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A COUNTRY MUSE

BY

NORMAN GALE

FIRST



SERIES

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
Song	1
To a Nest of Young Thrushes	2
Cupid	12
A Song	13
A Petition	14
Song	21
A Drinking Song	23
A Sin	26
A Love Song	27
Spring	29
Summer	31
Autumn	33
Winter	35

CONTENTS

	PAGE
A Great Master	37
A Pastoral	39
A Song	41
Renunciations	42
A Funeral	44
Holy Ground	48
<i>Labore Confecto</i>	50
A Song	54
A House in the Hedge	56
A Shepherd's Song	59
A Song	61
An Outline	63
A Country Dance	64
In Spring	69
Courage	70
A Love Song	71
Were I a Star	73
Were I a Bird	75

CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Closing of Paradise	77
A Song	87
An Unfinished Picture	88
The Wounded Bird	90
Naseby Eve	92
A Patient	95
A Thrush in Seven Dials	96
<i>Requiescam</i>	102
A Maid's Holiday	104
The Happy Dead	108
The Kiss	111
The Reason	113
A Song	115
A Priest	117
A Song	121
Hope	122
An Epitaph	124
A Rosebud	125

CONTENTS

	PAGE
A Creed	126
Verses	132
Song	133
Threescore and Ten	135

APPENDIX

A Song	143
To a Maid Sleeping on the Lawn	144

A COUNTRY MUSE

A COUNTRY MUSE

TO A NEST OF YOUNG THRUSHES

DEAR little birds, you 're ready now to fly,
But just a word before you say good-bye,
And flash across the stately fields of rye
To flit afar !

Sit in a line upon that wild-rose spray,
And pay attention to the things I say,
Which will not last until the dying day
And evening star.

You yonder, by that angry-looking thorn,
Clean wings and breast to-morrow, neither scorn
The sage advice of very long years born
And thin grey hairs !

A COUNTRY MUSE

And you that perch the nearest to my face,
Please have the modesty and courtly grace
To check that coming song,—'tis not the place
For evening prayers.

Now, little thrushes, shall we not begin
Before the stonechat's clink so crisp and thin :
Ere larks hang o'er us with that lovely din
We heard last night ?
Sit still, my pretty ones, for now 's the time
To sip of wisdom ere the winter rime
Freeze summer hearts and hush the laughing chime
Once loud and bright.

Well, first of all, I knew you ere you came
To live in this my hedge. That dear old dame,
Your mother, trespassed on my lands ; small blame
She's had from me !

A COUNTRY MUSE

I knew the nook she chose, and saw her beak
Fetch straw and grass, and tho' we could not
speak

We were the best of friends, and very meek
She'd ever be.

And soon the tender architect, by aid
Most gladly lent by him who sweetly played
The part of lover sighing to a maid,
Built yon old nest.

Her mate and she would stand upon its side
To see if it were firm and sure to bide
The stress of wind when you were rocked inside
Beneath her breast.

Yes, it was safe. One morning when at last
The rising sun long shadows westward cast,
I left my bed, and o'er the lawnland passed
In splashing dew ;

A COUNTRY MUSE

The quickset scratched me as I pushed my hand
To help me view the home so rarely planned—
Four globes of blue with dots of black I scanned,
And these were you !

Only when you are parents you will know
The patience of your mother. Time will show
By equal proof the tenderness and glow
Of love she gave !
She kept you warm the while her merry mate
Sat like a sentry on that unhinged gate,
Truer than hearts that have no strength to wait,
Be saved and save.

At last her heart stirred life within the shell,
And how her bosom fluttered who can tell
When first she felt that all was very well,
And soon her chicks

A COUNTRY MUSE

Would chirp as birds, and stare up to the sky,
And marvel at the moon so fair and high
That sailed across their home and sank so nigh
Behind the ricks !

Then were dire huntings of the early worm
And crumbs of bread to keep alive the germ
Of being in you, make your legs grow firm
And strong to hold
The ground or twig when first with infant strut
You left the thrushes' land of Lilliput,
Half-tumbling in some wicked winter rut
When over-bold.

When you were sucklings, so to speak, I knew
The tale of feathers almost of the crew
That weathered winds which swayed them as a
shrew
Rocks restless child ;

A COUNTRY MUSE

But then I kept my room a while, and when
I next might hear the robin and the wren
I found the babies nearly grown to men,
And somewhat wild.

And you, Miss, you it was—I know your breast—
Were sitting watching, waiting for the rest
Who, far afield, were rambling in the quest
Of sights and food :
You feared my coming, squeaked, o'er-balanced,
fell

Down at my feet, and—is it fair to tell?—
Wept tears of fright, or what did just as well,
And did you good.

Your brothers laugh, but from that slight mishap
I knew you well, and in my easy cap
I set you, stroking you, upon my lap
Till calm again.

A COUNTRY MUSE

I pressed my cheek against the dainty lace
That set in ruffles round your heart's warm place,
And made you sweetheart for a moment's space,
And lost my pain.

I still am here, but you are going hence
Beyond my far field's very farthest fence
Out into shadows looming large and dense,
Across the sedge
'To see the world.' What's that? To woo,
to wive,
Be vagrants some, and some be plump and thrive!
To fall in snares, be shot, be saved alive
For next year's hedge?

And I am left. My birds, there was a year
When I was gathering twigs, and, summer near,
Looked for a mate, a whitethroat mate, to cheer
My lonely days ;

A COUNTRY MUSE

But she, God rest her, came not to my lure,
For angels found her pathways that were sure
And rich with blossoms white and sweet and pure
In sunny ways.

She won a nest. And sometimes, when I yearn
For peace in peace, my slower footsteps turn
And seek the house whose cheering windows
burn

Upon the hill ;
And she, as wife and mother, still can reach
Me both her hands, and even gently teach
Her comely cheeks that olden glow of peach
At memory's thrill.

And I could find no bird to share my nest ;
Nowhere to lay my head, no gracious breast
To throb for me and beat beside my rest
A low calm tune.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Home is not home no baby laughter nigh,
And, Hannah, well I understand the cry,
'O Father, give me children, or I die
Now very soon.'

Dear little thrushes, if you rub your eyes
And gape and stretch when I philosophise,
Unbend that burdened spray and lightly rise
Above the thorns.

Above the thorns ! the thorns are far too thick,
And do not only grow on rose and quick,
But spring from life and poison as they prick,—
What dreadful yawns !

Just one word more, one taste of mental food—
Practise an art that's little understood,
The art of arts, the art of being good,
Not saintly sad ;

A COUNTRY MUSE

Nor go where selfishness with custom herds ;
Be gentle to your fellows, soft in words,
So shall you win the paradise of birds
Singing and glad.

A COUNTRY MUSE

CUPID

Love, I met thee yesterday,
With an empty quiver,
Coming from Clarinda's house
By the reedy river.

And I saw Clarinda stand
Near the pansies, weeping,
With her hands upon her breast
All thine arrows keeping.

When the dewdrops came like stars,
Full of little flashes,
All Clarinda's tears I kissed
From her shining lashes.

A COUNTRY MUSE

A SONG

FIRST the fine, faint, dreamy motion
Of the tender blood
Circling in the veins of children—
This is Life, the bud.

Next the fresh, advancing beauty
Growing from the gloom,
Waking eyes and fuller bosom—
This is Life, the bloom.

Then the pain that follows after,
Grievous to be borne,
Pricking, steeped in subtle poison—
This is Love, the thorn.

