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ORCHARD
SONGS

BY
NORMAN
GALE



LONDON • ELKIN MATHEWS

& JOHN LANE

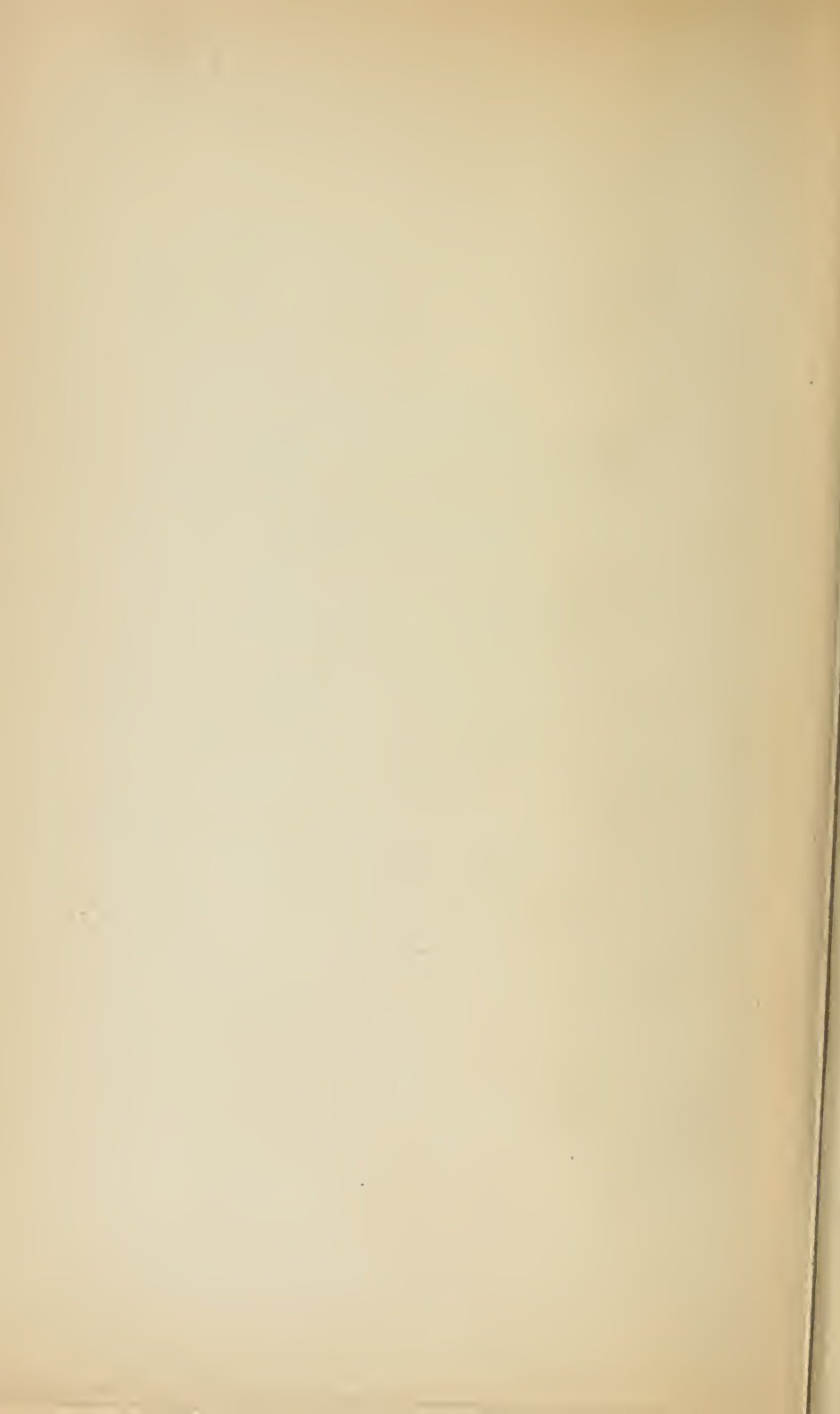
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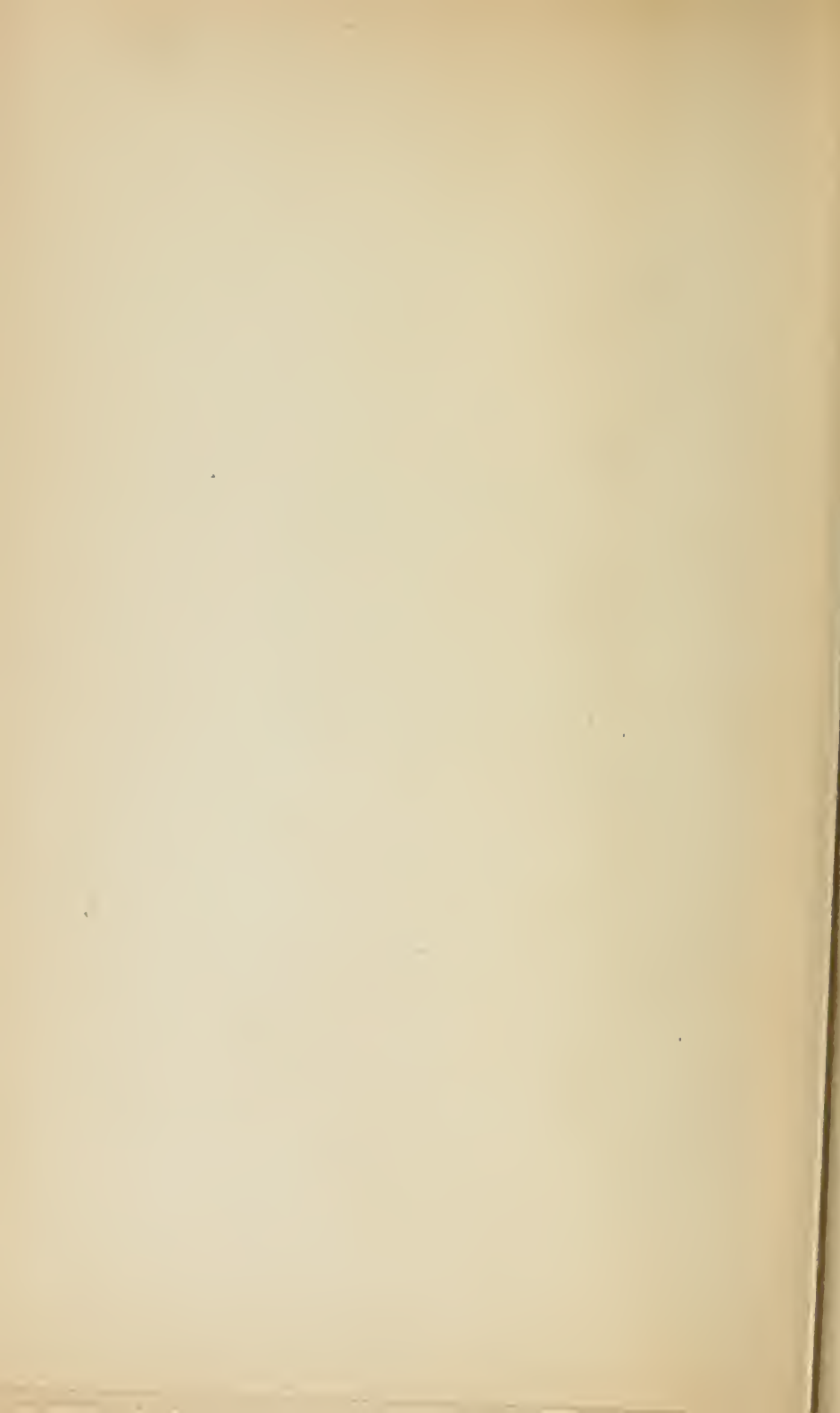


