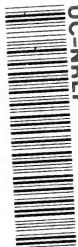


# THE CAPTIVE LION

*AND OTHER POEMS*

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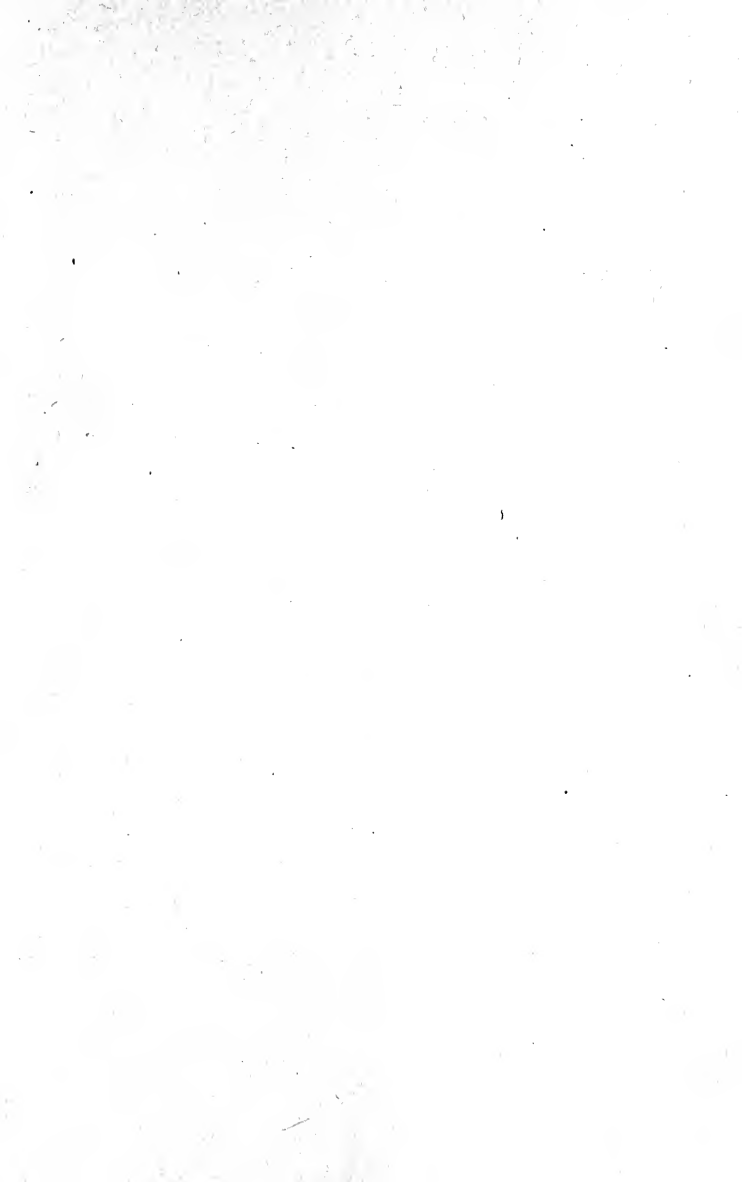
BY WILLIAM HENRY DAVIES



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The Captive Lion  
&  
Other Poems

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# The Captive Lion



## Other Poems

By William Henry Davies



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Mccccxxi

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# The Captive Lion

**T**HOU that in fury with thy knotted tail  
Hast made this iron floor thy beaten drum;  
That now in silence walks thy little space—  
Like a sea-captain—careless what may come:

What power has brought your majesty to this,  
Who gave those eyes their dull and sleepy look;  
Who took their lightning out, and from thy throat  
The thunder when the whole wide forest shook?

It was that man who went again, alone,  
Into thy forest dark—Lord, he was brave!  
That man a fly has killed, whose bones are left  
Unburied till an earthquake digs his grave.

# Oh, Sweet Content !

**O**H, sweet content, that turns the labourer's  
sweat,

To tears of joy, and shines the roughest face;  
How often have I sought you high and low,  
And found you still in some lone quiet place.