A COUNTRY MUSE

A PETITION

ONCE in the daring days,
Born out of strife,
Gods of my fashioning
Sprang into life—
Gods of high flight that scorn
Death as he plods,
Wonderful, winged and wild,
Glittering gods !
Yet were they weak as reeds,
Bending for this,
Only a woman's eyes,
Only her kiss.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Then did a god in me,
 Youngest and fair,
Bind me with luminous
 Tangles of hair ;
Drive me to roam at night
 Under the moon
Till it was winter-time
 Even in June !
Then in his treachery,
 Traitor and spy !
Snared her away I loved,
 Left me to die.

Soon when he deemed that I
 Pardoned the smart,
Lo, he, importunate,
 Cried at my heart !

A COUNTRY MUSE

Shelter I gave him not,
Nought of my breast
E'en though he fainted there
Bleeding, oppressed.
Then did each god in me
Powerless seem,
And at his altar changed
Into a dream !

What has a man to do ?
Toil and grow old,
Breaking his heart to gain
Silver and gold :
Happy to-day with one
Dearest and wife ;
Ruined by lives that spring
Out of his life !

A COUNTRY MUSE

Wrinkles and heavy eyes,
Vanishing grace—
Rags on the girl he loved,
Want on her face !

But if his shallop speed
Safe on the sea,
Laden with spice and pearls,
Laughter and glee,
Fortune but blesses him
When he is grey,
When the love-light is faint,
Stealing away ;
So that his quiet years,
Passed in his chair,
Lack the fine fire to kiss
Love's loosened hair !

A COUNTRY MUSE

Gods, shall I yearn to stay

Stoop and grow sad,

Poor, since no riches buy

Aught that I had ?

Never again to speed

Over the lawn,

Over the hills to catch

Sparkles of dawn !

Never again to wait

Down by the brook,

Wait for her coming feet,

Long for her look !

Gods that have fashioned me,

Take me again,

Take me, forgiving me

Error and stain ;

A COUNTRY MUSE

Spare them that love me yet,
Find them a face—
Find them a heart and life
Dear in my place;
And when the swallows' wings
Whispering sweep
Leave me a little while
Dreaming asleep!

There for my covering
Grant me, I crave,
Armies of rapid weeds
Storming my grave!
Regiments with grassy spears
Marching along
Chanting for me alone
Snatches of song!

A COUNTRY MUSE

And let the friends who come
 Seeking me start
Birds from my resting feet,
 Birds from my heart.

Here in the dewy moss,
 Here lay me down,
Far from the smoke and dust,
 Far from the town ;
Out of the breaking hearts,
 Terrors and tears ;
Out of the selfishness,
 Folly and fears ;
Far from the bitter wrong
 Waiting for right ;
Into the cold and dark
 Looking for light !

A COUNTRY MUSE

SONG

Wait but a little while—

The bird will bring
A heart in tune for melodies

Unto the spring,
Till he who's in the cedar there
Is moved to trill a song so rare,
And pipe her fair.

Wait but a little while—

The bud will break ;
The inner rose will ope and glow
For summer's sake ;
Fond bees will lodge within her breast
Till she herself is plucked and prest
Where I would rest.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Wait but a little while—

The maid will grow

Gracious with lips and hands to thee,

With breast of snow.

To-day Love's mute, but time hath sown

A soul in her to match thine own,

Though yet ungrown.

A COUNTRY MUSE

A DRINKING SONG

FACES prim and starched and yellow
Ne'er would meet us in the street
If with Bacchus, rare old fellow,
Folks would quaff the vintage sweet !
Round is he, and glowing scarlet
Shines upon his ample face ;
Each who shirks his toast's a varlet
Fit for only frills and lace !

Here's a cup to luck,
Here's a cup to folly !
Here's a butt to drown the slut,
Tearful Melancholy !

A COUNTRY MUSE

If the skein of life be twisted,
Bacchus can the knot untie !
If Dame Fortune grow close-fisted,
Bacchus knows to win her eye.
Oh, his mellow laugh and lusty,
And his nimble train of winks,
Could unfreeze the desert-dusty,
Moping, monumental Sphinx !

Here's a cup to luck,
Here's a cup to folly !
Tap a butt to souse the slut,
Damp old Melancholy !

Would you sue to white-throat Rosa,
Clink a glass with Bacchus first ;
If it chance the maiden shows a
Black face, home and drown the worst !

A COUNTRY MUSE

What? a wench with wine to meddle?

Many will, though many pout;—

Love's a tinker—let him peddle

While we roar the flagon out!

Here's a cup to luck,

Here's a cup to folly!

Here's a butt to drench the slut,

Puling Melancholy!

A COUNTRY MUSE

A SIN

I MET a woman in the street
The angry wind seemed blowing through :
I halted, for the way she trod
Reminded me of you.

She turned and spake in tones that matched
Her soft, tear-clouded eyes of blue :
I gave her bread because her voice
Reminded me of you.

But as I went upon my road
The sin flashed full upon my view—
In that I only gave to God
In memory of you !

A COUNTRY MUSE

A LOVE SONG

HER breast is snow with sun thereon,
Her eyes than Indian stars more fair ;
Her little ears are pink pearls caught
In glossy nets of falling hair.

I love her robe that skims the grass,
I love those lips that shine with glee ;
But most I love the wise young heart
Uncaptured in captivity.

No tame and tutored echo she
Of all upon her lover's lips ;
She scorns to bear across her soul
The changeless shadow of eclipse !

A COUNTRY MUSE

But full of fire and living help
Discovers to my blinder eyes
Green alleys that may wind—who knows?—
To peace and Paradise.

A COUNTRY MUSE

SPRING

WHAT did Spring-time whisper?

O ye rivulets,

Waking from your trance so sad,

Pleased to welcome fisher-lad

With his little nets,

Speed, for summer's in the air,

Prattle, for the breeze is warm,

Chatter by the otter's lair,

Bubble past the ivied farm ;

Wake the primrose on the banks,

Bid the violet ope her eyes,

Hurry in a flood of thanks

A COUNTRY MUSE

*Underneath serener skies !
What a revel's coming soon—
Fairies trooping o'er the leas,
Making magic by the moon,
Crowned with wood-anemones !
What a haunted heart the thrush
Nurses in the blackthorn bush,
Full of splendid songs to sing,
Cheery welcomes of the Spring—
Spring has come !*

A COUNTRY MUSE

SUMMER

What was Summer chanting?

*O ye brooks and birds,
Flash and pipe in happiness,
Stirring hearts that cares oppress
Into shining words!*

*Here's a maze of butterflies
Dancing over golden gorse,
Here's a host of grassy spies
Sunshine has set free, of course!
Wonder at the wind that blows
Odours from the forest sweet;
Marvel at the honeyed rose*

A COUNTRY MUSE

*Heaping petals at her feet ;
Hark at wood-nymphs rustling through
Brakes and thickets tender-knee'd !
Hark ! some shepherd pipe there blew !
Was it Pan upon a reed ?
Oh, the pinks and garden-spice,
Nature's ev'ry fair device,
Mingled in a scented hoard
Expected, longed-for, and adored—
Summer's come !*

A COUNTRY MUSE

AUTUMN

WHAT did Autumn murmur ?