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I DEDICATE
THESE COUNTRY AIRS
TO THOSE FRIENDS OF MINE
ALFRED HAYES AND
RICHARD LE GALLIENNE
AS AN ATTEMPTED PROOF OF
FRIENDSHIP EQUAL TO
THEIR OWN



*For permission to reprint, my
thanks are heartily due to the
Editors of 'The Christian
World,' the 'Pall Mall Maga-
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'English Illustrated Magazine,'
and 'The Woman at Home.'*



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DAWN AND DARK

GOD with His million cares
Went to the left or right,
Leaving our world ; and the day
Grew night.

Back from a sphere He came
Over a starry lawn,
Looked at our world ; and the dark
Grew dawn.

A SHILLING EACH

How shall a man or woman pass unstirred?

A shilling these ! One shilling, cage and bird !

I vow to birds my pennies ! I will pinch,

Redeeming redstart, yellowhammer, finch.

Let them recover all their greens and blues !

Threadbare my coat shall be and old my shoes.

O sweet to fill my hand with living fluff,

And toss the loves to heaven—joy enough !

Give me to kiss each shining head ; to feel

The wild-bird in the captive make appeal.

Suffer my cheek, O blackbird, on your breast,

Then slip to Laura's bosom for a nest ;

Her lips must gently consecrate your flight—

Dear bird, she kisses you. Good-night, good-night!

Behold my darling's orchard for your bill !

Peck here in peace and take your fruity fill.

No kin of mine shall cheat you of the blue

And keep my love and Laura's ; nor shall you

Feel grip of Christmas hunger, for a tithe

Of all our bread shall help you that you thrive.

My heart has ached to see your duller eye

Watching the greedy city hurry by.

On Laura's breast at evening I have heard

A heart beat pity for the prisoned bird ;

And we have vowed to spend with care ; to pinch

For linnet, lark and starling, thrush and finch.

To throw these loves to heaven with a kiss,

Blue-ward and sun-ward—that shall be our bliss.

Faded is Laura's homespun, if you will—

The woodland knows a once familiar bill!

What need to care for shabbiness that shows?

A shilling redstart perches on her rose!

Children of men and brothers of my day,

How long shall feathered joy be thrust away

To find a foot of prison, smoky air

For that large liberty and country fare

Which tenderness celestial set apart

For woodlark wings and velvet whitethroat heart?

How shall a man or woman pass unstirred?

A shilling these! One shilling, cage and bird!

A COTSWOLD VILLAGE

ROSES !

Great wild roses,

Aisles of bud and whitethroat song

All along

The lower lanes

Where Peace,

That first inhabitant of earth,

Remains :

Folding her hands as day begins

And closes

She, tranquil, watches May

That melts to June in roses,

Great wild roses,

Roses !

These are so fair that they should rest

My rivals on the snowdrop breast

Where God, by some sweet circle of event,
Has lent me refuge when I turn
From street and stool
And work by rule,
Scarred by the plea of endless discontent,
The wine of morning sunshine stale or spent.

We neither spoke.
The leafy lyrics of the stripling oak
Sang us along.
Hamlet by hamlet passed,
And yellow sheep,
We came at last
Upon the hills that keep,
As mothers watch their babes asleep,

Long Compton guarded in the vale :
There as a dreaming child it lay
And took the evening light ;
It was the vocal end of day
And larks in giddy flight
So out of view made music ring
That clouds, not birds,
Appeared to sing.

Go home, go home, ye doves, from out the field !
Fly to your forest cradles, fly !
In ambuscades of greenery concealed
Ponder the day gone by.
The shepherd is gone home,
The last rooks come,

Dear Jenny Wren shall whistle nothing more ;
His team well-housed and fed
The ploughman thinks of bed,
And smiles upon his sweetheart at the door.
Down Gipsy Lane we roam,
Go home, ye doves, go home !
Little of sunlight now
This fruitful valley holds,
Deeper the greys invade,
Fainter become the golds ;
The youngling's tap is on the pane,
And maids with sewing mothers sigh ;
Go home, go home, ye doves, from out the field,
To forest cradles fly !

We walked toward the inn.
O host and hostess looking forth
To make the welcome warm,
What man may fare from south to north,
From palace or from farm,
Shall early learn your kindly hearts
And never come to harm !

O happy days !
O days of country beauty made more sweet
By steppings of dear feet
And voices captured from the city's stress
To add a charm to all the loveliness
Of leaf and land !
The lesser whitethroat in the orchard growth

Beneath an apple planned
A hive for nest,
And as we lay and watched
The while she matched
Each grassy joist and beam,
The fluffy architect, unstirred,
Rounded the entrance with her beak
Or smoothed the cup
Where she would dream
Upon her family of eggs,
And warm them into song
Where pears and pippins throng.

Early we rose and raced to catch
Initial glories of the morn ;

The air itself was an embrace,
And Beauty, living in the place,
Seemed growing personal and kind,
Till in my heart,
Till on my face
I felt the thrill
That comes when lips I love consent,
Obedient to my will.
So hour by hour and day by day
Long Compton nursed our idleness,
Each meadow-path, each woodland way
Where campion calls and bluebells press
Conferred its bounty of delight ;
And when the fields of heaven were bright
With stars that have a native fire,
And those that do conspire

To rob a sun,
We knew a lane
Where in a briar's heart a bird
Released a strain
To cheer the mother musing on her eggs,
And promise her a son
Whose tender tale
Should shake the sleeping rosebud into dreams
And be the wonder of this Cotswold vale.

When time is weary of my company
Here let me rest.
If I should end within four walls
With bricks around,
Buy me no smoky patch of city ground,

But bring me to these acres of repose
Whose natural consecration is most sure,
That I may sleep beneath a country rose
And where the dew is pure ;
For in this valley God appeared to me,
And where my soul is let my body be.

What time the Father walked His earth
He trod, I know, these Cotswold slopes ;
With silence and with sound
He clothed each mound ;
The shadow of His robe goes over them,
The bounties of His wisdom cover them !
And whoso cometh here
To tread this sod—

He sees the neighbour neighbourly,
And learning all Long Compton's loveliness
The better learns his God.

WAGES

My lass, when God
 To suffer sent me,
No gifts He gave,
 But only lent me
For gold, my breath,
 For silver, labour ;
The sky as friend,
 The grass as neighbour.

The Vineyard called
 For workers many ;
At eve I took
 God's punctual penny :
Because I bowed
 Content, I fancy
He gave me you
 For wages, Nancy !