Here, in my room, when full of happy dreams,  
With no life heard beyond that merry sound  
Of moths that on my lighted ceiling kiss  
Their shadows as they dance and dance around.

Or in a garden, on a summer's night,  
When I have seen the dark and solemn air  
Blink with the blind bat's wings, and heaven's  
bright face  
Twitch with the stars that shine in thousands  
there.

## The Villain

**W**HILE joy gave clouds the light of stars,  
That beamed where'er they looked;  
And calves and lambs had tottering knees,  
Excited, while they sucked;  
While every bird enjoyed his song,  
Without one thought of harm or wrong—  
I turned my head and saw the wind,  
Not far from where I stood,  
Dragging the corn by her golden hair,  
Into a dark and lonely wood.

# Love Speechless

**I** LOOK on Nature and my thoughts,  
Like nimble skaters, skim the land;  
But when I watch my loved one near,  
My thoughts are walkers in soft sand.

I am a man that sees a sky  
Alive with stars that cannot rest;  
My eyes are here, my eyes are there,  
Above, and then below her breast.

Much like the summer's bee am I,  
A thousand flowers before his eyes;  
He, knowing each one's power to please,  
No sooner settles than must rise.

I sit bewildered by those charms  
That follow wave by wave all day;  
When I would with one wave make free,  
The others take my breath away.



# The Dog

**T**HE dog was there, outside her door,  
She gave it food and drink,  
She gave it shelter from the cold:

It was the night young Molly robbed  
An old fool of his gold.

“Molly,” I said, “you’ll go to hell——”

And yet I half believed  
That ugly, famished, tottering cur  
Would bark outside the gates of Heaven,  
To open them for Her!

# The Rat

“**T**HAT woman there is almost dead,  
Her feet and hands like heavy lead;  
Her cat's gone out for his delight,  
He will not come again this night.

“Her husband in a pothouse drinks,  
Her daughter at a soldier winks;  
Her son is at his sweetest game,  
Teasing the cobbler old and lame.

“Now with these teeth that powder stones,  
I'll pick at one of her cheekbones:  
When husband, son and daughter come,  
They'll soon see who was left at home.”

# The Cat

**W**ITHIN that porch, across the way,  
I see two naked eyes this night;  
Two eyes that neither shut nor blink,  
Searching my face with a green light.

But cats to me are strange, so strange—  
I cannot sleep if one is near;  
And though I'm sure I see those eyes,  
I'm not so sure a body's there!

# Today

I HAVE no hopes, I have no fears,  
Whether my dreams are gossamers  
To last beyond my body's day,  
Or cobwebs to be brushed away.  
Give me this life from hour to hour,  
From day to day, and year to year;  
This cottage with one extra room  
To lodge a friend if he should come;  
This garden green and small, where I  
Can sit and see a great big sky.  
And give me one tall shady tree,  
Where, looking through the boughs, I'll see  
How the sharp leaves can cut the skies  
Into a thousand small blue eyes.

## How Kind is Sleep

**H**OW kind is sleep, how merciful:  
That I last night have seen  
The happy birds with bosoms pressed  
Against the leaves so green.

Sweet sleep, that made my mind forget  
My love had gone away;  
And nevermore I'd touch her soft  
Warm body, night or day.

So, every night deceived by sleep,  
Let me on roses lie;  
And leave the thorns of Truth for day,  
To pierce me till I die.

# The Force of Love

**H**AVE I now found an angel in Unrest,  
That wakeful Love is more desired than  
sleep:

Though you seem calm and gentle, you shall show  
The force of this strong love in me so deep.

Yes, I will make you, though you seem so calm,  
Look from your blue eyes that divinest joy  
As was in Juno's, when she made great Jove  
Forget the war and half his heaven in Troy.

And I will press your lips until they mix  
With my poor quality their richer wine:  
Be my Parnassus now, and grow more green  
Each upward step towards your top divine.