*O ye sheaves of gold,
Gathered in the sun-burnt field,
Where the sowing-labours yield
Treasures manifold,
Here's a jug of rare old ale
Beading still the reaper's beard
While he whistles down the vale
As the humming farm is neared !
What a saucy knot of maids
Eggs him on to kiss his prize !
What a pack of bouncing jades*

A COUNTRY MUSE

*Binds a kerchief o'er his eyes—
Twirls him thrice, and bids him search
Whom he may the while they pinch,
Prick, and leave him in the lurch,
Each one shrilling like a finch !
Ah ! the starlight country dance,
Not without its rough romance—
Not without the fiddle's beat
Speeding Cicely's flashing feet—
Autumn's come !*

A COUNTRY MUSE

WINTER

WHAT did Winter mutter?

O ye frozen ponds

Ring, as on the flying skate

Rapid couples, maid and mate,

Skim in cosy bonds!

Bless me, what a scarlet nose

Comes with Robin home from school!

How his pilot jacket shows

Ghosts of snowballs on the wool!

Here are drifts beside the door,

Flakes that melt on Laura's face,

Shameless hurricanes that roar

A COUNTRY MUSE

*Anger into ev'ry place !
Here's a splendid pavement-slide,
Made by pourings from the jugs ;
Even babies take a pride,
Helping with their china mugs !
Now's the hour when chestnuts roast,
Now for father's promised ghost !
Children, Winter's come anen—
Love him, for he worships you !
Winter's come !*

A COUNTRY MUSE

A GREAT MASTER

HERE in the valley
Lyric with love,
Singing to slumber
Redpoll and dove,
Who's the musician
Hid in the fruit,
Lulling each velvety
Vocalist mute?

Milkmaid and shepherd
List in the hush,
List to the fairyland
Flute of the thrush!

A COUNTRY MUSE

Hark to his quavers,
Hark to his breves,
Shaking the cherries,
Thrilling the leaves !

Mellowly pouring
Out of the tree
Starlit impromptus,
Laura, for thee ;
Golden allegros
Flow from his heart,
Throstle Beethoven,
Spohr or Mozart !

A COUNTRY MUSE

A PASTORAL

THE last cow's milked, and Mary's free
To cool her face so warm ;
She pats old *Ginger* tenderly
And lends her comely arm
To hoist the pail
Across the rail,
And foots it homeward to the farm.

The bodice of her dairy-dress
Is full of milk-white loveliness,
And in her cheek there vies
The wild rose with the snowdrop small
That makes a deeper blue of all
The violets in her eyes !

A COUNTRY MUSE

With fearful hope and happy fear
 She listens for Jock's tread,
And when his whistle proves him near
 She does not turn her head
 Because her face
 May show the trace
Of love too great till she is wed !

The bodice of her dairy dress
Goes up and down in dear distress,
 And in her conscious cheek
The snowdrop changes to a rose,
And in her eyes each violet shows
 The love it cannot speak !

A COUNTRY MUSE

A SONG

I WILL not say my true love's eyes
Outshine the noblest star ;
But in their depth of lustre lies
My peace, my truce, my war.

I will not say upon her neck
Is white to shame the snow ;
For if her bosom hath a speck
I would not have it go.

My love is as a woman sweet,
And as a woman white ;
Who's more than this is more than meet
For me and my delight.

A COUNTRY MUSE

RENUNCIATIONS

DAN CUPID, get thee gone !

I will no more endure thee—

Thy wailings and thy fun,

Thy promisings to cure me !

So shy and shrewd,

So pure and lewd,

So full of shade and sun,

I can no more endure thee—

Dan Cupid, get thee gone !

O woman, get thee gone !

No more shalt thou undo me—

Of whims and vapours spun,

Thou shalt not come unto me !

A COUNTRY MUSE

Both dry and dew,
Both false and true,
Budge, wench, and run, run, run !
No more shalt thou undo me—
O woman, get thee gone !

A COUNTRY MUSE

A FUNERAL

We carried you one sullen winter day
Along a road of no return for you,
No coming back for you, O friend.
We bare your body, for your soul, men say,
Unviewed, had sped into the angels' view
And left the world to circle to its end.
We bare you on our shoulders though the wind
Came o'er the hedges with a cry that made
Us tremble in the mire—still we bare
You safe into the little church, and prayed
In tears.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Ah, wise in action and in words most wise,
We may not gaze into your earnest eyes
And in their noble steadfastness admire
Pure heart, clean mind, and flame of sacred fire
To burn up evil and attain the skies !
For in a searching wind we, tearful, bore
You safe into the church—our spirits sore
To think that we should walk with you no more ;
And when the priest read comfort from his book,
Lo, it was cold to us who might not look
Upon your face !

And then anew in tenderness we raised
Your body up and placed it near the grave ;
But God our strength and Christ our hope be
praised

A COUNTRY MUSE

That we shall gaze on you as Mary gazed
On the Redeemer when He rose to save !
Slowly, as falls a tear that slowly starts
From some great agony, the coffin sank,
But all your heart was treasured in our hearts ;
And when the Sexton from the earthen bank
Dropt clods upon you, tears fell warm and fast,
For though your eyes were closed and low your
 head,
It was as if you lived—and we were dead !

Whether along the lane or by the field
We all sobbed homeward, hard it is to tell !
A blackbird in the coppice close-concealed
Piped out of tune to grief within our breasts
And jarred against the unseen bell that pealed —

A COUNTRY MUSE

A late lark's song still wavered overhead,
Not beautiful, O Friend, for you were dead—
Not lovely, Friend of friends, for you were dead.

A COUNTRY MUSE

HOLY GROUND

SHY maids have haunts of still delight,
The lover glades he never tells ;
And one is mine where mass the bright
And odoured chimes of foxglove-bells.

A dewy, covert, silent place
Where surely long ago God walked
Close to His creature's blinded face,
And for his finer moulding talked.

There hawthorn glows as if, white-hot,
God present, it were sacred found
To preach a creed too oft forgot—
That all we tread is holy ground.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Ah, could we but remember this,

Our thoughts would spring as purely up
To labour for our fellows' bliss

As doth to heaven a snowdrop's cup !

A COUNTRY MUSE

LABORE CONFECTO

*Ah God, how good and sweet it is
To have so fair a rest
For such a weary, weary head
On such a white, white breast !*

Ah me, how sweet and good it is
To leave the city's lamps,
Its multitude of merchant-men,
Its multitude of tramps :

To find the children eager-eyed,
Expectant of my tread—
Bright little angels scantily robed
In readiness for bed !

A COUNTRY MUSE

To hear the music of a voice
That welcomes me at night ;
To see within her eyes of love
A rare and sudden light !

To watch the youngest at her heart,
And hear with ecstasy
His uncouth dialect of joy
When calling out to me !

The finest language lacking words
The world has ever had !
And how the spirit answers it !
And how the soul is glad !

Peace, peace indeed, with labour done,
The babies kissed to sleep,
To hear the household chronicles—
What made the children weep ;

A COUNTRY MUSE

What dandelions grew beside
The dock-plants in the lanes ;
How Baby puckered up his face
At stinging-nettle pains !

Peace, peace indeed ! And then to sit
Beside my Love's low chair,
And sometimes feel her hand—sometimes
Her lips upon my hair !

And bliss it is, returning late,
To see her, half-divine,
Calm as a statue-saint, asleep,
And think—*This angel's mine.*

Gold, pink, and snow in one she lies
Toward my vacant place,
As if she hoped when she awoke
At once to find my face.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Ah God, how good and sweet it is
To have so fair a rest
For such a weary, weary head
On such a white, white breast !

