seagulls sail
Between the lovely earth and lovely sky.

Here the sun grins along the dusty street
Beneath pale skies:
Hark! spiritless, sad tramp of toiling feet,
Hoarse hawkers, curses, cries--
Through these I hear the song that the sea sings
To the far meadowlands of Paradise.

O golden-lichened church and red-roofed barn--
O long sweet days--
O changing, unchanged skies, straight dykes all gay
With sedge and water mace--
O fair marsh land desirable and dear--
How far from you lie my life's weary ways!

Yet in my darkest night there shines a star
More fair than day;
There is a flower that blossoms sweet and white
In the sad city way.
That flower blooms not where the wide marshes gleam,
That star shines only when the skies are gray.

For here fair peace and passionate pleasure wane
Before the light
Of radiant dreams that make our lives worth life,
And turn to noon our night:
We fight for freedom and the souls of men--
Here, and not there, is fought and won our fight!

MOTHER.

A little room with scanty grace
Of drapery or ordered ease;
White dimity, and well-scrubbed boards,--
But there's a hum of summer bees,
The sun sends through the quiet place
The scent that honeysuckle hoards.

Outside, the little garden glows
With sun-warmed leaves and blossoms bright;
Beyond lie meadow, lane, and wood
Where trail the briony and wild rose,
And where grow blossoms of delight
In an inviolate solitude.

Through that green world there blows an air
That cools my forehead even here
In this sad city's riotous roar--
And from that room my ears can hear
Tears and the echo of a prayer,
And the world's voice is heard no more.



A BALLAD OF CANTERBURY.

Across the grim, gray, northern sea
The Danish warships went,
Snake-shaped, and manned by mighty men
On blood and plunder bent;
And they landed on a smiling land--
The garden-land of Kent.

They sacked the farms, they spoiled the corn,
They set the ricks aflame;
They slew the men with axe and sword,
They slew the maids with shame;
Until, to Canterbury town,
Made mad with blood, they came.

Archbishop Alphege walked the wall
And looked down on the foe.
"Now fly, my lord!" his monks implored,
"While yet a man may go!"
"Shame on you, monks of mine," he cried,
"To shame your bishop so!

"What, would you have the shepherd flee,
Like any hireling knave?
What, leave my church, my poor--God's poor,
To a dark and prayerless grave?
No! by the body of my Lord,
My skin I will not save!"

And when men heard his true, strong word,
They bore them as men should.
For twenty nights and twenty days
The foemen they withstood,

And, day and night, snone tapers bright,
And incense veiled the rood.

The warriors manned the walls without,
The monks prayed on within,
Till Satan, wroth to see how prayer
And valour fared to win,
Whispered a traitor, who stole out
And let the foemen in.

Then through the quiet church there ran
A sudden breath of fear;
The monks made haste to bar the door,
And hide the golden gear;
And to their lord once more they cried,
"Hide, hide! the foe is here!"

Through all the church's windows showed
The sudden laugh of flame;
Along the street went trampling feet,
And through the smoke there came
The voice of women, calling shrill
Upon the Saviour's name.

And "Hide! oh, hide!" the monks all cried,
"Nor meet such foes as these!"
"Be still," he said, "hide if ye will,
Live on, and take your ease!
By my Lord's death, *my* latest breath,
Like His, shall speak of peace!"

He strode along the dusky aisle,
And flung the church doors wide;
Bright armour shone, and blazing homes
Lit up the world outside,
And in the streets reeled to and fro
A bloody human tide.

The mailed barbarians laughed aloud
To see the brave blood flow;
They trampled on the breast and hair
Of girls their swords laid low,
And on the points of reeking spears
Tossed babies to and fro.

Alphege stood forth; his pale face gleamed
Against the dark red tide.
"Forbear, your cup of guilt is full!
Your sins are red," he cried;
"Spare these poor sheep, my lambs, for whom
The King of Heaven died!"

Drunken with blood and lust of fight,
Loud laughed Thorkill the Dane.
"Stand thou and see us shear thy sheep
Before thy foolish fane!
Hear how they weep! They bleat, thy sheep,
That thou mayst know their pain!"

He stood, and saw his monks all slain;
The altar steps ran red;

In horrid heaps men lay about,
The dying with the dead;
And the east brightened, and the sky
Grew rosy overhead.

Then from the church a tiny puff
Of smoke rose 'gainst the sky,
Out broke the fire, and flame on flame
Leaped palely out on high,
Till but the church's walls were left
For men to know it by.

And when the sweet sun laughed again
O'er fields and furrows brown,
The brave archbishop hid his eyes,
Until the tears dropped down
On the charred blackness of the wreck
Of Canterbury town.



"Now, Saxon shepherd, send a word
Unto thy timid sheep,
And bid them greaten up their hearts,
And to our feet dare creep,
And bring a ransom here which we,
Instead of thee, may keep!"

Archbishop Alphege stood alone,
Bruised, beaten, weary-eyed;
Loaded with chains, with aching heart,
And wounded in the side;
And in his hour of utmost pain
Thus to the Dane replied:

"Ye men of blood, my blood shall flow
Before this thing shall be;
If I be held till ransom come,
I never shall be free;
For by God's heart, God's poor shall never
Be robbed to ransom me!"

They flung him in a dungeon dark,
They heaped on him fresh chains,
They promised him unnumbered ills
And unimagined pains;
But still he said, "No English shall
Be taxed to profit Danes!"

Six months passed by; no ransom came;
Their threats had almost ceased,
When Thorkill held, on Easter-Eve,
A great and brutal feast;
And they sent and dragged the Christian man
Before the pagan beast.

Down the great hall, from east to west,
The long rough tables ran;
They roasted oxen, sheep, and deer,
And then the drink began--

And then the drink began--

At last in all that mighty hall
Was not one sober man.

'Twas then they brought the bishop forth
Before the drunken throng;
And "Send for ransom!" Thorkill cried,
"You are weak, and we are strong,
Or, by the hand of Thor, you die--
We have borne with you too long!"

The savage faces of the Danes
Leered redly all around;
The bones of beasts and empty cups
Lay heaped upon the ground,
And 'mid the crowd of howling wolves
The Christian saint stood bound.

He looked in Thorkill's angry eyes
And knew what thing should be,
Then spake: "By God, who died to save
The poor, and me, and thee,
Thou art not strong enough--God's poor
Shall not be taxed for me!"

"Gold! Give us gold, or die!" All round
The rising tumult ran.
"I give my life, I give God's word,
I give what gifts I can!
Bleed Christian sheep for pagan wolves?
Find you some other man!"

And, as he spake, the whole crowd rose
With one fierce shout and yell;
They flung at him the bones of beasts,
They aimed right strong and well.
"O Christ, O Shepherd, guard Thy sheep!"
The bishop cried--and fell.



And so men call him "Saint," yet some
Deemed this an unearned crown,
Since 'twas not for the Church or faith
He laid his brave life down;
But otherwise men deemed of it
In Canterbury town.

"Not for the Church he died," they said,
"Yet he our saint shall be,
Since for Christ's poor he gave his life,
So for Christ's self died he.
'Who does it to the least of these,
Has done it unto Me!'"



MORNING.

It was about the time of day
When all the lawns with dew are wet;
I wandered down a steep wood-way,
And there I met with Margaret--
Her hands were full of boughs of may.