## When Leaves Begin

**W**HEN leaves begin to show their heads,  
Before they reach their curly youth;  
And birds in streams are coming north,  
With seas of music from the south;

Then—like a snail with horns outstretched—  
My senses feel the air around;  
There's not a move escapes my eyes,  
My ears are cocked to every sound.

Till Nature to her greenest comes,  
And—with her may that blossoms white—  
Bursts her full bodice, and reveals  
Her fair white body in the light.

## Passion's Hounds

**W**ITH mighty leaps and bounds,  
I followed Passion's hounds,  
My hot blood had its day;  
Lust, Gluttony, and Drink,  
I chased to Hell's black brink,  
Both night and day.

I ate like three strong men,  
I drank enough for ten,  
Each hour must have its glass:  
Yes, Drink and Gluttony  
Have starved more brains, say I,  
Than Hunger has.

And now, when I grow old,  
And my slow blood is cold,  
And feeble is my breath—  
I'm followed by those hounds,  
Whose mighty leaps and bounds  
Hunt me to death.



# Love Impeached

**L**ISTEN for pity—I impeach  
The tyrant Love that, after play,  
Dribbles on Beauty's cheek, and still  
Refuses to be moved away.

That, not content with many a kiss,  
Plays with his fingers on her lip;  
And if she turns her back to him,  
Drums with his hand on either hip.

Sometimes he squeezes, then he slaps,  
I've heard he even bites her breast.  
Now, how can Beauty keep her charms,  
If she gets neither sleep nor rest?

Is there no punishment, I ask—  
No small corrections, soft and mild:  
For let us never once forget  
That, after all, he's but a child.

# The Truth

SINCE I have seen a bird one day,  
His head pecked more than half away;  
That hopped about, with but one eye,  
Ready to fight again, and die—  
Ofttimes since then their private lives  
Have spoilt that joy their music gives.

So when I see this robin now,  
Like a red apple on the bough,  
And question why he sings so strong,  
For love, or for the love of song;  
Or sings, maybe, for that sweet rill  
Whose silver tongue is never still—

Ah, now there comes this thought unkind,  
Born of the knowledge in my mind:  
He sings in triumph that last night  
He killed his father in a fight;  
And now he'll take his mother's blood—  
The last strong rival for his food.

# The Coming of Peace

**I**T was the night when we expected news from  
France,

To say the war was over, and the fighting done;  
The tidings that would make my heart rejoice at  
last,

For foe as well as friend, and make the peoples  
one.

And as I moved amidst that silent multitude,

Feeling the presence of a wild excitement there,  
The world appeared to me so strange and  
wonderful—

I almost heard a cuckoo in Trafalgar Square!

## April's Lambs

“**T**HOUGH I was born in April's prime,  
With many another lamb,  
Yet, thinking now of all my years,  
What am I but a tough old ram?”

“No woman thinks of years,” said she,  
“Or any tough old rams,  
When she can hear a voice that bleats  
As tenderly as any lamb's.”

# The Coming of Spring

**H**OW I have watched thy coming, Spring,  
From back in March, thy first-born day,  
When smiles, all meaningless and strange,  
    Would twist thy face and pass away;  
Such as will cross the faces of  
Our babes before they grow to love,  
    Or wonder at the new-made light—  
To this, thy great, all-smiling hour,  
    When thou hast soul and sight.

How I have waited for this day,  
    When thou, sweet Spring, art three weeks old;  
And I can hear that strange, sweet voice,  
    To seal the wonder of thy world;  
That lifts the heart of old and young  
To sing an echo to that song  
    Which cries "cuckoo" in every grove;  
When I, who did but smile before,  
    Must laugh outright for love.

## A Song

**M**Y love has gone long since,  
She sleeps, and yet I stay;  
To think of her is my  
    Good night till break of day.  
So, in my room, alone,  
    I still awake am keeping;  
Thinking of my white heaven,  
    And all its angels sleeping.