PIGEONS AT CANNON STREET

O YE pigeons of the Station with your sorcery
Of hues,
Some in opal tints resplendent, some in filmy fluff of
Blues,
As ye circle dearly downward, peck the cabmen's
Alms, unshot,
I could think you living colours falling on this dull
Stone plot.

Here, the friends of men and horses, ye serenely find
Your food,
Ev'ry happy mother bringing sons and daughters from
Her brood ;
Rough the act and strange the tumult that can stir you
From your rest,
Making all the yard a rainbow with the light of wing
And breast.

Ye are birds in Babylon whose sires were babies in
The tree ;
Once the bright eyes of your nation saw beneath
Them romp in glee
Little roes that chased the fawns, and tusky boars that
Stabbed the dog
Where the lovely leagues of azure sparkled innocent
Of fog.

Tho' the wilderness of mortar, tho' the miles of brick
And slate
Dawn by dawn are seen for ever as the comrades of
Your fate,
In the fairy tales of pigeons, in the folk-songs, in
The lore
Are not green and grassy counties mingled sweetly as
Of yore ?

Surely when the windy gods come roaring from the
Sea and wold

Creeping closely to some elder ye will ask him tales
Of old—

How the piping shepherd gathered all his lambs at
Death of light ;

How the fields were fat with increase ; how the
Were-wolf snarled at night.

London pigeons, many brothers, many sisters have
I seen

Flying woodward in the evening to their palaces
Of green ;

Tho' I closelier scan your feathers more I love the
Wild surprise

Of your Warwickshire relations mounting sudden to
The skies.

O the peaty moorland odours and the sparkling sweep
Of lawn !

O the last thin shade of darkness melting on the lips
Of dawn !

These are gifts of God your kindred spy and ponder
From their trees

While the mower's scythe is making golden haloes
Round his knees !

'Twixt the rows of mangel-wurzels, strutting stately, I
Can see

Careful cousins pecking, wary, ready for the hill
Or tree ;

Ye, methinks, have lost your birthright, lost your
Heritage of dew,

Lost the verdant county acres and the freedom of
The blue !

PARTING

WHY, love, don't weep !

Our joy was long,
Sweet twenty years
Of smile and song.

I shall but wait

Asleep, asleep,
For you to come—

Why, love, don't weep !

Why, love, don't weep !

The end is this ;
There comes a bound
To speech and kiss :

For joy like ours
The price is cheap—

Sweet twenty years !

Why, love, don't weep !

A FAREWELL

GOOD-BYE, little maid,
You 're too old for my knee !
You are dressed in a frock 'tis a torture to see ;
And the skirt has invaded
The hose which concealed
The limbs that went twinkling
From forest to field.
But a week, and I saw a sweet flash of your knee
As you jumped at the brook
In a moment of daring,
Not thinking of, caring
For sudden concealment
Of virgin revealment.
And now in a dress 'tis a torture to see
They will teach you to smirk
And to ogle, and be

But a bait for the wealthy,
The wolfish and stealthy
Who buy a young girl at a fabulous fee.
For the man who is poor—
For my heart—you will be
Unapproachable She !
In a year you will blush
If I speak of your rush
At the brook and the fence,
And with tutored pretence
Talk the tattle that grows at an afternoon tea !
Alas for the gossiping, tremulous tree
Which you mounted to loot ;
Till, afar in the green,
Brightly golden, was seen
The head that I loved so, the fairest of fruit !

No more shall I follow, no more shall you flee,
For now, in a dress 'tis a torture to see,
You who were yesterday
Wild as a finch
They gird and be-pinch.
Farewell to the days when your tresses were free—
Good-bye, little maid,
You're too old for my knee !

GOING SOUTH

It is ever so far away
For the swallow to fly ;
And she peeped from an English thatch
At a round of sky !

But the elders have told her tales
Of the sister blues ;
And she starts at the wink of dawn
On her windy cruise.

She can tell her path in the void,
Though her native sod
Was here in a Warwickshire lane ;
For her pilot's God.

AN ORCHARD DANCE

ALL work is over at the farm
And men and maids are ripe for glee ;
Love slips among them sly and warm
Or calls them to the chestnut-tree.
As Colin looks askance at Jane
He draws his hand across his mouth ;
She understands the rustic pain,
And something of the tender south
About her milkmaid beauty flits.
Her dress of lilac print for guide
Draws shepherd Colin where she sits,
Who, faring to her lovely side
To snatch his evening pension tries,
But skimming like a bird from clutch
The maid escapes his Cupid touch,
And speeding down a passage flies

Not fast enough to cheat his eyes.
Ah, sweet-lip ways and sweet-lip days,
And sweetheart captures of the waist,
How swiftly still the virgin runs
She's sure at last to be embraced !
Now Colin fires at kiss delayed,
And faster flits the red stone floor
Till Fortune yields the tricky maid
A captive at the pantry door !

The farmer with his fifty years
Is not too old to join the fun ;
He pulls the milkmaids' pinky ears
And bids a likely stripling run
To find the fiddlers for a dance :
And in the cherry orchard there

A tune shall mingle with romance,
And love be brave in open air.

The village wakens to the bliss,
The crones and gaffers crawl to see
The country game of step and kiss
Beneath the laden cherry-tree.
The chairs and benches now are set,
Old John is wheedled from his pet,
The cider cup with beady eyes
Responds to winkings of the skies.
The farmer, burly in his chair,
Now claps for ev'ry fond and fair
To foot it on the grassy patch
While rustic violinists snatch
From out those varnished birds of wood

A tune to jink it in the blood.
Now Jane and Colin in a trice
Float sweetly round not less than thrice
Before their motion draws a pair
To revel with the dancing air.
The thrush, that on his velvet wipes
His juicy bill, protesting pipes,
And, somewhat as a piccolo,
Doth race the concord of the bow.
A virgin yonder by the tree
Rejects a mate who saucily
Would press, if she might only start,
Her modest homespun to his heart.
Ah, sweet-lip ways and sweet-lip days,
And sweetheart captures of the waist,
Though like a finch the maiden flies

She's sure at last to be embraced.

The orchard now is in full bloom
With rosy cheek and snowdrop throat ;
The stars invade the growing gloom,
And rarelier sounds the blackbird's note.
But in this dewy little park
Love burns the brighter for the dark,
And till he use a stricter rule
Dear Cicely's cheek shall never cool !
The fiddlers storm a tomboy tune,
The shepherds closer clasp the girls
While skirts the more desert the shoon,
And rebel leap the lovely curls.
The farmer glows within his chair
And muses on the dancing time

When he and She—a matchless pair—
Were warm and nimble in their prime.
God bless the man who, duller grown,
Can feel the younger heaven anew
By granting to his maids and men
A romp by starlight in the dew !
Ah, greenwood ways and greenwood days,
And soft pursuings of the waist,
The cheek must yellow out of praise,
And bent be those who once embraced !