A COUNTRY MUSE

A SONG

I SAW a weeping maiden
A-searching in the morn
For Love that's half a rosebud,
For Love that's half a thorn :
She sought him on the hill-top
And o'er the dewy lea,
But he was standing in the shade,
Was waiting there with me !

He sang not in the meadow,
He piped not near the stream,
Nor hid in ferny forests,
The darling of her dream :

A COUNTRY MUSE

He lurked not in the poppies,
He shone not in the sky ;
But called to her from out my heart,
And yet she passed him by !

A COUNTRY MUSE

A HOUSE IN THE HEDGE

ALL architecture done,
And housekeeping begun,
The mother warms with joy
Her coming maid or boy.

Her husband in his tree
Pours out his heart in glee,
And tells the evening star
How blue his treasures are.

Crescendos of delight
From blackthorn take their flight,
Allegros of desire,
And trills that never tire.

A COUNTRY MUSE

His wife so meek is pent
Within the leafy tent,
And God instructs her breast
To linger on the nest.

At last in tangled quick
There cries the sudden chick ;
Within the maze of thorn
To birds a son is born !

With baby chirp and cheep
Three other children peep.
O commonwealth of bills
For unimagined trills,

The wind shall rock you there,
All medicine the air !
And then in season due
Shall sons be born to you !

A COUNTRY MUSE

So Spring next year shall fledge
The infants of the hedge ;
These very stars shall look
On love's unfingered nook.

With fatherly delight
The bird shall thrill the night ;
To mound and mead be lent
Contralto of content.

If ev'ry human nest
Contained so pure a breast,
If ev'ry husband gave
To home the merry stave,

Methinks that life would pass
More sweet for lad and lass,
And, piercing deeps of blue,
God's smile come radiant through.

A COUNTRY MUSE

A SHEPHERD'S SONG

COME, sweetheart, do not cry '
Our love was born to die ;
 For Love 's a nimble fellow
 Who rarely stays to mellow.
Some lusty shepherd swain
Will pinch your cheek again
When these fresh tears are dry—
Come, sweetheart, do not cry !

Why, Delia, do not pout !
A flame must e'en go out,
 And honest lads would falter
 To pledge the fool won't alter !

A COUNTRY MUSE

Let's be as friend to friend,
Kiss once, and homeward wend
With hearts both wise and stout—
Why, Delia, do not pout !

A COUNTRY MUSE

A SONG

I NEED some music for my brain
As pansies need the dew ;
Sing that heart-breaking song again,
And let me play for you.

Of old a sigh betrayed your breast,
The courier of your pain ;
And just one tear-drop, unrepressed,
Came, shone, and fled again.

You loved me then. And when you ask
If I can play it yet,
I sit and sound the tender task
I never may forget.

A COUNTRY MUSE

And if you falter at the part
Where long ago you sighed,
Remember we are heart to heart
Serenely satisfied.

A COUNTRY MUSE

AN OUTLINE

As Mary walked ahead with John
We heard glad voices ringing ;
But suddenly there came a pause
Filled up by wood-birds singing,
Filled up by wild birds singing.

As John came back to us alone
His eyes with tears were welling.
'Twas but a simple tale he told
That was not worth the telling,
Ah me ! not worth the telling !

A COUNTRY MUSE

A COUNTRY DANCE

*Fiddle away, Old Time—
Fiddle away, Old Fellow !
Airs for infancy, youth, and prime,
Tunes both shrill and mellow.
Fiddle away,
Or grave or gay,
For faces pink or yellow—
Scrape your song a lifetime long,
Fiddle away, Old Fellow !*

Here are country maidens' breasts
As white as hedgeside May ;

A COUNTRY MUSE

Here are lips as red as hips
That make October gay ;
Here are buckled feet, and comely
Limbs unspoiled by hose that's homely,
Twinkling as you play !
Though your bow be fast as fire,
Feet like these shall hardly tire
While the stars will stay !

*Fiddle away, Old Time—
Fiddle away, Old Fellow !
Airs for infancy, youth, and prime,
Tunes both shrill and mellow.*

Here's a wooden bench where sit
Two old crones in tears

A COUNTRY MUSE

Have not flung a romping leg
Fully forty years !
Lovers, sons and daughters gone,
Still they sadly linger on,
Mingling hopes and fears :
And in the merry dancing-rings
There's not a bouncing maiden springs
With blood allied to theirs ;
And not a bearded mouth that smiles
Rejoiced their hut with baby wiles
Or learned their gentle prayers !

*Fiddle them peace, Old Time—
Fiddle them rest, Old Fellow !
Tunes that ring through winter rime
Something of sweet and mellow !*

A COUNTRY MUSE

Down scented lanes that sweethearts know
The panting dancers go,
And bodices of goddesses
Still mark the music's ebb and flow.
' Ah, come with me across the ridge
And dream upon the shining bridge,'
Says John to rebel Kate,
' While in the reedy river-plots
Small, moonlit, blue forget-me-nots
' Do hear the shingle grate.'

Here softly lies in starlit eyes
That story, old as are the stars,
Unchanged beneath the changing skies
On mountain tops, by harbour bars,
Wherever Venus in her cars,
Dove-drawn, upon her mission flies !

A COUNTRY MUSE

And as they lean across the rail
The water clasps their faces pale—
But sweeter far than this,
The lips within the stream unite
(O star of Love, so strangely bright !)
And tremble to a kiss.

*Fiddle them faith, Old Time—
Fiddle them love, Old Fellow !
Beautiful songs of wedded prime,
Low and sweet and mellow.*

*Let your brilliant bow
Tenderly always go,
And happy things on golden strings
Fiddle them, dear Old Fellow !*

A COUNTRY MUSE

IN SPRING

APRIL's sweet upon the hill,
Streamlets, full with rainy fee,
Flow in silvery adventure
Out to sea.

Cherry is the hedge's bride,
Marriages are made by sun ;
Here's a downy habitation
Just begun !

Love, when thou hast come to seek
In my sweetheart's side for rest,
Wake for me a Spring as fragrant
In her breast !

A COUNTRY MUSE

COURAGE

WHEN you kneel to-night, and pray
God to keep the house you love,
Think of me so far away,
Think of me, my dear and dove.

For to-night, when I shall call
Blessings on the house I love,
I shall ask for joy to fall
On your heart, my dear and dove.

Let us trust a Father's care,
Looking to a Father's love ;
He will only bid us bear
What we can, my dear and dove.

A COUNTRY MUSE

A LOVE SONG

SOME may praise thy wondrous tresses

With a poet's golden speech ;

Some may muse within their meshes

On thy cheek, so soft's the peach ;

Some may sing that stars above thee

Wait for thee to light their skies ;

I can only say—*I love thee,*

With my lips and with mine eyes.

Some may call thee true and tender

In an ode upon thy face ;

Or may hymn thy bosom's splendour,

Snow beneath its snowy lace !

A COUNTRY MUSE

Some may sing that saints above thee
Are less pure in Paradise ;
I can only say—*I love thee*,
With my lips and with mine eyes.

A COUNTRY MUSE

WERE I A STAR

WERE I a star, I would not shine
Save when my Love was looking forth
With star-like eyes, surpassing fine
And clustered glories of the north.

And if a ray from me should sink
Upon her face, her peerless breast,
It could not tremble on the brink
Of deeper lustre, truer rest.

Ah, surely if her gleaming hand
Should prison this one summer night,
I might come down to wonderland,
Made mortal, to regain my light!