It was the merest chance we met:
I could not find a word to say,
And she was silent too--and yet
For hand and lips I dared to pray--
And Margaret did not say me nay.

Still on my lips her kisses stay,
Her eyes are like the violet;
Will time take this joy, too, away,
And ever teach me to forget--
And to forget without regret--
The dawn, the woods, and Margaret?

THE PRAYER.

They talk of money and of fame,
Would make a fortune or a name,
And gold and laurel both must be
For ever out of reach of me.

And if I asked of God or fate
The gift most gracious and most great,
It would not be such gifts as these
That I should pray for on my knees.

No, I should ask a greater grace--
A little, quiet, firelit place,
Warm-curtained, violet-sweet, where she
Should hold my baby on her knee.

There she should sit and softly sing
The songs my heart hears echoing;
And I, made pure by joy, should come
Not all unworthy to our home.

But if I dared to ask this grace,
Would not God laugh out in my face?
Since gold and fame indeed are His
To give, but, ah! not this, not this!

THE RIVER MAIDENS.

When autumn winds the river grieve,
And autumn mists about it creep,
The river maids all shivering leave
The stream, and singing, sink to sleep.

The keen-toothed wind, the bitter snow
Alike are impotent to break
The spell of sleep that laid them low--
The lovely ladies will not wake.

But when the spring with lavish grace
Strews blossom on the river's breast,
Flowers fall upon each sleeping face
And break the deep and dreamless rest.

Then with white arms that gleam afar
Through alders green and willows gray,
They rise where sedge and iris are,
And laugh beneath the blossomed May.

They lie beside the river's edge,
By fields with buttercups a-blaze;
They whisper in the whispering sedge,
They say the spell the cuckoo says.

And when they hear the nightingale
And see the blossomed hawthorn tree,
What time the orchard pink grows pale--
The river maidens beckon me.

Through all the city's smoke appear
White arms and golden hair a-gleam,
And through the noise of life I hear
"Come back--to the enchanted stream.

"Come back to water, wood and weir!
See what the summer has to show!
Come back, come back--we too are here."
I hear them calling, and I go.

But when once more my dripping oar
Makes music on the dreaming air,
I vainly look to stream and shore
For those white arms that lured me there.

I listen to the singing weir,
I hold my breath where thrushes are,
But I can never, never hear
The voice that called me from afar.

Only when spring grows fair next year,
Even where sin and cities be,
I know what voices I shall hear,
And what white arms will beckon me.



ON THE MEDWAY.

I.

In summer evening, love,
 We glide by grassy meadows,
 Red sun is shining,
 Day is declining,
Peace is around, above.
 The poplar folds on high
 Dark wings against the sky;
 Through dreaming shadows
On we move,
 Silently, you and I.

And seaward still we row,
 By sedge and bulrush sliding,
 Breezes are sending
 Ripples unending
Over the way we go.
 Above the poplar tree
 The moon sails white and free,
 The boat goes gliding
Swift or slow,
 But ever towards the sea.

II.

Dip, drip, in and out
 The rhythmic oars move slowly,
Mist-kissed, round about
 The pale sky reddens wholly;
Chill, still, through waxing light
 Mystical and tender,
Morn, born of starlit night,
 Clothes herself with splendour.

Rose-glow in eastern sky,
 In the north faint flushes;
Boat, float idly by
 Past the sedge and rushes!
Here, near the willow screen
 River-gods bathe gaily;
White, bright against the green,
 Poets see them daily.

See, we, we alone
 Greet this fresh sun-waking,
Too few, who hail day done,
 See it in the making!
Sad, glad, we two see
 Dawn the earth adorning,
Sigh: "Why can no noon be
 Worth so gold a morning?"

III.

It was beside a wide, white weir,
Where the foam dances in the sun,
The butterflies are fair this year,
And o'er the weir there hovered one--
A far-off cottage curled its smoke
Against a blue and perfect sky;
There love triumphant laughed and woke,
And we were silent--you and I.

Love stirred in sleep, reached out his hands,
And sighed, and smiled, and stood upright,
Then fell the careful cobweb bands
With which our will had bound his might;
His royal presence made us still,
Our will was water, matched with his;
Like water-spray he broke our will
And joined our lips in our first kiss.

IV.

Look out! The stars are shining,
The dew makes gray the meadow!
The jasmine stars are twining
About your window bright;
The glow-worms green are creeping
On lawns all dressed in shadow,
The roses all are sleeping--
Good-night, my heart, good-night!

The nightingale is singing
Her song of ceaseless sorrow,
The night's slow feet pass, bringing
The day when I rejoice;
Beloved beyond measure,
Our bridal is to-morrow--
Oh, thrill the night with pleasure!
Oh, let me hear thy voice!

From cloudy confines sliding,
The moon sails white and splendid;
No roses now are hiding
The glory of their grace;
So, if my song thou hearest--
For thee begun and ended--
Light up the night, my dearest,
And let me see thy face!

V.

O gleaming, gliding river,
Where ash and alder lean,
Where sighing sedges shiver
By willows gray and green;
Upon thy shifting shadows
The yellow lily lies,
And all along thy meadows
Grow flowers of Paradise.

The red-roofed village sleeping,
Soft sounds of farm and fold,
The dappled shadows creeping,
The sunset's rose and gold,
Twilight of mist and glamour,
Noontide of sunlit ease,
How, 'mid life's sordid clamour,
Our hearts will long for these!

Yet, since at heart we treasure
These weirs and woods and fields,
This crown of lovely leisure
Which Kentish country yields--
These, these are ours for ever,
Though dream-sweet days be done;
Through all our dreams our river
Will evermore flow on.

VI.

When all is over, lay me down
Far from this dull and jaded town,
Not in a churchyard's ordered bound,
But in some wide green meadow-ground.

No stone upon me! Above all
Let no cold railing's shadows fall
Across my rest. Dead, let me be
What no one may be living--free.

Let no one mourning garments wear,
And if you love me, shed no tear;
Don't weight me with a clay-built heap,
But plant the daisies where I sleep.

There is a certain field I know,
I met my dear there, years ago;
Perhaps, if you should speak them fair,
They'd let you lay her lover there.

Laid there, perhaps my ears would hear
The ceaseless singing of the weir,
The soft wind sighing thro' the grass,
And hear the little children pass.

Or, if my ears were stopped with clay
From all sweet sounds of night and day,
I should at least (so lay me there)
Sleep better there than anywhere!

THE BETROTHAL.

There is none anywhere
So beautiful as she nor half so dear;
My heart sings ever when she draweth near,
Because she is so good and sweet and fair.

I may not be the one
To break the cloistered stillness of her life,
To teach her passion and love and grief and strife,
And lead her through the garden of the sun.

For I am sad and wise;
I have no hopes, no dreams, no fancies--none;
Yet she has taught me that I am alone,
And what men mean who talk of Paradise.

But, when her joybells ring,
I think, perhaps, that I shall hear and sigh
And wish the roses did not have to die,
And that the birds might never cease to sing.

A TRAGEDY.

I.

Among his books he sits all day
To think and read and write;
He does not smell the new-mown hay,
The roses red and white.

I walk among them all alone,
His silly, stupid wife;
The world seems tasteless, dead and done--
An empty thing is life.

At night his window casts a square
Of light upon the lawn;
I sometimes walk and watch it there
Until the chill of dawn.