Sleep shall not hold me yet,  
    Her power I'll not obey;  
I fear she has strange dreams  
    To take my love away.  
So, in my room, alone,  
    I still awake am keeping;  
Thinking of my white heaven,  
    And all its angels sleeping.

## Love's Caution

**T**ELL them, when you are home again,  
How warm the air was now;  
How silent were the birds and leaves,  
And of the moon's full glow;  
And how we saw afar  
A falling star:  
It was a tear of pure delight  
Ran down the face of Heaven this happy night.

Our kisses are but love in flower,  
Until that greater time  
When, gathering strength, those flowers take wing,  
And Love can reach his prime.  
And now, my heart's delight,  
Good night, good night;  
Give me the last sweet kiss—  
But do not breathe at home one word of this!

# Trees

**T**HEY ask me where the Temple stands,  
And is the Abbey far from there;  
They ask the way to old St. Paul's,  
And where they'll find Trafalgar Square.

As I pass on with my one thought  
To find a quiet place with trees,  
I answer him, I answer her,  
I answer one and all of these.

When I sit under a green tree,  
Silent, and breathing all the while  
As easy as a sleeping child,  
And smiling with as soft a smile—

Then, as my brains begin to work,  
This is the thought that comes to me:  
Were such a peace more often mine,  
I'd live as long as this green tree.



## What County?

**W**HAT county sends me this surprise,  
That had more rainbows in its skies—  
More songsters in its woods and fields,  
Than any other county yields?  
For, judging her by her fresh look,  
She never lived in grime and smoke.  
So here we are, the thrush and I—  
How we enjoy our ecstasy!  
While one blue egg employs his tongue,  
For two blue eyes I sing my song.  
Yet when I think how my love's eyes  
Shine with a soul so clear and wise,  
Your egg, poor bird, I fear to tell,  
May have no baby in its shell.  
Yon cuckoo too, whose voice doth fail  
When more than one sing in one vale,  
Hear how her voice becomes more sweet  
Among a number, when they meet.  
And yon pale star that loses light  
When other stars appear in sight,  
See how her light is magnified,  
With other women at her side.

## A Child's Pet

WHEN I sailed out of Baltimore,  
With twice a thousand head of sheep,  
They would not eat, they would not drink,  
But bleated o'er the deep.

Inside the pens we crawled each day,  
To sort the living from the dead;  
And when we reached the Mersey's mouth,  
Had lost five hundred head.

Yet every night and day one sheep,  
That had no fear of man or sea,  
Stuck through the bars its pleading face,  
And it was stroked by me.

And to the sheep-men standing near,  
"You see," I said, "this one tame sheep?  
It seems a child has lost her pet,  
And cried herself to sleep."

So every time we passed it by,  
Sailing to England's slaughter-house,  
Eight ragged sheep-men—tramps and thieves—  
Would stroke that sheep's black nose.

## The Flirt

A PRETTY game, my girl,  
To play with me so long;  
Until this other lover  
Comes dancing to thy song,  
And my affair is over.

But love, though well adored,  
Is not my only note:  
So let thy false love-prattle  
Be in another man's throat  
That weaker man's death-rattle.

Ah, such as thou, at last,  
Wilt take a false man's hand:  
Think kindly then of me,  
When thou'rt forsaken, and  
The shame sits on thy knee.

# The Clock

**E**VERY tick and every tock  
That comes from my old clock,  
Keeps time to Molly's step;  
And when it cries "Cuckoo,"  
Her hand should knock below.

Unless—for now I see  
The clock looks down at me  
With a white and silent face;  
It stops, and not one beat  
Keeps time to Molly's feet.

Then, staring at that clock,  
Whose every tick and tock  
Should be one step of hers,  
"Why have you stopped," I said—  
"Has Molly dropped down dead?"

## A Bird's Anger

A SUMMER'S morning that has but one  
voice;

Five hundred stooks, like golden lovers, lean  
Their heads together, in their quiet way,  
And but one bird sings, of a number seen.