A COUNTRY MUSE

Were I a star, I would not shine
Save when my Love looked up to see
Star flash to star a silver sign
That she was searching heaven for me !

A COUNTRY MUSE

WERE I A BIRD

WERE I a bird, I would not pipe
Save when my love was near the tree,
That I might watch her lips so ripe
Half-open in delight at me.

And I would sing a song divine,
Would make her clasp her heart in pain,
Yet never tire, and always pine
To hear me carol it again.

A song so full of tears and ache,
Of such fair sadness and unrest,
That she her homeward path should take,
And yearn to lodge me in her breast.

*

A COUNTRY MUSE

Were I a bird, I would not sing
Save when my love was near the tree,
That I might watch my music bring
Her maiden blood in praise of me.

A COUNTRY MUSE

THE CLOSING OF PARADISE

THE Gods who toss their bounties down
 To willing laps,
To some gave villas nested high
Among the foliage of the sky
Of Alp or soaring Apennine ;
To some a Sabine farm ; to some
The pillared porches of a home
With marble vaults for priceless wine,
And slaves, whose solemn ebon line
Salutes the great who go and come.

A COUNTRY MUSE

The Gods who toss their bounties down
 To willing laps,
To some sent all felicities
Of native statues, foreign frieze,
And gold to bribe the poet's lyre ;
To some upon the inland sea
A pleasure-ship near Sicily,
Where harps and echoes long have rung,
And bards in busy vineyards sung
For maidens purple to the knee.

The Gods who toss their bounties down
 To willing laps
Gave me the joy of being free—
Gave me the gift of poverty !
No eagle, sinking from the sun
At eventime, discerns afar
The flashing of a golden star

A COUNTRY MUSE

On roof of mine, nor slaves who press
With all the pomp of slavishness
To help me from my gilded car.

The Gods who toss their bounties down
 To willing laps
Gave me no treasure-house of pearls,
No bevy of slim dancing-girls,
But finer gifts outshining these—
A little wood whose paths are few,
Some trees made bright with fruit and dew ;
And lastly, O my child so fair
With masses of resplendent hair,
They, gracious, dowered me with you !

The Gods who toss their bounties down
 To willing laps

A COUNTRY MUSE

Exalted me beyond my kind
With all the mercies of a mind
That does not hungry gape for change.
The blackbird of a yesterday,
So it unlearns no liquid lay,
To-morrow can entice my feet
As pilgrims after piping sweet
Across the drying lines of hay.

The Gods who toss their bounties down
 To willing laps,
To her who left a stately house
To comfort me gave marvellous
Rare glimpses of pure maidenhood :
A benediction was her face,
Her heart a very tender place
Where love conceived the potent rule

A COUNTRY MUSE

To ache for others, merciful
Beyond the boundaries of race.

The Gods who toss their bounties down
 To willing laps
Instilled in her the simple taste
Of seeking in a country waste
For Nature's hidden handiwork :
She knew all secrets of the sedge,
The Lords and Ladies in the hedge,
What stripling blackbird first essayed
To fly from home, and half-dismayed
Piped pitiful upon the edge.

The Gods who toss their bounties down
 To willing laps

A COUNTRY MUSE

In uncontrolled abundance
Decreed that praise of bud and bee
Should be the duty of her lips.
The thunder of the world roared on
Nor shook our stars that nightly won
The worship of our eager eyes
Sweeping the kingdom of the skies
Deserted by the westward sun.

The Gods who toss their bounties down
To willing laps
Conspired to mould a million shapes—
Crocus and grasses, seas and capes—
To wake deep echoes in our hearts.
What rare divine imaginings
Conceived the ivy-spray that clings
To other miracles, the trees !

A COUNTRY MUSE

How magical those great decrees
That sent us roses, birds, and springs !

The Gods who toss their bounties down
To willing laps

Neither forgot the violet's scent,
Nor planets in the firmament—
The outposts of a mystery !
They gave to man the undefiled
Bright rivulets and waters wild ;
They wrought at goodly gifts above,
And, for the pinnacle of love,
They fashioned him a little child.

The Gods who toss their bounties down
To willing laps

Remembered, and a wailing cry
Smote at my heart so tenderly—

A COUNTRY MUSE

The master-miracle was ours !
He prospered in his tiny bed,
And when my angel bent her head,
Translating all his uncouth cries
By knowledge motherhood supplies,
My penitence arose and fled.

The Gods who toss their bounties down
To willing laps
All suddenly announced a hate
Of me, my wood, my simple gate,
The glory of my cherry-trees !
But when for grief I scarce could speak,
Love, coming closer, kissed my cheek,
And, with the genius of caress,
By pretty acts of tenderness
Made peace more near and earth less bleak.

A COUNTRY MUSE

The Gods who toss their bounties down
 To willing laps
Thought as they bent from heaven to see,
This man is happier than we.
Nor were these grasping Gods ashamed
To steal from me my Love's caress
And her, the fount of happiness,
Rainbow and sunshine of my soul
Till all embittered nations roll
Where gods nor curse again nor bless !

Ah, silent melodies of joy,
 So sadly dumb !
Ah, for the wilderness of life
With no oasis, lasting strife
With love's triumphant memory !

A COUNTRY MUSE

The memory of her ! Ye great,
Who mock me and my rustic gate,
I am the rich man of you all !
What is a polished silver wall
Compared with her who died of late ?

A COUNTRY MUSE

A SONG

THE shyest blooms are best. The hidden bird
Can make a midnight melody of wrong ;
And sweetest far the Love that is not heard
Before a kindred soul demands its song.
How luring she that's simple-souled and staid !
And love is ever rarest half-afraid.

The maytree has its white, the rose its red,
The brook gold lilies, and the pool its rush ;
The graveyard has its unforgotten dead,
And life has beauty waking to a blush.
But Love has tenderness and all sweet things,
And throbs alike for cotters and for kings !

A COUNTRY MUSE

AN UNFINISHED PICTURE

'Tis Mary the milkmaid singing,
A-singing, a-singing
So rarely and sweet that the lark at her feet,
All ready to start with a song in his heart,
Presses closer the nest with his warm little
breast,
Forgetting his lay as he drinks in the sweet
Pure music of Mary singing.

'Tis Mary the milkmaid singing,
A-singing, a-singing
So rarely and plain that a man in the lane

A COUNTRY MUSE

Grows flushed in the face standing still in his
place,

And moves his red lips as the melody slips

In a lovely and tenderly womanly strain

From Mary the milkmaid singing.

'Tis Richard the keeper whistling,

A-whistling, a-whistling

So rarely and clear for the milkmaid to hear !

And she with a start puts her hand to her heart

That leaps in the nest of that tremulous breast

Beating time to the rollicking tune drawing near

With Richard the keeper whistling.

A COUNTRY MUSE

THE WOUNDED BIRD

Rose coming home
Had a bird in her breast ;
In the garden that's mine
Was a robin for guest ;
He had piped in her path, and my dove
Gave him rest.

Rose coming home
Had her palms at her throat ;
And I heard from the lace
Such a musical note
Of the bird that wore scarlet in front
Of his coat.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Rose in my room

Let me peep in the nest
Where the robin was nursed,
And he pecked when I pressed
On his velvety pate ! He was warm
In her breast.

A COUNTRY MUSE

NASEBY EVE

HERE 's to men who pluck a blade,
Whirling it for Charlie !
Here 's to ev'ry willing maid
Blushing in the barley !
Pest befall the trooper knave
Cheats her of a crown, Sirs,
Chant him as a miser slave—
Let us sing him down, Sirs !