And now they pant against the trees,
And, using darkness for their plan,
Girls loose the garters at their knees
And mend the clumsiness of man.
One virgin, thankful for the dance,

About the music shyly trips—
Her Love 's a fiddler, and her love
Pops fruit in Paganini's lips ;
Or finding on the starlit tree
The wife and husband cherry there,
She hangs the couple at his cheek
And hides the stalk with tufts of hair.
The girls are at the cider-cup,
And shepherds tilt the yellow base
Until a giddy amber flood
Runs, kissing, over Cicely's face,
And Dora's upper lip doth shine
With winking beads of apple-wine.
The fiddlers scrape a farewell tune,
The dancers dwindle in the dusk
While summer puffs of easy wind

Bring hints of cottage garden musk.

And thus the revel dearly ends
With milkmaid's palm in shepherd's hand,
And lovers grow from only friends
Where plum and pear and apple stand.
Ah, sweet-lip ways and sweet-lip days,
And sweetheart captures of the waist,
How fast so-e'er the virgin flies
She's sure at last to be embraced !

DELIA

DELIA, that will not kiss,
Is hardly ripe
To glow again at airs
Of shepherd-pipe.
Sing of the flock to-day,
And wait for Love
To storm the simple breast,
And stir the dove.

Touch but her tender waist
And she shall cry !
But Love may come before
Her tears are dry.
Then, shepherd, tune to trees
Your wanton pipe ;
Delia, that will not kiss,
Is hardly ripe.

IN PAIN

PAIN is the language of decay,
The tongue of human impotence ;
It waits upon our coming here,
Our going hence,
Implacably austere :
And from our earliest breath,
Which is the birth of death,
A soft-foot mute
It seems to prophesy a coming sleep,
Another sphere.

Long have I journeyed thro' the Great Fatigue
Of life.

Lo, I have had my share of grass and birds—
And strife.

For me has Pain, the sentinel,
Been vigilant

To pace my plot and dwell
Within my tent ;
Oft in the night with small alarms
Has stirred me out of rest,
Alert, oppressed,
Till shepherded within thine arms
And on thy breast,
O loving Lady, in the curse of Pain
I have been blest—
Have felt soft hands rebuke the agony
And stroke my face
With fingers that are ministers of love,
Ambassadors of peace
To bring release
For that sharp prisoned pain along my brow
As, would to God, they brought it, Lady, now !

BABY

COME, Mother, bring the baby out,
And let her roll—the grass is dry !
Take off her shoes, and she shall kick
Those pinky toes toward the sky.

The firmament forgive her crime !
And as a sign of love and grace
May God, who holds it, send my child
Her mother's hair, her mother's face !

See, Mary, here 's a cherry-tree
To make her eyes grow round and bright ;
Oh, how she chatters to the fruit—
The dimpled bundle of delight !

There, sweetheart ! See the gaudy cheek,
And see the naughty lurking stone ;
And now each juicy half (my word !)
Is Baby Rosebud's very own !

Dear Mother, as I watch this child
 Stare upward to the depthless blue,
My spirit, fleeter than the gaze,
 Goes up with thanks for her and you.

God, blight my orchard, scourge my friend,
 And drive my blackbird from his tree,
But leave this babe for Mary's breast,
 And let me tend them both for Thee !

FATHER THRUSH

THE thrush was a bachelor early in March,
And now there's a wife with a velvety heart ;
 There 's a house in the quick
 Never builded of brick
And a capital egg for a start.

The thrush was a bachelor early in March,
And now there's a medley of bosom and bill !
 There are Susan and Dick
 In the daggers of quick,
And a couple of golden-throats still !

A WALK

COW-HONEYBOURNE, that dost survey
The profile of that great green range
So seeming near, so far away,
It was from out thy sleepy heart
My friend and I did start
To tramp toward the temple of the hills,
Past poising hawks, past little gossip rills,
To storm the Cotswolds, and enjoy thereon
The fine frugality of winter sun.

The great tit in the apple-tree
Delayed us long ;
The shrill staccato song
The creeper chirped amid his industry
Drew us from pollard unto pollard, till

We drank our fill
Of that white-feathered patch, his breast,
His busy bill
That with detective skill
Stabbed at each crevice in the wood
In search of food.
'Twas through an orchard valley that we passed,
And all the pear-tree boles were painted white ;
Small wonder if the pinky maid,
A kiss half-melted on her lips,
Should shrink at night
When not embraced
About her waist
By Dick the ploughman's arm,
For very ghostly in the gloom
These whitened files of pear-trees loom

Beside the farm.

We marched toward the succour of the hills,
And came to Weston at the middle day.
We hymned the rural loveliness
With glowing words,
And made response with clumsy human lips
To all the easy chattering of the birds.
The hedge's darkly purple top
We praised ;
The verdure of the coming crop ;
The glazed
And glorious bulwark of the beach ;
The wind that with clear Cotswold speech
Addressed the poplar gustily—

The poplar that would rather be
A spire to pierce the blue
Than lend its secret energy
To grow
In liberal breadth below.

The lane that led us upward now was steep,
And slower we stepped.
Oh, how the peace of God was there,
And how the country slept !
Ten leagues away the city's filth
That gnaws our faculties by stealth,
And we were free !
Men flying from our slavery !
Nothing between our lowliness

And God on high !
Here in this pure encampment of repose
The grass can see the sky,
And all the acres of exceeding blue
Look down upon the dew ;
No hell of uncongenial fog
Can come betwixt these two.

We stood upon the forehead of the hills,
And lifted up our hearts in prayer ;
And as we halted, reverent,
Meseemed that Nature o'er us bent,
That she did bid us sup
From bread she gave and from her cup.
There at her large communion did we feast,
Herself the Substance and herself the Priest.

The immaterial wine she poured,
And standing on the Cotswold sward
Administered to us
Beneath the unsupported sky
Her sacrament of scenery.
Thus made her child, I inly felt
Her gradual unction me possess ;
Accumulated baseness melt,
And such behaviour press
Into my life as shall invoke
The rainbow to the street,
Green grasses for my feet
Unseen by blinder folk ;
And leave me heir to some supreme content
Until, O Friend, with you
I drink anew
On Cotswold hills of Nature's sacrament.

CONVALESCENCE

THREE weeks her face was snowy white

From memory of her pain,

But then, with dear, recapturing light

A gradual glow again

Taught almost tintless buds to show

Their mimicry of pink ;

They were but ghosts of former glow,

But yet a lovely link

Between the opulence of health,

The poverty of care,

When she but grew my greater wealth,

And fathomlessly fair.

At last the happy edict gave

A boundary to alarms,

And lifting her, myself the slave,

Heaven trembled in my arms !

Now wife and babe before my fire
In speechless converse rest ;
The milky comfort, his desire,
And hers, the bounteous breast.

One arm is free, and strong with joy
Around me warmly slips
When that I stoop to bless the boy,
And touch him with my lips.

TO ORANGES

YE thousand yellow worlds from Spain
Upon a barrow piled,
And bartered for the timid pence
Of some desirous child,
How do your smooth and shining spheres
Recall the years
When by that sunny inland sea
I dreamed great dreams that may not be
Translated to reality !