I have no brain to understand
The books he loves to read;
I only have a heart and hand
He does not seem to need.

He calls me "Child"--lays on my hair
Thin fingers, cold and mild;
Oh! God of Love, who answers prayer,
I wish I were a child!

And no one sees and no one knows
(He least would know or see)
That ere Love gathers next year's rose
Death will have gathered me;

And on my grave will bindweed pink
And round-faced daisies grow;
He still will read and write and think,
And never, never know!

It's lonely in my study here alone
Now you are gone;
I loved to see your white gown 'mid the flowers,
While, hours on hours,
I studied--toiled to weave a crown of fame
About your name.

I liked to hear your sweet, low laughter ring;
To hear you sing
About the house while I sat reading here,
My child, my dear;
To know you glad with all the life-joys fair
I dared not share.

I thought there would be time enough to show
My love, to throw
Some day with crowns of laurel at your feet
Love's roses sweet;
I thought I could taste love when fame was won--
Now both are done!

Thank God, your child-heart knew not how to miss
The passionate kiss
Which I dared never give, lest love should rise
Mighty, unwise,
And bind me, with my life-work incomplete,
Beside your feet.

You never knew, you lived and were content;
My one chance went;
You died, my little one, and are at rest--
And I, unblest,
Look at these broken fragments of my life,
My child, my wife.

LOVE.

I.

THE DESIRE OF THE MOTH FOR THE STAR.

The wide, white woods are still as death or sleep,
 Silent with snow and sunshine and crisp air,
Save when the brief, keen, sudden breezes sweep
 Through frozen fern-leaves rustling everywhere.
No leaves are here, nor buds for gathering,
 But in her garden--risen from Summer's tomb
To bear the gospel of eternal Spring--
 The Christmas roses bloom.

O heart of mine, we two once dreamed of days
 Pure from all sordid soil and worldly stain,
Like this wide stretch of white untrodden ways--
 Ah that such dreams should always be in vain!
We, too, in bitterest sorrow's wintry hour,
 Too chill to let the redder roses blow,
We, too, had our delicious hidden flower
 That blossomed in life's snow.

O heart, if we again might hope to be
 Pure as the snow or Christmas roses white!
If dreams and deeds might but be one to me,
 And one to thee be duty and delight!
If that may ever be, one hand we know
 Must beckon us along the way she goes,
The hand of her--as pure as any snow,
 And sweet as any rose.

II.

WORSHIP.

I passed beneath the stately Norman portal,
I trod the stones that pilgrim feet have trod,
I passed between the pillars tall and slender,
That yearn to heaven as man's soul yearns to God.

The coloured glory of the pictured windows
Fell on me as I kneeled before the shrine
Where, round the image of the Mother-maiden,
The countless flames of love-lit tapers shine.

The hymn rose on the wings of children's voices,
The incense thrilled my soul to voiceless prayer
With scent of dear dead days, and years forgotten--
And all the soul of all the past was there.

But in my heart as there I kneeled before her,
Not to the Mother-maid the winged prayers flew--
They passed her by and sought, instead, your presence;
The incense of my soul was burned for you.

For you, for you were all the tapers lighted,
For you the flowers were on the altar laid,
For you the hymn rose thrilling through the chancel
To the clerestory's mysteries of shade.

To you the anthems of a thousand churches
Rose where the taper-pointed flames burned clear;
To you--through all these leagues of deathly distance,
To you--as unattainable as dear.

Dear as the dreams life never brings to blossom,
Lost as the seeds hope sowed, which never grew,
Pure as the love which only you could waken,
Prayer, incense, tears, and love were all for you!

III.

SPLENDIDE MENDAX.

When God some day shall call my name
And scorch me with a blaze of shame,
Bringing to light my inmost thought
And all the evil I have wrought,

Tearing away the veils I wove
To hide my foulness from my love,
And leaving my transgressions bare
To the whole heaven's clear, cold air--

When all the angels weep to see
The branded, outcast soul of me,
One saint at least will hide her face--
She will not look at my disgrace.

"At least, O God, O God Most High,
He loved me truly!" she will cry,
And God will pause before He send
My soul to find its fitting end.

Then, lest heaven's light should leave her face
To think one loved her and was base,
I will speak out at judgment day--
"I never loved her!" I will say.

LOVE SONG.

Light of my life! though far away,
My sun, you shine,
Your radiance warms me every day
Like fire or wine.

Life of my heart! in every beat
This sad heart gives,
It owns your sovereignty complete,
By which it lives.

Heart of my soul! serene and strong,
Eyes of my sight!
Together we can do no wrong,
Apart, no right.

THE QUARREL.

Come down, my dear, from this high, wind-swept hill,
Where the wild plovers scream against the sky;
Down in the valley everything is still--
We also will be silent, you and I.

Come down, and hold my hand as we go down.
A gleam of sun has dyed the west afar;
The lights come out down in the little town,
'Neath the first glimmer of the evening star.

Did my heart forge the bitter words I said?
Did your heart breed those bitterer replies--
Spoken with plovers wheeling overhead
In the gray pallor of the cheerless skies?

Is it worth while to quarrel and upbraid,
Life being so little and love so great a thing?
The price of all life's follies has been paid
When we, true lovers, fall to quarrelling.

Here is the churchyard; swing the gate and pass
Where the sharp needles of the pines are shed.
Tread here between the mounds of flowered grass;
Tread softly over these forgotten dead.

We are alive, and here--O love! O wife!
While life is ours, and we are yours and mine,
How dare we crush the blossom of our life?
How dare we spill love's sacramental wine?

Kiss me! Forget! We two are living now,
And life is all too short for love, my dear.
When one of us beneath these flowers lies low,
The other will remember we kissed here.

Some one some day will come here all alone
And look out on the desolated years,
With bitter tears of longing for the one
Who will not then be here to dry the tears!



CHANGE.

There's a little house by an orchard side
Where the Spring wears pink and white;
There's a garden with pansies and London pride,
And a bush of lad's delight.
Through the sweet-briar hedge is the garden seen
As trim as a garden can be,
And the grass of the orchard is much more green
Than most of the grass you see.

There used to be always a mother's smile
And a father's face at the door,
When one clambered over the orchard stile,
So glad to be home once more.
But now I never go by that way,
For when I was there of late,
A stranger was cutting the orchard hay,
And a stranger leaned on the gate.

THE MILL.

The wheel goes round--the wheel goes round
With drip and whirl and splash,
It keeps all green the grassy ground,
The alder, beech and ash.
The ferns creep out 'mid mosses cool,
Forget-me-nots are found
Blue in the shadow by the pool--
And still the wheel goes round.

Round goes the wheel, round goes the wheel,
The foam is white like cream,
The merry waters dance and reel
Along the stony stream.
The little garden of the mill,
It is enchanted ground,
I smell its stocks and wall-flowers still,
And still the wheel goes round.

The wheel goes round, the wheel goes round,
And life's wheel too must go--
But all their clamour has not drowned
A voice I used to know.
Her window's blank. The garden's bare
As her chill new-made mound,
But still my heart's delight is there,
And still the wheel goes round.

RONDEAU.

A red, red rose, all wet with dew,
With leaves of green by red shot through,
And sharp, thin thorns, and scent that brings
Delicious memories of lost things,
A red rose, sweet--yet sad as rue.