*Then let each morion be a cup,
And drink, my night-hawks, drink
Till Noll shall prick his dog's ears up
To listen to the clink !*

A COUNTRY MUSE

Troll a stave for Mistress Plump
Carving at the pullets,
While our cans the board bethump
In the praise of bullets !
Brown October gaily hums
In our ringing sconces
As we give the hymn that comes
Cavalier responses !

*Then let each trooper of you all
Drench beards again and drink,
Till ev'ry Barebones, great and small,
Can catch the ditty's clink !*

Death to Reuben Snufflenose—
Scores of canting thinkers
Soon to taste the burly blows
Rained by lusty drinkers !

A COUNTRY MUSE

Here's to trumpet, sword, and glove,
Wenches' lips at pleasure,
While the varlet Roundheads prove
Souls the only treasure !

*Then let our morions be the cups,
And shout, my night-hawks, shout
Till from his tent where Satan sups,
Noll push his brewer's snout !*

A COUNTRY MUSE

A PATIENT

HE watches her the livelong day,
A household spirit, star and stay ;
He bends upon her till he dies
The still devotion of his eyes.

O God, who took from him we see
The talent of activity,
To him mysteriously bereft
How much in charity was left !

A woman bent beneath the load,
And sang along the sacred road ;
Faith showed a still unshaken spire,
Love lit the cot with tenfold fire !

A COUNTRY MUSE

A THRUSH IN SEVEN-DIALS

HERE in this den of smoke and filth
They caged a thrush's broken heart ;
Yet when the sun, as if by stealth,
Shone, or a milkman's rattling cart
Shook all her narrow wicker-work,
The bird would chirp, and very soon
To passing Jew or Dane or Turk
Sing some remembered forest-tune.

But, ah, the rounded notes that rang
In emulation of her mate
Who in the shadowed evening sang
Beside the five-barred spinney-gate

A COUNTRY MUSE

Were thin and false ; but still the song
Gained pathos from its lessened spell,
For this proclaimed aloud the wrong
Of shutting thrushes up in hell !

But sometimes, stirred to quite forget
The crime of her captivity,
The songster o'er the city's fret
Flung strains of bird-divinity,
And tried to stretch her tattered wings,
And poise above the constant perch,
And answered the imaginings
Of sparrows on the murky church.

She marvelled much that they so small,
So scant of music, plainly drest,
Should swoop at will from wall to wall,
While she, whose melody and breast

A COUNTRY MUSE

Had fluttered whitethroats in the wood,
Should hang upon a rusty nail
And chirp to great-eyed boys who stood
To hear her sing in rain or hail !

'Twas when these urchins flocked around
That, most forgetful of her cage,
Her wild-wood carollings she found
Warm in her heart, untouched by age :
So, sitting on her perch, she sang
Marsh-marigolds and river-sand
Till all the grimy district rang
With tales of moss and meadowland.

And then for days she would not shake
A single utterance from her store
Despite the outcast imps who spake
Like *Oliver* and asked for more !

A COUNTRY MUSE

In fluffy listlessness she sat
And dreamed of all the grassy west—
How she had feared the parson's cat,
And how she built the earliest nest !

Sometimes a French Piano hurled
Metallic scales adown the street,
That seemed to buffet all the world,
So hard and clear, so shrill and fleet !
No maddened music of this kind
Could tempt the thrush to rivalry ;
She pecked an inch of apple-rind
And waited till the din went by !

There from a tiny patch of sun
She made an April for her heart !
Imagined twigs, and sat thereon,
Though shaken by the milkman's cart.

A COUNTRY MUSE

The slinking fog that filled her cage
Usurped her heritage of dew,
Of grass, of berries—all the wage
Of hedgerows where she hid or flew.

And if perchance disdain or pride
Made e'en her scanty chantings fail,
Sing, bird! an ugly villain cried,
And swung her fiercely on her nail!
This was the man whose crafty net
Cast o'er the lilac meshed her wings—
Ah, not for such her music set
The song of her imaginings!

Oh, leave them in the wilderness,
Or in the bush, or in the brake;
Let them in liberty possess
The haunts God fashioned for their sake!

A COUNTRY MUSE

And all the glories of their throats
Shall sound more glorious when they rise
In flights and waves of noble notes
To stir your hearts and dim your eyes.

A COUNTRY MUSE

REQUIESCAM

THE churchyard yews may murmur on
 Monotonous o'er me,
But that incessant dirge which sounds
 So very wearily
May to the thistled grass make moan—
I shall not hear beneath my stone.

Friends' faces shine not now again,
 And I have breathed my last ;
The pulse of love, the grip of scorn,
 The ache, the stir are past :
Life was my only deep distress—
Sleep is my crown of happiness.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Of all I lose the loss is most
Of hearing birds no more ;
Of no more hearing rebel waves
Insurgent on the shore ;
The hedges, harvests, all are gone—
My little dream of daylight's done.

A COUNTRY MUSE

A MAID'S HOLIDAY

THE deep and silent undergrowth
 Shall be my home this summer day ;
The idle bird and breeze shall both
 Entrance me with their lay :
How cool to lie where shadows toss
 In revelry upon the turf,
And press my fingers in the moss,
 And be no more a serf !

No more a slave to pen and ink ;
 No more a slave to aching dread ;
Released from cages where I think
 To win my daily bread.

A COUNTRY MUSE

O little blade of grass so soft,
My heart is glad to find you here—
To find your slender lance aloft,
With all your comrades near!

Is then your regiment, bright, alert,
In marching order, cooled by dew,
Camped here to watch that none may hurt
The speedwell's speck of blue?
Or do you guard the foxglove bloom
That rings a chime it never tells,
Round which the bees in concert boom
And rumble in its bells?

'Tis sweet indeed to lie and watch
Faint figures in the open glades;
To see the pressing sweethearts snatch
A tribute from the maids!

A COUNTRY MUSE

To hear the clink of milking-pails ;
The brisk and angry crack of whips
That startle Colin by the rails
From touching Cicely's lips !

But best of all, with eyes devout,
To gaze in silence at the sky,
And wonder if the dead look out
Upon me as I lie :
Across my patch of firmament
So many angels seem to rove—
So many friends who died and went,
Tho' not beyond my love !

I will not wrong their happiness,
Nor lust to bring them back again,
For God will give fresh joy to ease
The iron of my pain :

A COUNTRY MUSE

He sends me lilacs, pansies, pinks,
This deep and silent undergrowth,
And sometimes, when my spirit sinks,
The peace of utter sloth.

A COUNTRY MUSE

THE HAPPY DEAD

SOME lie in their spices and linen unshrunk,
Their weariness, wonder, and waiting are past ;
They feel not the cold and their cheeks are scarce
 sunken,
They dream of a light that may wake them at last ;
But though it should shine not, these figures
 repine not,
They sleep in their peace with the world overhead ;
And who shall disturb them, or who shall perturb
 them ?

Yea, they are the happy ones, they who are dead.

I turn me away from the noise of the street filled
With footfalls of merchants and faces of thieves ;
My treasure-house stands in the gold of the
 wheat-field,

A COUNTRY MUSE

My books are the bushes with millions of leaves.
The poppy stares up in my face as she bears up
Her sleep-giving cup of imperial red,
But Death could enchant me far more would he
plant me
Too deep down for poppies, dead dust with the
dead.