Throughout the gradual day
Ye fade away
As dreams.
Hoarsely the invitation of your master goes
Adown the street ;
With careless, cunning hand he throws

To children's innocence
Some value for their pence ;
And his proud pyramid of fruit
From apex unto base descends ;
Each golden atom blends
With all the large and general life
That throbs through London strife.

Ye ride to far suburban homes
In Juliet's very cosy muff—
The one that cousin Herbert gave,
All wonder, warmth, and fluff !
The haggard merchant rushing by
Thinks sweetly of his nursery
Where Ralph and Jenny watch the rain
Becloud the pane.

If he should miss the train !
The Coster, cordial, winks ;
God bless the babes, the merchant thinks,
If I should lose the six
There 's one at seven,
And these will make a little heaven
For those two angels whom I love !
Off goes his glove !
Out comes a threepenny bit !
And the abysses of the bag are lit
By leaping rounds of yellow rain—
Soft tumbling circles fresh from Spain !

O Spanish captives in the Strand
That pour the south along the street,

A man in pleasantness may stand
And read your history awhile ;
Thus ye have made me smile,
And made me sigh,
For as ye go, go I.
My pyramid of hours grows less,
Fewer the lips that laugh,
The hands that bless,
And rarely comes the greeting kind
To make my heart the quicklier beat.
I am not fruit, but rind,
O sweet barbarians of the street,
That, severed from your native land,
Do pour the south
Along the Babel length of Strand !

A PASTORAL

COME you, Mary, there 's a dear !

Mind no more the plaguy dairy !
Milk can never match your white—

Come you, Mary !

All the music of my scythe

Sang you in the heated meadow ;
And I thought your shape behind
Ev'ry shadow !

Down with sleeves, and bring those lips

(Roseleaves in the happy dairy)
To the chestnut where we kiss—
Come you, Mary !

THE NIGHTINGALE

WHEREAS the blackbird and the thrush
Are fondly English in their song,
And finely pipe great island airs
Where bloomy orchards throng,
The nightingale has all the East
Within his dear tumultuous breast ;
World-passions and the strong refrains
That ring in wild unrest.

Circassian music he can sing,
Rough mountain loves, and stories meek
That in the vineyard valley run
From traitor cheek to cheek.

And all the secrets of desire,
By right of lyric ancestry,
From out a midnight hawthorn bush
He now reveals to me.

AT BRANDON

ON the ivied house the starling
 Clapped his beak as we went by,
And the dipping chaffinch flying
 Slipped in loops across the sky.
Here and there a hermit poplar
 Musing on his stature stood,
And we heard, advancing farther,
 Unseen wings within the wood.
What a lesson is the forest
 For a brotherhood of life !
What a green rebuke for nations
 Ever ready for the strife !
Here within a space no longer
 Than a blackbird floats unfanned,
Oak and elm and beech, the chieftains,
 Spire in peace above the land.



Here we heard the windy shepherd
 Making cloudy lambkins pass
Over Nature's pupils dreaming
 With their mistress in the grass.
As we lay a stockdove fluttered,
 Settled on a branch in view,
And we saw her comely plumpness
 Lined against the evening blue,
Till she spied beneath her pouting
 Shapes that are the pulse of flight—
Thought us enemies, and melted
 Very softly out of sight
Westward, where a wall of blackness
 Stood before a yellow lake,
While along the inky summit
 Crawled a great and golden snake !

Here we heard the whitethroats homing
From the raiding of the day ;
Heard the prophet thrush proclaiming
Divination from his spray.
Bringing back his song from spaces
Where the world is faintly seen
To his field the lark descended,
Seeking slumber in the green.
Multitudes of gossip creatures
Darkness gathered to repose ;
But we drank of Nature's silence
Till the huntress moon arose—
Till Diana, lap and bosom
Finely full of stolen light,
By her beautiful unbending
Made a lover of the night.

A PRAYER

TEND me my birds, and bring again
The brotherhood of woodland life,
So shall I wear the seasons round,
A friend to need, a foe to strife.

Keep me my heritage of lawn,
And grant me, Father, till I die
The fine sincerity of light
And luxury of open sky.

So, learning always, may I find
My heaven around me everywhere,
And go in hope from this to Thee,
The pupil of Thy country air.

AT MIDNIGHT

Now that the living sleep
And the dead awake,
Joy shall return to me
And my cold hands take.

Here at the midnight hour
I shall feel again
Love in a kiss, and then
The resulting pain.

But when the dawn shall speed
With its stealth and flash,
Deep in my heart the fire
Shall again be ash.

A PASTORAL

WHO would shepherd pipes forsake

If there greet him dearly

Cupid in the knee-deep brake

Singing sweet and clearly?

Who to London deserts go,

Scanning friendless faces,

If there beat a heart for him

Under Laura's laces?

As I near the leafy oak,

Laura, swift as starling,

Brings her cheek for me to stroke—

Little fragrant darling!

Take your air in Rotten Row,

Gentlemen of leisure,

Milkmaid kiss and velvet sloe

Fashion me my pleasure!

While we sit the stilly skies
Change from blue to purple,
And my arm in daring lies
Round a homespun circle !
Thus doth pastoral delight
Follow shepherd-duty,
Speeding to my heart at night
Laura's love and beauty !

NORTH WIND AT NIGHT

GOOD it is when Northern winds come blowing from
the ice and bear,

Shouting round the shaking steeple till the opal stars
can hear ;

Good it is in shifting dusks to feel the polar thunder-
flail

Lashing at the weary forehead with its knots of biting
hail !

Hurricanes that blow the foxes over leagues towards
their prey,

Roaring sagas of the icebergs, songs of baby seals at
play !

Hurricanes with ghostly chorus of the Norsemen grim
and stark

Hurling oaths at giant foemen hacking furious in the
dark !

In the lulls between the wrangle of the tempest and
the floe

Sweet it is to fancy love-songs of the patient Es-
quimaux ;

Speeding, warm at heart, across the level purity of
plain,

Love beneath his furs as constant as beneath the ice
the main !

Oh, I joy to hear the sinews of the god of Northern
blast

Crackle as his fingers fasten on the icy hilt and vast !

Rushing over wold and valley, dusky dells and uplands
bleak,

How he flings his frozen gauntlet at the challenge of
my cheek !

Tho' he dash the dew about me from the blooms of
other stars,
Pansies from the lap of Venus, speary rushes down
from Mars,
More I love his gusty onset than the woman-breeze
that brings
Scent of harems and the radiant Persian roses on his
wings !

Northland god, your tears of fury drive upon my
freshened cheeks,
While the roadside branch above me writhes in agony
and creaks !
As we wrestle at the midnight, breast to breast and
hand to hand,
Care and pain depart like swallows lifting to a friendly
land !

THE FIRST KISS

ON Helen's heart the day were night !

But I may not adventure there :

Her breast is guarded by a right,

And she is true as fair.

And though in happy days her eyes

The glow within mine own could please,

She's purer than the babe who cries

For empire on her knees.

Her love is for her lord and child,

And unto them belongs her snow ;

But none can rob me of her wild

Young kiss of long ago !