'Twas a red rose you gave me--you
Whose gifts so sacred were, and few--
And that is why your lover sings
A red, red rose.

I sing--with lute untuned, untrue,
And worse than other lovers do,
Because perplexing memory stings--
Because from your green grave there springs,
With your spilt life-blood coloured through,
A red, red rose.



A MESALLIANCE.

I hear sweet music, rich gowns I wear,
I live in splendour and state;
But I'd give it all to be young once more,
And steal through the old low-lintelled door,
To watch at the orchard gate.

There are flowers by thousands these ball-rooms bear,
Fair blossoms, wondrous and new;
But all the flowers that a hot-house grows
I would give for the scent of a certain rose
That a cottage garden grew!

Oh, diamonds that sparkle on bosom and hair,
Oh, rubies that glimmer and glow--
I am tired of my bargain and tired of you!
I would give you all for a daisy or two
From a little grave I know.



THE LAST THOUGHT.

It's weary lying here,
While my throbbing forehead echoes all the hum of London near,
And oh! my heart is heavy, in this dull and darkened room,
When I think about our village, where the orchards are in bloom--
Our little red-roofed village, where the cherry orchards are--
So far away, so far!

They say that I shall die--
And I'm tired, and life is noisy, and the good days have gone by:
But oh! my red-roofed village--I should die with more content
Could I see again your gables, and the orchard slopes of Kent,
And the eyes that look out vainly, from a rose-wreathed cottage door,
For one who comes no more.

APOLLO AND THE MEN OF CYME.

(Herodotus, I. 157-160.)

"What be these messengers who come fleet-footed
Between the images that guard our roadway,
Beneath the heavy shadow of the laurels--
Whence be these men, and wherefore have they come?"

"We come to crave the counsel of Apollo--
The men of Cyme he has counselled often--
Ask of the god an answer to our question,
Ask of Apollo here in Branchidae.

"Pactyes the Lydian, flying from the Persian,
Has sought in Cyme refuge and protection;
The Persian bids us yield--our hearts bid shield him,
What does Apollo bid his servants do?"

The Oracle replied--and straight returning
To Cyme ran the messengers fleet-footed,
Brought to the citizens the Sun-god's answer:
"Apollo bids you yield to Persia's will".

So when the men of Cyme heard the answer,
They set in hand at once to yield their suppliant,
But Aristodicus, loved of the city,
Withstood their will,--and thus to them spake he.

"Your messengers have lied--they have made merry
In their own homes, they have not sought Apollo;
The god in Branchidae had never counselled
That we should yield our suppliant to the foe.

"Wait. I, myself, with others of your choosing,
Will seek the god, and bring you back his answer,
I would not yield the man who trusted Cyme--
What--is the god of baser stuff than I?"

So, by the bright bay, under the blue heavens,
A second time to Branchidae they journeyed,
A second time beneath the purple shadows

Passed through the laurels to Apollo's fane.

Then Aristodicus spake thus: "To Cyme
Comes Pactyes fleeing from the wrath of Persia--
And she demands him, but we dare not yield him,
Until we know what thou wouldst have us do.

"Our arm is weak against the power of Persia,
The foe is strong, and our defences slender;
Yet, Lord, not yet have we been bold to render
Him who has come, a suppliant, to our gates."

So the Cymeans spake. Apollo answered:
"Yield ye your suppliant--yield him to the Persians".
Then Aristodicus bethought him further,
And in this fashion craftily he wrought.

All round the temple, in the nooks and crannies
Of carven work made by man's love and labour,
In perfect safety, by Apollo guarded,
The swallows and the sparrows built their nests.

And all day long their floating wings made beauty
About the temple and the whispering laurels,
And their shrill notes, with the sea's ceaseless murmur,
Rose in sweet chorus to the great god's ears.

Now round the temple went the men of Cyme,
Tore down the nests and snared the building swallows,
And a wild wind went moaning through the branches.
The sun-light died, and all the sky grew gray.

Men shivered in the disenchanted noontide,
And overhead the gray sky darkened, darkened,
And, in the heart of every man beholding,
The anger of the immortal gods made night.

Then from the hid shrine of the inner temple
Came forth a voice more beautiful than music,
More terrible than thunder and wild waters,
And more to be desired than summer sun.

"O thou most impious of all impious mortals,
Why hast thou dared defy me in my temple,
And torn away the homes of those who trust me,
Taken my suppliants from me for thy prey?"

Then Aristodicus stood forth, and answered:
"Lord, is it thus *thy* suppliants are succoured,
What time thy Oracle bids men of Cyme
To yield their suppliant to the Persian spears?"

Then on the hush of awful expectation
Following the challenge of the too-bold mortals,
Broke the god's voice, unspeakably melodious
With all the song and sorrow of the world:--

"Yea, I do bid you yield him, that so sinning
Against the gods ye may the sooner perish--
And come no more to question at my temple
Of yielding suppliants who have trusted you!"

AT THE PRIVATE VIEW.

Yes, that's my picture. "Great," you say?
The crowd says it will make my name--
A name I'd gladly throw away
For a certain unseen star's pure ray.
I want success I've missed--not fame.

You see the mother kneeling there,
The child who cries for bread in vain.
The hard straw bed, the window bare,
The rags, the rat, the broken chair,
The misery and cold and pain.

But what you don't see--(never will!)--
Is what was there while yet I drew
The lines--which are not drawn so ill,
Put on the colours--worthy still
Of praise from critics such as you.

I used to paint all day, to pour
My soul out as I painted--see
There, to the life, the rotten floor,
The rags, the damp, the broken door,
For those your world will honour me.

But, though if here my models were,
You should not find a line drawn wrong,
Yet there is food for my despair,
But half my picture's finished fair;
Words without music are not song.

Sometimes I almost caught the tune,
Then changing lights across the sky,
Turned gray morn to red afternoon,
I had to drop my brush too soon,
Lay the transfigured *palette* by.

That woman did not kneel on there,
When once my back was turned, I know,
She used to leave the broken chair
And show her face and its despair:
Oh--if I could have seen her so!

About her neck child-arms clung close,
Close to her heart the child-heart crept,
My room could tell you--if it chose.
There was a picture, then--God knows!
And I--who might have painted--slept.

Then when birds bade the world prepare
For dawn--ere yet the East grew wan,
She stepped back to the canvas there,
Wearing the look she will not wear
When eyes like yours and mine look on.

And when the mother knelt once more

And when the mother kneeled once more,
While birds grew shrill, and shadows faint,
The child's white face the one look bore,
Which to my eyes it never wore,
Which I would give my soul to paint.



Hung, as you see--upon the line--
But when I laid the varnish on
And left my two--Fate laughed, malign,
"Farewell to that last hope of thine,
Thy chance of painting them is gone!"



A DIRGE IN GRAY.

Larranagas! Thank you, thank you!
Not a knife. I never use one--
I've the right thing on my watch-chain
Which some fool or other gave me--
Takes the end off in a second--
Sharp as life bites off our pleasures.

See! The soft wreath upward curling,
Gray as mists in leaf-strewn hollows;
Blue as skies in mild October;
Vague, elusive as delight is.
Ah! what shapes the smoke-wreaths grow to
When they're looked at by a dreamer!

Waves that moan--cold, gray, and curling,
On a shore where gray rocks break them;
Skies where gray and blue are blended
As our life blends joy and sorrow.
Angel wings, and smoke of battles,
Lines of beauty, curved perfection!