The nuts slip their leashes and couch in the mosses,
The over-ripe berry falls into the pond ;
The butterfly's floating magnificence crosses
Our lawn for a moment, then flutters beyond :
And likewise we flutter a moment, and utter
The laugh and the moan that together are wed ;
But tho' we must weep well, God give we may
sleep well
Deep down in the silences next to the dead.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Come, Merciful Sleep, where the balmy wind passes
Not far from the slopes where anemones grow ;
Perchance I shall learn the soft secret of grasses,
And hear when the world's heart begins to beat slow.
But set up no token, and leave me unspoken—
My name and my virtues and aught I have said ;
The few who have kissed me, and she who has
 missed me,
Need nothing to guide them to where I am dead.

If bird-dreams and shade-dreams be all unavailing,
Grant slumber in one of the many green graves ;
Give peace in sea-gardens spread under ship sailing
Far, far from the shoreward quick tramp of the
 waves :

Cold comrades to sleep with, but never to weep with,
Stark brides that come down to us sinking as lead :
And well if Time hold us where Ocean has rolled us,
Unmeshed by the drag-net that draws in the dead !

A COUNTRY MUSE

THE KISS

BENEATH his eyes a fringe of lace
Upon her bosom strangely stirs,
For she had seen herself in his,
And knew he saw himself in hers.

So, like a new-born star that fears
Its own magnificence of light,
Those dark blue glories of her face
Seemed clouded over by the night.

Yet in that glance she found her place
Was by his side—her all in all—
As clearly as Belshazzar saw
The hand that wrote upon the wall.

A COUNTRY MUSE

And wisdom lit her leaping heart
More swiftly than the swallows skim ;
Whereas the King dropped down his cup
To call interpreters to him.

And soft as mother's earliest word
Unto her babe a moment old,
His kiss, with Midas-touch, at last
Came down and turned her life to gold.

A COUNTRY MUSE

THE REASON

THAT I, all loveless, sing of love

Is passing strange :

What can I know except that love

Knows how to change ?

O Fortunate, if it be true

Love bends his roseleaf cheek to you !

That he should make divine her eyes

Was nought, Love felt ;

He snowed on woman's heart a snow

That could not melt,

Although the slopes whereon it lay

Were warm as rainless April day.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Love lent me angel eyes a while,
And O! a breast
Of stainless snow's fresh-fallen hue
For dreamy rest!
Wherefore, unkissed, my lips still move
With songs to praise the Ghost of Love.

A COUNTRY MUSE

A SONG

Love, with a crocus in his cap,
Came past the streams and springs,
His quiver full of faithlessness
And sweet imaginings,
In snowdrop time
And primrose prime.

Love, with a rosebud in his cap,
Came o'er my meadowlands;
His gold-tipped bow he bent at me
With only idle hands
In tulip time
And pansy prime.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Love, with a dead leaf in his cap,
Outspread his velvet wings,
Nor gathered he the arrows shot
From off the silver strings.
Ah, tearful prime
Of winter-time !

A COUNTRY MUSE

A PRIEST

NATURE and he went ever hand in hand
Across the hills and down the lonely lane ;
They captured starry shells upon the strand
And lay enchanted by the musing main.
So She, who loved him for his love of her,
Made him the heir to traceries and signs
On tiny children nigh too small to stir
In great green plains of hazel leaf or vines.
She taught the trouble of the nightingale ;
Revealed the velvet secret of the rose ;
She breathed divinity into his heart,
That rare divinity of watching those

A COUNTRY MUSE

Slow growths that make a nettle learn to dart
The puny poison of its little throes.

Her miracles of motion, butterflies,
Rubies and sapphires skimming lily-crests,
Carved on a yellow petal with their eyes
Tranced by the beauty of their powdered
breasts,

Seen in the mirror of a drop of dew,
He loved as friends and as a friend he knew.
The dust of gold and scarlet underwings
More precious was to him than nuggets torn
From all invaded treasure-crypts of time,
And every floating, painted, silver beam
Drew him to roses where it stayed to dream,
Or down sweet avenues of scented lime.

And Nature trained him tenderly to know
The rain of melodies in coverts heard.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Let him but catch the cadences that flow
From hollybush or lilac, elm or sloe,
And he would mate the music with the bird.
The faintest song a redstart ever sang
Was redstart's piping, and the whitethroat knew
No cunning trill, no mazy shake that rang
Doubtful on ears unaided by the view.

But in his glory, as a young pure priest
In that great temple, only roofed by stars,
An angel hastened from the sacred East
To reap the wisest and to leave the least.
And as he moaned upon the couch of death,
Breathing away his little share of breath,
All suddenly he sprang upright in bed !
Life, like a ray, poured fresh into his face,
Flooding the hollow cheeks with passing grace.
He listened long, then pointed up above ;

A COUNTRY MUSE

Laughed a low laugh of boundless joy and love—
That was a plover called, he softly said,
And on his wife's breast fell, serenely dead !

A COUNTRY MUSE

A SONG

MAID of the yet unconquered heart,
My siege to thee alone is set ;
Love hath no secret shaft or dart,
No web of smiles, no cunning net,
But I will storm his arsenal
To make thy virgin fortress fall.

Maid of inviolate snow, beware !
With trench and mine and ev'ry test
To lull the foe, or speak her fair,
I march to my desire of rest :
Nor shall the clang of war's alarms
Hush till I find me in thine arms !

A COUNTRY MUSE

HOPE

THE flush that gathers in thy cheeks
Sweeps down thy neck in scarlet wealth,
And in a realm of tenderness
Shakes roses on the snow by stealth.

Because I say, 'Twere sweet enough
To suffer Fortune's sharpest test
So there were refuge for my head
Among the lilies of thy breast.'

For this the sword of Damocles
Its point above my head might swing,
And I would joy as lovers do
Who walk and whisper in the Spring.

A COUNTRY MUSE

Hate has no goblin at his beck
Whose scheming brain could ever cope
Against man's finest heritage—
The immortality of hope.

And all my share in this shall cling
Round thee, pure angel of my dream ;
That when thy mating moment's here,
When Loves surprise thee by the stream,

Filling thine eyes with softer light—
Painting thy lips a deeper hue,—
My absence shall be poisoned thorns,
My presence, bloom and fruit and dew !

A COUNTRY MUSE

AN EPITAPH

HE sang a simple forest song ;
To him the day was never long
Amid the blooms and feathered throng
 He loved with all his heart :
He took the hand he knew was pure ;
He preached the faith he felt was sure ;
God taught him how he should endure
 And gird him to depart.

A COUNTRY MUSE

A ROSEBUD

Love's a little rosebud,
Speak not of the thorn !
Only watch the rosebud
Open in the morn.
Maiden, on the milk-white
Beauty of thy breast
Give the little rosebud
Rest.

A COUNTRY MUSE

A CREED

God sends no message by me. I am mute
When Wisdom crouches in her farthest cave ;
I love the organ, but must touch the lute.

I cannot salve the sores of those who bleed ;
I break no idols, smite no olden laws,
And come before you with no separate creed.

No controversies thrust me to the ledge
Of dangerous schools and doctrines hard to
learn ;
Give me the whitethroat whistling in the hedge.

Why should I fret myself to find out nought ?
Dispute can blight the soul's eternal corn,
And choke its richness with the tares of thought.

A COUNTRY MUSE

I am content to know that God is great,
And Lord of fish and fowl, of air and sea—
Some little points are misty. Let them wait.