A WISH

WHEN I am done with pen and ink,
And only sleep in careless hope,
Oh, bear me to the Cotswold hills
And leave me on the southern slope !

The modesty of Nature glows
And mingles with the country air ;
The peace of God is on the land,
And passeth understanding there.

Come, sweet and dearest, nor deny
The tribute of one gentle pain ;
Refresh my primrose with a tear ;
But never wish me home again.

TO MY BROTHERS

O BROTHERS, who must ache and stoop

O'er wordy tasks in London town,

How scanty Laura trips for you—

A poem in a gown !

How rare if Grub-street grew a lawn !

How sweet if Nature's lap could spare

A dandelion for the Strand,

A cowslip for Mayfair !

But here, from immaterial lyres,

There rings in easy confidence

The blackbirds' bright philosophy

On apple-spray or fence :

For ploughmen wending home from toil

Some patriot thrush outpours his lay,

And voices, wildly eloquent,

The diary of his day.

These living lyrics you may hear
Remembering the lane's romance,
All hung in wicker hells to chirp
Thin ghosts of utterance :
But where the gusts of liberty
Make Ragged Robin wisely bend
They quicken hedgerows with their song,
Melodiously unpenned.

If souls of mighty singers leave
The vacant body to its hush,
Does Shelley linger in the lark,
Or Keats possess the thrush?
The end is undecaying doubt,
And in some blackbird's bosom still
Great Tennyson may sweeten eve
And whistle on the hill.

Come, brothers, to this clean delight,
And watch the velvet-headed tit.
Here's honest sorrel in the grass
And sturdy cuckoo-spit :
What shepherds hear you shall not miss,
And at deliverance of dawn
Shall see a miracle of bloom
Across the sparkling lawn.

The forest musically begs
To fan you with its leafy love ;
Oh, fall asleep upon this moss
Entreated by the dove !
Here shall that sweet Conservative,
Dear Mother Nature, lend to you
Her lovely rural elements
Beneath the primal blue.

O brothers, who must ache and stoop
O'er wordy tasks in London town,
How scanty Laura trips for you—
A poem in a gown !
How good if Fleet-street grew a lawn !
How sweet if garden-plots could spare
A bed of cloves to scent the Strand,
A pansy for Mayfair !

THE BUDDING OF THE ORCHARD

Oh! the budding of the orchard

Is a heralding of June ;

Of the woodlark's brighter bosom,

And the freedom of her tune.

In the hedge's heart the sparrow

Tends her sapphire eggs in love

Till the song that 's in the oval

Makes a music for the grove.

And the grass beside the river

Grows the long cool green of joy

For the creature in its comfort,

And the maiden and the boy.

Oh! the budding of the orchard

Is a promise to my hope

Of the grey and opal evening
Over lambs upon the slope.
I shall see the stock and pansy
And the brown of Cicely's arm ;
I shall hear the harness tinkle,
And the cattle at the farm :
And the God above my forehead
In his camp of beam and blue
For the colony of rosebuds
Shall remember drops of dew.

HAPPY LIFE

BABY beauty on my knee,
 Baby's mother near me ;
Master Bullfinch grown so tame
 That he cannot fear me ;
Brooks to tell of dipping maids,
 Ruby cloves to scent me—
What a happy, happy life
 God in trust has lent me !

Baby tumbles on our bed,
 Either cheek a cherry,
Raiding Laura's lovely heart,
 Mischievous and merry !
Infant swallows at my eaves
 Twitter, and content me—
What a happy, happy life
 God in trust has lent me !

INSPIRATION

I LAY my head on the foolscap page,
 Bidden to sing, and being mute ;
No help there came with the lovely air
 Of the blackbird's magic flute.

My Love ran in, and she kissed my cheek.
 Lyrics woke in my blood and rang ;
Her hair glowed gold by the foolscap page,
 And the barren singer sang.

TO DORA

GOD's mercy, Dora, what 's a kiss

That you should whimper like a child?

A maid was ne'er as coy as this,

A woodlark never was so wild.

There went, i' faith, no niggard pinch

You little pecking sweetbill finch!

Come, loveliness, 'tis but the task

Of mating Cupid's red to red;

A rosebud touch is all I ask,

Lift up, dear nun, this shining head!

There! see how good a thing it is—

God's mercy, Dora, what 's a kiss?

CLARINDA'S BEAUTY

THE tree may win the stripling
 With its clusters round and red,
And a shepherdess may languish
 Till his silly mouth is fed ;
But Clarinda has an orchard
 Where sweet circles grow for me,
And no shepherd, though he covet,
 Dares approach my cherry-tree !

The mistress airs her velvet
 Ev'ry Sunday down the aisle
As the sunburnt farmers titter,
 And the saucy milkmaids smile ;
Though it cost a mort of money
 And can make the children stare,
'Tis a thistle to the softness
 That Clarinda's cheek doth wear.

But when my sweetheart dangles

In the Avon as it goes

Her feet, and cattle ponder

On the marvel of her hose,

Not a virgin ever trusted

Such a comely white as this

To the chilly river fingers,

And for water-lips to kiss !

REGRET

O HUMAN bird, whose nest has been
Within my heart a thousand days,
To fly away so suddenly
When April glittered in her green,
And woodland aisles
For leafy miles
In fifty fine harmonious ways
Were musical with flying praise,
Was a strange winging from my life,
O false and fair—
Was a departure that the sense
Could nowhere gather strength to bear!

Day comes.

The Artist of the dawn
Makes all the sky a masterpiece ;

The dewdrops vanish from the lawn
And from the shepherd's sheep.
Each day 's a miracle to cheat the mind,
Night brings the wonder, sleep ;
But all along the lane there flies
My loss of her whose helping eyes
Made olden moments kind ;
And in the pulsing heart of night,
When darkness seems to throb to light,
Remembrance of my whitethroat yet
Comes with a great regret.
No blackbird's magic in the bush,
Succeeded by the aching hush,
Can win me from my thought of her ;
And all that Father Avon says
To leagues of blue forget-me-nots

Cannot cast out
My dream of Jenny's girlish ways,
Her lovely pout ;
And all those perished days
When on my knees
She sat contented till the sun was set—
God has not fashioned me to think them nought,
Or taught me to forget !

HANNIBAL, SAGUNTO CAPTO, LOQUITUR.

THANKS to your pith Saguntum is destroyed !
'Tis time to pipe the songs of Carthage now ;
To muse upon the world within its streets,
The tinkling in some soft and sandy place
Of camel cavalcades whose spicy loads
Make fragrant leagues for those who march behind.
The Gods are gracious. I enrich you all
With pastoral dawns and twilights of repose.
Go, make the girdled hearts revolt with joy,
And feel around your necks the arms of peace ;
Hide in the sheath that gapped and greedy blade
That drank the plenty of Saguntum veins !
What of the siege, my heroes ? Was it long ?
What of the sack, my heroes ? Was it good ?
Each sword has won a virgin ; ev'ry man
White witching arms to tie him round with love.