Half-shut eyes see many marvels;
Gazed at through one's half-closed lashes
Wreaths of smoke take shapes uncanny--
Beckoning hands and warning fingers--
But the gray cloud always somehow
Ends by looking like a woman.

Like a woman tall and slender,
Gowned in gray, with eyes like twilight,
Soft, and dreamy, and delicious.
Through my half-shut eyes I see her--
Through my half-dead life am conscious
Of her pure, perpetual presence.

Then the gray wreaths spread out broadly
Till they make a level landscape,
Toneless, dull, and very rainy--
And an open grave--I saw it.
Through the rain I heard the falling
Of the tears the heart sheds inly.

Oh, I saw it! I remember
Leafless branches, dripping, dripping,
Through a chill not born of Autumn.
To that grave tends all my dreaming--
Oh, I saw it, I remember ...
By that grave all dreaming ended!

THE WOMAN'S WORLD.

Oh! to be alone!
To escape from the work, the play,
The talking, everyday;
To escape from all I have done,
And all that remains to do.
To escape, yes, even from you,
My only love, and be
Alone, and free.

Could I only stand
Between gray moor and gray sky
Where the winds and the plovers cry,
And no man is at hand.
And feel the free wind blow
On my rain-wet face, and know
I am free--not yours--but my own.
Free--and alone!

For the soft fire-light
And the home of your heart, my dear,
They hurt--being always here.
I want to stand up--upright
And to cool my eyes in the air
And to see how my back can bear
Burdens--to try, to know,
To learn, to grow!

I am only you!
I am yours--part of you--your wife!
And I have no other life.
I cannot think, cannot do,
I cannot breathe, cannot see;
There is "us," but there is not "me"--
And worst, at your kiss, I grow
Contented so.

THE LIGHTHOUSE.

Above the rocks, above the waves
Shines the strong light that warns and saves.
So you, too high for storm or strife,
Light up the shipwreck of my life.

The lighthouse warns the wise, but these
Not only sail the stormy seas;
Towards the light the foolish steer
And, drowning, read its meaning, dear.

And, if the lamp by chance allure
Some foolish ship to death, be sure
The lamp will to itself protest:
"His be the blame! I did my best!"

TO A YOUNG POET.

Tired of work? Then drop away
From the land of cheerful day!
Pen the muse, and drive the pen
If you'd stay with living men.

Fancy fails? Then pluck from those
Gardens where her blossom blows;
Trim the buds and wire them well,
And your bouquet's sure to sell.

Write, write, write! Produce, produce!
Write for sale, and not for use.
This is a commercial age!
Write! and fill your ledger page.

If your soul should droop and die,
Bury it with undimmed eye.
Never mind what memory says--
Soul's a thing that never pays!



THE TEMPTATION.

Let me go! I cannot be
All you think me, pure and true:
Those brave jewel-names crown you,
They were trampled down by me.

Horrid ghosts rise up between
You and me; I dare not pass!
What might be is dead; what was
Is its poison, O my Queen!

I should wither up your life,
Blacken, blight its maiden flower;
You would live to curse the hour
When you made yourself my wife.

Yet, your hand held out, your eyes
Pleading, longing, brimmed with tears ...
I have lived in hell for years:
Do not show me Paradise.

Lest I answer: "Take me, then!
Take me, save me if you can,
Worse than any other man,
Loving more than other men."



THE BALLAD OF SIR HUGH.

The castle had been held in siege,
While thrice three weeks went past,
And still the foe no vantage gained
And still our men stood fast.

We held the castle for our king
Against our foes and his;
Stout was our heart, as man's must be
In such brave cause as this.

But Sir Hugh walked the castle wall,
And oh! his heart was sore,
For the foe held fast the only son
His dead wife ever bore.

The castle gates were firm and fast,
Strong was the castle wall,
Yet bore Sir Hugh an aching heart
For the thing that might befall.

He looked out to the pearly east,
Ere day began to break:
"God save my boy till evensong,"
He said, "for Mary's sake!"

He looked out on the western sky
When the sun sank, blood-red:
"God keep my son till morning light
For His son's sake," he said.

And morn and eve, and noon and night,
His heart one prayer did make:
"God keep my boy, my little one,
For his dear dead mother's sake!"

At last, worn out with bootless siege--
Our walls being tall and stout--
The rebel captain neared our gates
With a flag of truce held out.

"A word, Sir Hugh, a word with you,
Ere yet it be too late;
We have a prisoner and would know
What is to be his fate.

"Yield up your castle, or he dies!
'Tis thus the bargain stands:
His body in our hands we hold,
His life is in your hands!"

Sir Hugh looked down across the moat
And, in the sunlight fair,
He saw the child's blue, frightened eyes
And tangled golden hair.

He saw the little arms held out;
The little voice rang thin:
"O father dear, undo the gates!
O father--let me in!"

Sir Hugh leaned on the battlements;
His voice rang strong and true:

"My son--I cannot let thee in,
As my heart bids me do;

"If I should open and let thee in,
I let in, with thee, shame:
And that thing never shall be done
By one who bears our name!

"For honour and our king command
And we must needs obey;
So bear thee as a brave man's son,
As I will do this day."

The boy looked up, his shoulders squared,
Threw back his bright blond hair:

"Father, I will not be the one
To shame the name we bear.

"And, whatsoever they may do,
Whether I live or die,
I'll bear me as a brave man's son,
For that, thank God, am I!"

Then spake Sir Hugh unto the foe,
He spake full fierce and free:
"Ye cowards, deem ye, ye have affair
With cowards such as ye be?"

"What? I must yield my castle up,
Or else my son be slain?
I trow ye never had to do
Till now with honest men!

"'Tis but by traitors such as you
That such foul deeds be done;
Not to betray his king and cause
Did I beget my son!

"My son was bred to wield the sword
And hew down knaves like you,
Or, at the least, die like a man,
As he this day shall do!

"And, since ye lack a weapon meet
To take so good a life
(For your coward steel would stain his blood),
Here--take his father's knife!"

With that he flung the long knife down
From off the castle wall,
It glimmered and gleamed in the brave sunlight,
Full in the sight of all.

Sir Hugh passed down the turret stair,
We held our breath in awe ...
May my tongue wither ere it tell
The damned work we saw!



When all was done a shout went un

From that accursed crew,
And from the chapel's silence dim
Came forth in haste Sir Hugh.

"And what may mean this clamour and din?"
"Sir Hugh, thy son is dead!"
"I deemed the foe had entered in,
But God is good!" he said.

We stood upon the topmost tower,
Full in the setting sun;
Shamed silence grew in the traitor's camp
Now that foul deed was done.

See! on the hills the gleam of steel,
Hark! threatening clarions ring,
See! horse and foot and spear and shield
And the banner of the king!

And in the camp of those without,
Hot tumult and cold fear,
For the traitor only dares be brave,
Until his king be near!

We armed at speed, we sallied forth,
Sir Hugh was at our head;
He set his teeth and he marked his path
By a line of traitors, dead.

He hacked his way straight to the churl
Who did the boy to death,
He swung his sword in his two strong hands
And clove him to the teeth.

And while the blade was held in the bone,
The caitiffs round him pressed,
And he died, as one of his line should die,
With three blades in his breast.