I well can wait when upland, wood, and dell
Are full of speckled thrushes great with song,
And foxgloves chime each purple velvet bell.

Our village is encircled by sweet sound
Of bee and bird and lily-loving brook :
Hence, Unbelief, for this is holy ground !

At early dawn I stand upon the sod
And let the lark rain this upon my soul—
The smaller in man's sight, the nearer God.

At noon I linger by the curving stream,
And watch fresh water running to the sea,
The salt of which comes not into its dream.

A COUNTRY MUSE

At eventide I lean across a gate,
And, knowing life must set as does the sun,
Muse on the angels in the Happy State.

Ah, let me live among the birds and bloom
Of hazel copses and enchanted woods
Till death shall toll me to the common tomb.

Give me no coat of arms, no pomp, no pride,
But violets only and the rustic joys
That throne content along the country-side ;

No subtle readings, but a trusting love,
A hand to help, a heart to share in pain,
And over all the cooing of the dove.

How sweet the hedge that hides a cunning nest,
And curtains off a patient, bright-eyed thrush
With five small worlds beneath her mottled
breast !

A COUNTRY MUSE

Though life is growing nearer day by day,
Each globe she loves as yet is mute, and still
Her bosom's beauty slowly wears away.

At last the thin blue veils are backward furled,
Existence wakes and pipes into a bird
As infant music bursts into the world.

And now the mother-thrush is proud and gay ;
She has her pretty cottage and her young
To feed and lull when western skies turn grey.

It would be bitter work to set a snare,
Catch her and hang her in a London den
Unknown to sun and woodland wealth of air.

As with the thrush so would it be with me
If I should leave my red-tiled roof and push
My country shoulders through a living sea.

A COUNTRY MUSE

My song is all of birds and peasant homes,
For on such themes my heart delights to dwell
And sing in sunshine till the shadow comes.

I sing of daisies and the coloured plot
Where dandelions climb the thistle's knee—
I take what is, nor pine for what is not.

I am for finches and the rosy lass
Who leads me where the moss is thick, and
where
Sweet strawberry-balls of scarlet gleam in grass.

And this I know, that when I leave my birds,
The lichened walls, the heartease and the heath,
I shall not wholly fail of kindly words.

And while I journey to the distant Day
That first shall dawn upon the eastern hills,
Perchance some thrush shall sing me on my way.

A COUNTRY MUSE

The Great Republic lies toward the East,
And Daybreak comes when Christ with tender
face
Welcomes the poor in spirit—who were least.

A COUNTRY MUSE

VERSES

You will not kiss me, O my love, my love !
You will not kiss me, but you cannot spare
My lips for others, nor in comfort list
If haply they should laud strange eyes and hair.

The violets and roses of my choice
Must in your garden grow, or you are sad ;
And if I cease to smile, come shining tears
To buy fresh smiles, whereat your heart grows
glad.

Thus in austere simplicity our lives
Are sunshine, sunshine, sunshine without heat ;
And it is witness to your nameless charm
That I must starve in patience at your feet.

A COUNTRY MUSE

SONG

WE walk together, you and I,
And dream the world is ours to-day ;
So bright the sun, so blue the sky,
And then the clouds—so far away !
So present is our paradise
That both our hearts it scanty grieves
To know that Death beyond the hedge
Is leering through the leaves.

Love, when I stoop to kiss your hand,
Across your face warm blushes pass
Like shadows floating o'er the land,
Elusive islands on the grass :

A COUNTRY MUSE

And when my lips essay your own,
And all your breast insurgent heaves,
Wide eyes of Death may stare in vain
When looking through the leaves.

The corn on yonder yellow hill
Has that ripe colour of your hair ;
To-morrow men will whistle shrill,
And neither corn nor poppy spare.
To-day, at least, the field shall glow ;
To-day, at least, our fate reprieves ;
So love me, dearest, spite of Death,
Who leers between the leaves !

A COUNTRY MUSE

THREESCORE AND TEN

SILENT he sits from day to day,
With eyes as dull as smoky glass,
And wonders in a childish way
At shadows on the grass.

Or else the spark of memory
Lights to his chair, now quick, now slow,
The shades of what he used to be,
The ghosts of Long Ago!

Remembrances of velvet cheeks
And blushes that are Cupid's spies,
Revealing what a shy heart speaks
To lovers' burning eyes!

A COUNTRY MUSE

And as they glide in dumb review
He stretches out his withered hand,
Desiring you, O Joy, and you,
O Love, to hear and stand.

‘Once more,’ he cries to Time, ‘once more
To rise at dawn and swiftly start
To find my milkmaid as of yore
And press against her heart !

‘Again,’ he cries to Time, ‘again
To swing my boy upon my knee,
And kiss the scented cherry-stain
On lips upraised to me !

‘Again to call for Joan, and hear
Her steps obedient to the call ;
But not again the depthless fear,
The one thing worst of all—

A COUNTRY MUSE

'The narrow coffin and the face
Cold, comfortless, and sightless there,
And whiter than the filmy lace
Her breast was wont to bear !'

Ah, Life, that dost begin so fair
With eager heart and tender kiss
And strokings of Love's golden hair,
That thou shouldst come to this—

This—that a broken man should watch
And pray for just one day—one more—
While Death is trifling with the latch,
And fumbling at the door !

A COUNTRY MUSE

*Who will may take Love's pipe from out my fingers,
Who will may sing the songs I used to sing ;
No more where dying daylight shyly lingers
Will I, made musical, salute the Spring.*

*No more my sheep shall crop the grass around me,
Browsing the rings where Queen Titania trips ;
No more I shame the leaves and birds that found me
Once as a shepherd praise Clarinda's lips.*

*O woodland nymph, whose amber-coloured tresses
Held me so long where love-lyres woo and ache,
Now I desert the soul of thy caresses,
Struggling, all dazed, from thine enchanted brake !*

A COUNTRY MUSE

*Lie still, lost Love ! Young blood will come to woo
thee,*

*Blood that shall leap to find thee flushed and fair ;
Heroes of fire, young kings of verse, shall sue thee,
Nest on thy heart that shines beyond compare !*

But from my pipe hath poured its first love's splendour,

*Now will I dare the steep that bounds the plain ;
Teaching my soul its duty, stern and tender,
Singing the truth that only comes through pain.*

APPENDIX

It was the author's intention to omit some verses from this new issue of 'A Country Muse,' but it was pointed out to him that the present book could hardly pretend to be a second edition if it did not contain all that was in the first. Consequently the poems he would prefer to leave out are printed in this Appendix.

APPENDIX

A SONG

I KISSED thee once.

No deep distress,

No bitterness

Of piercing word or silent bird

Can cloud with strife

This joy of life—

I kissed thee once.

I kissed thee once.

When wings apace

Towards thy face

The robber bee to plunder thee,

Not first he sips

Thy honeyed lips—

I kissed thee once !

A COUNTRY MUSE

TO A MAID SLEEPING ON THE LAWN

Gold and roses,
Roses, gold !
Not a thorn to
Prick the bold !
She reposes,
As of old,
Gold and roses,
Roses, gold.

Love and kisses,
Kisses, love !
Whiter-breasted
Than a dove !

APPENDIX

When she misses
 This her glove,
Love and kisses,
 Kisses, love,

Sweet and lily,
 Lily, sweet,
I will throw me
 At her feet
In this stilly
 Rose retreat,
Sweet and lily,
 Lily, sweet !



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