Has not the wine run freely in the camp,
Or have I niggardly denied the can
Its island-cluster of canary beads
That hissed and bridled, sparkling as you roared
Great soldier-songs that rumbled in the hills?
Your beards are hung with purple dewdrops yet,
Drops of the wine that splashed the naked knees
Of girls who speed it round your garrulous fires.
Take back this history of roaring fight,
Take home your scars to Carthage; show the trench
Saguntum bullies carved upon your cheeks,
Till youths, midway between the boy and man,
Shall itch to glut beside their country's sons
A thirsty blade throughout our next campaign,
And maidens sing you in their fountain-songs.
Oh, how the dame's recovered cheek will flush

At news of hostile handiwork ; to learn
Her husband's mightier arm confused the foe !
Your sons will reap incentives, and each wound
Will be a star to guide the coming brood
To follow glory upward to a scar.
The striplings of the land will charge at play
With girlish swords and baby javelins ;
Their harmless bows will speed as harmless shafts.
'Tis thus the glamour grows ; for stirring tales
Of onset, and the death-grip day by day,
Of peril, rescue, booty and applause
Are trumpets to the blood and signals fine
To urge the sprouting heroes of our kin.
I am a man of battle, and I yearn
To see young tigers lap their early blood,
So here I make a harvest of my plans

And loot the hours of possible design.
Gods, if the soul of Carthage should not feel
That glory waiting past the Pyrenees—
Should dwindle to a passive, womanish thing,
And, barren, shirk the dominating task!
But when your stiffened fingers scarce stretch out
For gripping iron handles, it is ill
To let the shadow of another war
Fall thus athwart your pleasure. Let me hope.
Home to the mellow homeland songs and dance,
For standards, scars upon your daring cheeks!
O for a sight of Carthage! Homing braves,
I charge you bear me when the Spring's at bud
Sweet gossip of my mistress and my wife!
She sits eternal by the lusting sea
And stares upon the wilderness of blue,

Kept by the beating of a million hearts !
Within her gates unrivalled maidens blush
Whose necks are clasped by chiming ornaments ;
They look to Spain, and supplicate the Gods
To bring you home to kisses from the war.
Go, dream beside their beauty ! Go, and take
The throbbing sweethearts in your potent arms—
Arms that can help an empire to be set,
Babe of an empire, in this Spanish West.
Each with his lips against some sleeping cheek
Forget the clank of armour and the shrill
Quick scream of arrows, and the wind
The stone makes coming from the monstrous sling ;
But when the branch begins to feel the leaf
At push and pout in her, forsake those lips
Are rivals of your greatness, and arise !

Your road is Spain-wards ! Once again
Intrust you to the mouthings of the deep,
Placating first, by prayers and gifts of worth,
The sea-god looking through his opal roof.
Come back to me with even sharper swords,
And not one pinch of all the excellence
You showed of old lost in the realm of ease,
Forgetting not the soul of all my need
Sweet gossip of my mistress and my wife—
Carthage I took in trust from Hasdrubal,
Carthage I widen, love, and glorify.
So, with good news of her, and you in trim
To swing her steel as strongly as of old,
I doubt not we shall fright the Eagle yet,
And pour our language through the streets of Rome !

A CONTRAST

THE apple in my garden
Is a round of bloom and scent,
With the grass beneath it pointing
To the blue above it bent :
Here's dew of dawn, and music
That can shame a city's rush ;
For Town the hurdy-gurdy,
But for Warwickshire the thrush !

At middle day the blossom
Takes the utmost of the sun ;
The tits as sweet explorers
All along the branches run :
'Tis wild-birds' country piping
That can make the forehead flush ;
For Town the hurdy-gurdy,
But for Warwickshire the thrush !

As Mary milks the cattle,
And I stoop to kiss her cheek,
The lilac shakes with lyrics
From the song-bird's easy beak :
'Twas God who made him poet—
How his masterpieces gush !
For Town the hurdy-gurdy,
But for Warwickshire the thrush !

A SONG

ALL night I have lain in the Gipsies' camp,

Heel to heel with a gipsy lass,

With a planet hung in the sky for lamp,

And for bed the honest grass :

At morn I have wended upon my way,

Taking only as baggage this—

The love that lies in a gipsy's eyes

And a gipsy maiden's kiss.

All day I have pined for the greensward girl,

Brown and sweet in the forest hush,

Where a man may play with a southland curl,

And a southland virgin's blush :

I'd give my wealth if there warmed me again,

Filling eve with a daring bliss,

The heart that pressed at a gipsy's vest,

And a wildwood gipsy's kiss.

CICELY BATHING

THE brook told the dove
And the dove told me
That Cicely's bathing at the pool
With other virgins three.

The brook told the dove
And the dove told me
That Cicely floating on the wave
Woke music in the tree.

The brook told the dove
And the dove told me
That Cicely's drying in the sun,
A snowy sight to see.

HESTER SINCLAIR

HESTER SINCLAIR passed me by,

Busy at her glove—

Hester Sinclair whom I call

Lavender and love !

Little waves of muslin film

Lapping at her feet,

Hester trips, all snow in snow,

Country fair and sweet.

Hester Sinclair homes to me—

Mine this woodland dove !

Hester trembles in my arms

Lavender and love !

BETTER SO

FRIEND, you did well to die !

How agonising was that hour
When the last inch of candle grew
A heated pool ; when at the pane
The morning wind, a bully, blew,
While you, no whit discomfited
By all these great Spring gusts at play,
In all the sorcery of senselessness
Did hardly stay
To breathe away
The fragments of your span,
Last lingerings of the man

So soon to fashion us supreme distress.
In the acacia on the lawn
The storm-cock whistled vengeance and disdain ;
The milder thrush, in harmony with fate,
Piped cheerly through the active flight of rain
Ineffably sedate.
Below him in the lilac-tree
The blackbird in his cottage green
Did sing between
The plainings and content.
O God, I thought, bring back again
His pleasure in the firmament ;
Instruct his ears to catch
Some redstart's whisper, some reviving snatch
Of chaffinch music, ere, the morning spent,
These servants of the dawn,

These breathing songs,
Desert the lawn !
His ears, O Lord, were reverent,
And Thou dost know
He loved Thy miracles
With all his force,
Praising Thee daily more because Thy love
Mellowed the woodland with the soothing dove,
Set linnets in the gorse,
Made sweet the darkness with the nightingale
That we might find his comfort in the vale
Though seeing not its source.
Give him to hear again our words,
To hear the birds ;
To drink the landscape's distances
With those deep eyes

In ecstasies
At finding spread around him everywhere
The everlasting sameness and surprise.

Friend, you did well to die !
The incarnation of ideals
Is slow ;
The health of nations mendeth not ;
They go
From base to base
Immeasurably fraudulent
In gross and cunning government.
But you did burn to see
A Brotherhood arise
That in nobility should not misfit

The Maker of our skies ;
But day by day more separate we stand,
Pursuing pelf,
Adoring self,
One blood, one fate, but not one Band.
Due to the spade and promised to the earth
We buy our guinea's worth of evening mirth,
Go home and ponder how the money spent
Shall be extorted from the negligent,
Improvident
Poor brother, who, with equal worth,
By all the devilry of biting need
Comes as a test of our prevailing creed
To beg, for Christ's sake, aid !
We, dressing for the tomb and promised to the
spade,
Make profit of his hurt

In golden dirt !