And when they told the king these things,
He turned his head away,
And said: "A braver man than I
Has fallen for me this day!"



FEBRUARY.

The Spring's in the air--
Here, there,
Everywhere!
Though there's scarce a green tip to a bud,
Spring laughs over hill and plain,
As the sunlight turns the lane's mud
To a splendour of copper one way, of silver the other;
And longings one cannot smother,
And delight that sings through the brain,
Turn all one's life into glory--
'Tis the old new ravishing story--
The Spring's here again!

When the leaves grew red
And dead,
We said:
"See how much more fair
Than the green leaves shimmering
Are the mists and the tints of decay!"
In the dainty dreamings that lighted the gray November,
Did our hearts not remember
The green woods--and linnets that sing?
Ah, we knew Spring was lost, and pretended
'Twas Autumn we loved. Lies are ended;
Thank God for the Spring!

APRIL.

Who calls the Autumn season drear?
It was in Autumn that we met,
When under foot dead leaves lay wet
In the black London gardens, dear.
The fog was yellow everywhere,
And very thick in Finsbury Square,
Where in those days we used to meet.
I used to buy you violets sweet
From flower-girls down by Moorgate Street.
'Twas Autumn then--can we forget?--
When first we met.

Who says that Spring is dear and fair?
It is in Spring-time that we part,
And weary heart from weary heart
Turns, as the birds begin to pair.
The sun shines on the golden dome,
The primroses in baskets come,
With daffodils in sheaves, to cheer
The town with dreams of the crowned year.
We're both polite and insincere:
Though neither says it, yet--at heart--
We mean to part.

JUNE.

Oh, I'm weary of the town,
Where life's too hard for smiling--and the dreary houses frown,
And the very sun seems cruel in its glory, as it beats
Upon the miles of dusty roofs--the dreary squares and streets;
This sun that gilds the great St. Paul's--the golden cross and dome,
Is this the same that shines upon our little church at home?

Our little church is gray,
It stands upon a hill-side--you can see it miles away,
The rooks sail round its tower, and the plovers from the moor.
I used to see the daisies through the low-arched framing door,
When all the wood and meadow with June's sunshine were ablaze,--
Then the sun had ways of shining that it hasn't nowadays.

There are elm trees all around
Where the birds and bees in summer make a murmuring music-sound,
And on the quiet pastures the sheep-bells sound afar,
And you hear the low of cattle--where the red farm buildings are;
Oh! on that grass to rest my head and hear that old sweet tune,
And forget the cruel city--on this first blue day of June!

The grass is high--I know;
And the wind across the meadow is the same that used to blow;
But if my steps turned thither, on this golden first June day--
It would only be to count my dead--whom God has taken away.
That graveyard where the daisies grow--not yet my heart can bear
To pass that way--but oh, some day, some kind hand lay me there!



JULY.

The night hardly covers the face of the sky,
But the darkness is drawn
Like a veil o'er the heaven these nights in July,
A veil rent at dawn,
When with exquisite tremors the poplar leaves quiver,
And a breeze like a kiss wakes the slumbering river,
And the light in the east keener grows--clearer grows,
Till the edge of the clouds turn from pearl into rose,
And o'er the hill's shoulder--the night wholly past--
The sun peeps at last!

Come out! there's a freshness that thrills like a song,
That soothes like a sleep;
And the scent of wild thyme on the air borne along,
Where the downs slope up steep.
There's such dew on the earth and such lights in the heaven,
Lost joys are forgotten, old sorrows forgiven,
And the old earth looks new--and our hearts seem new-born,
And stripped of the cere-clothes which long they have worn--
And hope and brave purpose awaken anew
'Mid the sunshine and dew.

NOVEMBER.

Low lines of leaden clouds sweep by
Across the gold sun and blue sky,
Which still are there eternally.
Above the sodden garden-bed
Droop empty flower-stalks, dry and dead,
Where the tall lily bent its head
Over carnations white and red.

The leafless poplars, straight and tall,
Stand by the gray-green garden wall,
From which such rare fruit used to fall.
In the verandah, where of old
Sweet August spent the roses' gold,
Round the chill pillars, shivering, fold
Garlands of rose-thorns, sharp with cold.

And we, by cosy fireside, muse
On what the Fates grant, what refuse;
And what we waste and what we use.
Summer returns--despite the rain
That weeps against the window-pane.
Who'd weep--'mid fame and golden gain--
For youth, that does not come again?

ROCHESTER CASTLE.

Blue sky, gray arches, and white, white cloud;
Gray eyes, white hands, and a free, white crowd
Of wheeling, whirling, fluttering things--
Pink feet, bright feathers, and wide, warm wings.
Thousands of pigeons all the year
Fly in and out of the arches here.

What prisoned hands have torn at the stone
Where your soft hand lies--oh my heart!--alone?
What prisoned eyes have grown blind with tears
To see what we see after all these years--
The free, broad river go smoothly by
And the free, blithe birds 'neath the free, blue sky?

And now--O Time, how you work your will!
--The pitiless walls are standing still,
But the wall-flowers blossom on every ledge,
And the wild rose garlands the walls' sheer edge,
And where once the imprisoned heart beat low,
The beautiful pigeons fly to and fro!

In the sad, stern arches they build and pair,
As happy as dreams and as free as air,
And sorrow and longing and life-long pain
Man brings not into these walls again;
And yet--O my love, with the face of flowers--
What do we bring in these hearts of ours?

RUCKINGE CHURCH.

"And we said how dreary and desolate and forlorn the church was, and how long it was since any music but that of the moth-eaten harmonium and the heartless mixed choir had sounded there. And we said: 'Poor old church! it will never hear any true music any more'. Then she turned to us from the door of the Lady Chapel, which was plastered and whitewashed, and had a stove and the Evangelical Almanac in it, and her eyes were full of tears. And, standing there, she sang 'Ave Maria'--it was Gounod's music, I think--with her voice and her face like an angel's. And while she sang a stranger came to the church door and stood listening, but he did not see us. Only we saw that he loved her singing. And he went away as soon as the hymn was ended, we also soon following, and the church was left lonely as before."--*Extract from our Diary.*

The boat crept slowly through the water-weeds
That greenly cover all the waterways,
Between high banks where ranks of sedge and reeds
Sigh one sad secret all their quiet days,
Through grasses, water-mint and rushes green
And flags and strange wet blossoms, only seen
Where man so seldom comes, so briefly stays.

From the high bank the sheep looked calmly down,
Unscared to see my boat and me go by;
The elm trees showed their dress of golden brown
To winds that should disrobe them presently;
And a marsh sunset flamed across the wold,
And the still water caught the lavished gold,
The purple and the purple of the sky

the purple and the purple of the sky.

The boat pressed ever through the weeds and sedge
Which, rustling, clung her steadfast prow around;
The iris nodded at the water's edge,
Bats in the elm trees made a ghostly sound;
With whirring wings a wild duck sprang to sight
And flew, black-winged, towards the crimson light,
Leaving my solitude the more profound.

We moved towards the church, my boat and I--
The church that at the marsh edge stands alone;
It caught the reflex of the sunset sky
On golden-lichened roof and gray-green stone.
Through snow and shower and sunshine it had stood
In the thronged graveyard's infinite solitude,
While many a year had come, and flowered, and gone.

From the marsh-meadow to the field of graves
But just a step, across a lichened wall.
Thick o'er the happy dead the marsh grass waves,
And cloudy wreaths of marsh mist gather and fall,
And the marsh sunsets shed their gold and red
Over still hearts that once in torment fed
At Life's intolerable festival.

The plaster of the porch has fallen away
From the lean stones, that now are all awry,
And through the chinks a shooting ivy spray
Creeps in--sad emblem of fidelity--
And wreathes with life the pillars and the beams
Hewn long ago--with, ah! what faith and dreams!--
By men whose faith and dreams have long gone by.

The rusty key, the heavy rotten door,
The dead, unhappy air, the pillars green
With mould and damp, the desecrated floor
With bricks and boards where tombstones
should have been
And were once; all the musty, dreary chill--
They strike a shudder through my being still
When memory lights again that lightless scene.

And where the altar stood, and where the Christ
Reached out His arms to all the world, there stood
Law-tables, as if love had not sufficed
To all the world has ever known of good!
Our Lady's chapel was a lightless shrine;
There was no human heart and no divine,
No odour of prayer, no altar, and no rood.

There was no scent of incense in the air,
No sense of all the past breathed through the aisle,
The white glass windows turned to mocking glare
The lovely sunset's gracious rosy smile.
A vault, a tomb wherein was laid to sleep
All that a man might give his life to keep
If only for an instant's breathing while!

Cold with my rage against the men who held
At such cheap rate the labours of the dead,

My heart within me sank, while o'er it swelled
A sadness that would not be comforted;
An awe came on me, and I seemed to face
The invisible spirit of the dreary place,
To hear the unheard voice of it, which said:--

"Is love, then, dead upon earth?
Ah! who shall tell or be told
What my walls were once worth
When men worked for love, not for gold?
Each stone was made to hold
A heartful of love and faith;
Now love and faith are dead,
Dead are the prayers that are said,
Nothing is living but Death!

"Oh for the old glad days,
Incense thick in the air,
Passion of thanks and of praise,
Passion of trust and of prayer!
Ah! the old days were fair,
Love on the earth was then,
Strong were men's souls, and brave:
Those men lie in the grave,
They will live not again!

"Then all my arches rang
With music glorious and sweet,
Men's souls burned as they sang,
Tears fell down at their feet,
Hearts with the Christ-heart beat,
Hands in men's hands held fast;
Union and brotherhood were!
Ah! the old days were fair,
Therefore the old days passed.

"Then, when later there came
Hatred, anger and strife,
The sword blood-red and the flame
And the stake and contempt of life,
Husband severed from wife,
Hearts with the Christ-heart bled:
Through the worst of the fight
Still the old fire burned bright,
Still the old faith was not dead.

"Though they tore my Christ from the cross,
And mocked at the Mother of Grace,
And broke my windows across,
Defiling the holy place--
Children of death and disgrace!
They spat on the altar stone,
They tore down and trampled the rood,
Stained my pillars with blood,
Left me lifeless, alone--

"Yet, when my walls were left
Robbed of all beauty and bare,
Still God cancelled the theft,
The soul of the thing was there.
In my damp, unwindowed air

in my camp, unwindowed and
Fugitives stopped to pray,
And their prayers were splendid to hear,
Like the sound of a storm that is near--
And love was not dead that day.

"Then the birds of the air built nests
In these empty shadows of mine,
And the warmth of their brooding breasts
Still warmed the untended shrine.
His creatures are all divine;
He is praised by the woodland throng,
And my old walls echoed and heard
The passionate praising word,
And love still lived in their song.

"Then came the Protestant crew
And made me the thing you have known--
Whitewashed and plastered me new,
Covered my marble and stone--
Could they not leave me alone?
Vain was the cry, for they trod
Over my tombs, and I saw
Books and the Tables of Law
Set in the place of my God.

"And love is dead, so it seems!
Shall I never hear again
The music of heaven and of dreams,
Songs of ideals of men?
Great dreams and songs we had then,
Now I but hear from the wood
Cry of a bat or a bird.
Oh for love's passionate word
Sent from men's hearts to the Good!

"Sometimes men come, and they sing,
But I know not their song nor their voice;
They have no hearts they can bring,
They have no souls to rejoice,
Theirs is but folly and noise.
Oh for a voice that could sing
Songs to the Queen of the blest,
Hymns to the Dearest and Best,
Songs to our Master, her King!"

The church was full of silence. I shut in
Its loss and loneliness, and went my way.
Its sadness was not less its walls within
Because I wore it in my heart that day,
And many a day since, when I see again
Marsh sunsets, and across the golden plain
The church's golden roof and arches gray.



Along wet roads, all shining with late rain,
And through wet woods, all dripping, brown and sere,
I came one day towards the church again.
It was the spring-time of the day and year;

The sky was light and bright and flecked with cloud
That, wind-swept, changeful, through bright rents allowed
Sun and blue sky to smile and disappear.

The sky behind the old gray church was gray--
Gray as my memories, and gray as I;
The forlorn graves each side the grassy way
Called to me "Brother!" as I passed them by.
The door was open. "I shall feel again,"
I thought, "that inextinguishable pain
Of longing loss and hopeless memory."

When--O electric flash of ecstasy!
No spirit's moan of pain fell on my ear--
A human voice, an angel's melody,
God let me in that perfect moment hear.
Oh, the sweet rush of gladness and delight,
Of human striving to the heavenly light,
Of great ideals, permanent and dear!

All the old dreams linked with the newer faith,
All the old faith with higher dreams enwound,
Surged through the very heart of loss and death
In passionate waves of pure and perfect sound.
The past came back: the Christ, the Mother-maid,
The incense of the hearts that praised and prayed,
The past's peace, and the future's faith profound.

*"Ave Maria,
Gratia plena,
Dominus tecum:
Benedicta tu
In mulieribus,
Et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus.
Sancta Maria, Mater Dei,
Ora pro nobis peccatoribus
Nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen."*

And all the soul of all the past was here--
A human heart that loved the great and good,
A heart to which the great ideals were dear,
One that had heard and that had understood,
As I had done, the church's desolate moan,
And answered it as I had never done,
And never willed to do and never could.

I left the church, glad to the soul and strong,
And passed along by fresh earth-scented ways;
Safe in my heart the echo of that song
Lived, as it will live with me all my days.
The church will never lose that echo, nor
Be quite as lonely ever any more;
Nor will my soul, where too that echo stays.

A little town that stands upon a hill,
Against whose base the white waves once leaped high;
Now spreading round it, even, green and still,
The placid pastures of the marshes lie.

The red-roofed houses and the gray church tower
Bear half asleep the sunshine and the rain;
They wait, so long have waited, for the hour
When the wild, welcome sea shall come again.

The lovely lights across the marshes pass,
The dykes grow fair with blossom, reed and sedge;
The patient beasts crop the long, cool, green grass,
The willows shiver at the water's edge;

But the town sleeps, it will not wake for these.
The sea some day again will round it break,
Will surge across these leagues of pastoral peace,
And then the little town will laugh, and wake.



THE BALLAD OF THE TWO SPELLS.

"Why dost thou weep?" the mass priest said;
"Fair dame, why dost thou weep?"
"I weep because my lord is laid
In an enchanted sleep.

"It was upon our bridal day
The bitter thing befel,
My love and lord was lured away
By an ill witch's spell.