How this would wrench your heart if you were
nigh,

You who with me

Could bear to see

Espousals of the brick and of the glade—

The serpent street crawl greedy to the wood,

The mason drive the pigeon from her bough,

The hind, dismayed,

From following his plough,

If all this robbery from Nature meant

A crop of fresh content ;

If all these rendings of her verdant robe,

Invasions of her temples gave

Serenity to the globe,

A thrilling to the slave !

Brother, they drive the field-mouse hence,
They steal the finches' home ;
From mead to mead, from fence to fence,
With all the power of impotence
The merchant-princes come,
Sending the workmen first to clear the way,
To build and slay.
In half a hundred dingles where of yore
We lay on moss, and spake of Evermore
While blackbirds shrilled the present in our ears,
Are cots and babes and tears !
With moss and melody and woodlands dense
Fled Innocence,

As She will fly from centres of repose,
Northward and southward, east and west,
Within her bosom thrusting as She goes
Her honeysuckle and her pink wild-rose.

How this would wrench your heart if you were nigh!
Friend, it was well—that bitter vanishing—
Friend, you did well to die!

DORA'S RIBBON

PLAGUE upon the ribbon

And the bow beneath my chin !

Bells no longer call me,

And the service should begin.

Kate will walk with Colin,

Mary go with John—

Drat the band of cherry silk

That won't go on !

Plague upon the ribbon !

I must fix it with a pin !

Yet the bow looks pretty

As it cuddles at my chin !

Richard's in the garden

Looking at my pane—

Sunday next the cherry band

May sulk again !

COMFORT

How poorly reaches to my heart,
When all my joy is in eclipse,
The stilted comfort and the noise
Of kind, but useless, lips.

But down the road an arrow's flight
Where evening brings the sleepy birds,
The thinnest twitter in the green
Is more than clumsy words.

And in that forest synagogue,
Whose aisles are paved with bloom and sod,
A broken heart may haply find
The tenderness of God.

TO A GLOW-WORM

IN thee there lives the energy
Can make the turf a heaven,
May birds that peck thy candle die
By Parson Rook unshriven !

Thou art a child the Father's hand
Within this fruity acre
Dropt in the grass, as shy and still
As any virgin Quaker !

Thou tiny, unofficial lamp
Within my orchard burning,
Dost signal by this living star
Thy husband home returning ?

Here at this cherry's grassy base
Thou 'rt sure of no upbraiding ;
Too small thy lantern to arouse
The thrush for midnight raiding.

As tender girls at water-play
Grow blanched when shepherds whistle,
So fades thy spark if carelessly
I brush this neighbour thistle.

Ah, how my freckled lads would run,
A knee apiece would capture,
And prattle questions if they watched
Thy lovely light in rapture !

A SONG

It was the time when heaven comes down
And paves the wood with blue ;
A firmament of hyacinths
Drank deep of forest dew :
The cooing of a lonely dove
Went mourning on the breeze,
And over all there swayed the songs
And sighings of the breeze.

The velvet palms of moss caressed
And comforted my face ;
An angel joy from Paradise
Seemed truant in the place :
The forest was a voice, and sang,
O Love long dead, of you
What time the gracious heaven came down
And paved the wood with blue.

AT EVENING

BELOW her in the valley farm
She heard the rustic mirth ;
The pastures lessened to a line
Was heaven as much as earth.

The fiddle poured a dancing tune,
That called her feet. And oh !
Her heart was hungry for the lad
She danced with long ago !

OLD LETTERS

LAST night some yellow letters fell
From out a scrip I found by chance ;
Among them was the silent ghost,
The spirit of my first romance :
And in a faint blue envelope
A withered rose long lost to dew
Bore witness to the dashing days
When love was large and wits were few.

Yet standing there all worn and grey
The teardrops quivered in my eyes
To think of Youth's unshaken front,
The forehead lifted to the skies ;
How rough a hill my eager feet
Flung backward when upon its crest
I saw the flutter of the lace
The wind awoke on Helen's breast !

How thornless were the roses then
 When fresh young eyes and lips were kind
When Cupid in our porches proved
 How true the tale that Love is blind !
But Red-and-White and Poverty
 Would only mate while shone the May ;
Then came a Bag of Golden Crowns
 And jingled Red-and-White away.

Grown old and niggard of romance
 I wince not much at aught askew,
And often ask my favourite cat
 What else had Red-and-White to do ?
And here 's the bud that rose and sank,
 A crimson island on her breast—
Why should I burn it ? Once again
 Hide, rose, and dream. God send me rest.

MORNING

THE throstle and the dawn

Together come

That light and music may

Invade my home ;

And wakefulness begins

In Laura's hands ;

Upon her pillow stir

Those glowing strands

That lure me till I kiss

Her dreamy eyes

To win her back from sleep

To Paradise.

A LULLABY

SLEEP, dearest, sleep.

The birds are still,

The trees are hushed

Upon the hill.

Oh, in green dreamland valleys deep

Rest, dearest, rest—sleep, dearest, sleep.

Rest, Alice, rest,

And wait for me.

If Gods be kind

I come to thee !

Oh, in thine eyes the dawn is deep,

Rest, Alice, rest—sleep, Alice, sleep.

TO MY LOVE

(With a rose)

THAT freedom thou dost now control
Once basely commerced with my soul ;
All inward enterprise, unchid,
In fancy grew as Fancy bid ;
But now, possessed by thee, it grows
So clean a captive as this rose.

A DEFENCE

(Written on being charged with undue frankness)

DEAR country Muse, my heart's delight,
Whose purity displays
The rounded nude of loveliness
For shepherd-pipes to praise—

Dear Muse, that dancing on the green
Inspired my country tone,
Have I who saw your chastity
In seeing lost my own?

Have I, for all your liberal love
And wildflower music, taught
A multitude your bosom's white
Uncovered, but unsought—

And not this lesson from your snow,
This knowledge from your knee—
That more of virtue, less of robe,
Belongs to purity?

With glimpses of a sunny neck,
And ripe untrespassed lips
That boasted even brighter red
Than any autumn hips,

Barefooted, in a rebel robe
That kissed your careless knee
And showed the splendour of your shape
With woodland modesty,

You danced adown a forest-aisle
And taught me from the store
Of simple airs your lyric lips
Shall sing for evermore.

In what array your beauty came—
I sang it as I might ;
So sings the pupil blackbird, so
The poet of the night ;

The thrush, a student of your dance,
Divinely serenades
Your revelation of the limbs
That twinkle in the glades.

Should I within your leafy school
The only scholar sit
To pipe discordantly, and be
Less trusted than the tit?

Not so, sweet country Muse ! The wood
Demands the scanty gown ;
Why should their London velvets clog
Your dances on the down ?

I have not shamed you, O my love,
So friendly and so wild !
You shall not blush to teach again
Your lover and your child !

Who call me base must think me base ;
But soon afresh for me
Your speeding footsteps in the grass
Shall prove my purity !

List of Books
in
Belles Lettres



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