"She lured him to her hidden bower
Among the cypress trees,
And there she holdeth manhood's flower
Asleep across her knees."

"Pray to our Father for His aid,
God knows ye need it sore."
"O God of Heaven, have I not prayed?
But I will pray no more.

"God will not listen to my prayer,
And never a Saint will hear,
Else should I stand beside him there,
Or he be with me here.

"But there he sleeps--and I wake here
And wet my bread with tears--
And still they say that God can hear,
And still God never hears.

"If I could learn a mighty spell,
Would get my love awake,
I'd sell my soul alive to hell,
And learn it for his sake.

"So say thy mass, and go thy way,
And let my grief alone--
Teach thou the happy how to pray
And leave the devil his own."



Within the witch's secret bower
Through changeful day and night,
Hour after priceless golden hour,
Lay the enchanted knight.

The witch's arms about him lay,
His face slept in her hair;
The devil taught her the spell to say
Because she was so fair.

And all about the bower were flowers
And gems and golden gear,
And still she watched the slow-foot hours
Because he was so dear.

Watched in her tower among the trees
For his long sleep to break;
And still he lay across her knees
And still he did not wake.

What whisper stirs the curtain's fold?
What foot comes up the stair?
What hand draws back the cloth of gold
And leaves the portal bare?

The night wind sweeps through all the room,
The tapers flee and flare,
And from the portal's outer gloom
His true love enters there.

"Give place, thou wicked witch, give place,
For his true wife is here,
Who for his sake has lost heaven's grace
Because he was so dear.

"My soul is lost and his is won;
Thy spells his sleep did make,
But I know thy spell, the only one
Can get my lord awake."

The witch looked up, her shining eyes
Gleamed through her yellow hair--
(She was cast out of Paradise
Because she was so fair).

"Speak out the spell, thou loving wife,
And what it beareth, bide,
Go--bring thy lover back to life
And give thy lord a bride."

The wife's soul burned in every word
As low she spoke the spell,
Weeping in heaven, her angel heard.

One, hearing, laughed in hell.

And when the spell was spoken through,
Sudden the knight awoke
And turned his eyes upon the two--
And neither of them spoke.

He did not see his pale-faced wife
Whom sorrow had made wise,
He only saw the light of life
Burn in the witch's eyes.

He only saw her bosom sweet,
Her golden fleece of hair,
And he fell down before her feet
Because she was so fair.

She stooped and raised him from the floor
And held him in her arms;
She said: "He would have waked no more
For any of my charms.

"You only could pronounce the spell
Would set his spirit free;
And you have sold your soul to hell
And wakened him--for me!

"I hold him now by my blue eyes
And by my yellow hair,
He never will miss Paradise,
Because I am so fair."

The wife looked back, looked back to see
The golden-curtained place,
Her lord's head on the witch's knee,
Her gold hair on his face.

"I would my soul once more were mine,
Then God my prayer would hear
And slay my soul in place of thine
Because thou art so dear!"

IN MEMORIAM

PHILIP BOURKE MARSTON.

When you were tired and went away,
I said, amid my new heart-ache:
"When I catch breath from pain some day,
I will teach grief a worthier way,
And make a great song for his sake!"

Yet there is silence. O my friend,
You gave me love such years ago--
A child who could not comprehend
Its worth, yet kept it to the end--
How can I sing when you lie low?

Not always silence. O my dear,
Not when the empty heart and hand
Reach out for you, who are not near.
If you could see, if you could hear,
I think that you would understand.

The grief that can get leave to run
In channels smooth of tender song
Wins solace mine has never won.
I have left all my work undone,
And only dragged my grief along.

Many who loved you many years
(Not more than I shall always do),
Will breathe their songs in your dead ears;
God help them if they weep such tears
As I, who have no song for you.

You would forgive me, if you knew!
Silence is all I have to bring
(Where tears are many, words are few);
I have but tears to bring to you,
For, since you died, I cannot sing!

RONDEAU.

TO AUSTIN DOBSON.

Your dainty Muse her form arrays
In soft brocades of bygone days.
She walks old gardens where the dews
Gem sundials and trim-cut yews
And tremble on the tulip's blaze.
The magic scent her charm conveys
Which lives on when the rose decays.
She had her portrait done by Greuze--
Your dainty Muse!

Mine's hardier--walks life's muddy ways
Barefooted; preaches, sometimes prays,
Is modern, is advanced, has views;
Goes in for lectures, reads the news,
And sends her homespun verse to praise
Your dainty Muse!

RONDEAU.

TO W. E. HENLEY.

Dream and delight had passed away,
Their springs dried by the dusty day,
And sordid fetters bound me tight,
Forged for poor song by money-might;
I withed, and could not get away.
There might have been no flowering may
In all the world--life looked so gray
With dust of railways, choking quite
Dream and delight.

When, lo! your white book came my way,
With scent of honey-buds and hay,
Starshine and day-dawns pure and bright,
The rose blood-red, the may moon-white.
I owe you--would I could repay--
Dream and delight.

TO WALTER SICKERT.

(IN RETURN FOR A SIGHT OF HIS PICTURE "RED CLOVER".)

There is a country far away from here--
A world of dreams--a fair enchanted land--
Where woods bewitched and fairy forests stand,
And all the seasons rhyme through all the year.

The greenest meadows, deepest skies, are there;
There grows the rose of dreams, that never dies;
And there men's heads and hands and hearts and eyes
Are never, as here, too tired to find them fair.

Thither, when life becomes too hard to bear,
The poet and the painter steal away
To watch those glories of the night and day
Which here the days and nights so seldom wear.

In that brave land I, too, have part and lot.
Dim woods, lush meadows, little red-roofed towns,
Walled flowery gardens, wide gray moors and downs;
Sedge, meadow-sweet, and wet forget-me-not;

The Norman church, with whispering elm trees round;
A certain wood where earliest violets grow;
One wide still marsh where hidden waters flow;
The cottage porch with honey-buds enwound--

These are my portion of enchanted ground,
To these the years add somewhat in their flight;
Some wood or field, deep-dyed in heart's delight,
Becomes my own--treasure to her who found.

To my dream fields your art adds one field more,
A field of red, red clover, blossoming,
Where the sun shines, and where more skylarks sing
Than ever in any field of mine before.



OLD AGE.

Between the midnight and the morn
When wake the weary heart and head,
Troops of gray ghosts from lands forlorn
Keep tryst about my sleepless bed.

I hear their cold, thin voices say:
"Your youth is dying; by-and-by
All that makes up your life to-day,
Withered by age, will shrink and die!"

Will it be so? Will age slay all
The dreams of love and hope and faith--
Put out the sun beyond recall,
And lap us in a living death?

Will hearts grown old forget their youth?
And hands grown old give up the strife?
Shall we accept as ordered truth
The dismal anarchy of life?

Better die now--at once be free
Of hope and fear--renounce the whole:
For of what worth would living be
Should one--grown old--outlive one's soul?

Yet see: through curtains closely drawn
Creeps in the exorcising light;
The sacred fingers of the dawn
Put all my troop of ghosts to flight.

And then I hear the brave Sun's voice,
Though still the skies are gray and dim:
"Old age comes never--Oh, rejoice--
Except to those who beckon him.

"All that youth's dreams are nourished by,
By that shall dreams in age be fed--
Thy noble dreams can never die
Until thyself shall wish them dead!"

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