It is the lark, that louder, louder sings,  
As though but this one thought possessed his  
mind:

“You silent robin, blackbird, thrush, and finch,  
I'll sing enough for all you lazy kind!”

And when I hear him at this daring task,  
“Peace, little bird,” I say, “and take some rest;  
Stop that wild, screaming fire of angry song,  
Before it makes a coffin of your nest.”

## Bird and Brook

**M**Y song, that's bird-like in its kind,  
Is in the mind,  
Love—in the mind;  
And in my season I am moved  
No more or less from being loved;  
No woman's love has power to bring  
My song back when I cease to sing;  
Nor can she, when my season's strong,  
Prevent my mind from song.

But where I feel your woman's part,  
Is in the heart,  
Love—in the heart;  
For when that bird of mine broods long,  
And I'd be sad without my song,  
Your love then makes my heart a brook  
That dreams in many a quiet nook,  
And makes a steady, murmuring sound  
Of joy the whole year round.

## When Autumn's Fruit

**W**HEN Autumn's fruit is packed and stored,  
And barns are full of corn and grain;  
When leaves come tumbling down to earth,  
Shot down by wind or drops of rain:  
Then up the road we'll whistling go,  
And, with a heart that's merry,  
We'll rob the squirrel of a nut,  
Or blackbird of a berry.

When Winter's bare and cold for all,  
Save lovers with their spawny eyes;  
And, like a horse that fleas annoy,  
We stamp, to make our spirits rise:  
Then out of doors we'll whistling go,  
And, with a heart that's merry,  
We'll feed—while richer squirrels sleep—  
The birds that have no berry.

# One Thing Wanting

“YOUR life was hard with mangling clothes,  
You scrubbed our floors for years;  
But now, your children are so good,  
That you can rest your poor old limbs,  
And want for neither drink nor meat.”  
“It’s true,” she said, and laughed for joy;  
And still her voice, with all her years,  
Could make a song-bird wonder if  
A rival sweetness challenged him.  
But soon her face was full of trouble:  
“If I could only tear,” she said,  
“My sister Alice out of her grave—  
Who taunted me when I was poor—  
And make her understand these words:  
‘See, I have everything I want,  
My children, Alice, are so good’—  
If I could only once do that,  
There’s nothing else I want on earth.”



# The Mint

**N**ATURE has made my mind a mint,  
My thoughts are coins, on which I live;  
The dies, with which I stamp my thoughts,  
Trees, blossoms, birds, and children give.

Sometimes my die's a homeless man,  
Or babes that have no milk and perish;  
Sometimes it is a lady fair,  
Whose grace and loveliness I relish.

But all my love-thoughts, until now,  
Were false to utter, and must cease;  
And not another coin must pass  
Without your image on each piece.

So you shall be my queen from now,  
Your face on every thought I utter;  
And I'll be rich—although the world  
May judge my metal's worth no better.

## Worm-Proof

“**H**AVE I not bored your teeth,” said Time,  
“Until they drop out, one by one:  
I’ll turn your black hairs into white,  
And pluck them when the change is done;  
The clothes you’ve put away with care,  
My worm’s already in their seams——”  
“Time, hold your tongue, for man can still  
Defy you with his worm-proof dreams.”

# Comfort

**F**ROM my own kind I only learn  
How foolish comfort is;  
To gather things that happy minds  
Should neither crave nor miss:  
Fine brackets to adorn my walls,  
Whose tales are quickly told;  
And copper candlesticks or brass,  
Which soon must leave me cold.

From my own kind I only learn  
That comfort breeds more care;  
But when I watch our smaller lives,  
There's plainness everywhere:  
That little bird is well content,  
When he no more can sing,  
To close his eyes and tuck his head  
Beneath his own soft wing.

## Her Mouth and Mine

AS I lay dreaming, open-eyed,  
With some one sitting at my side,  
I saw a thing about to fly  
Into my face, where it would lie;  
For just above my head there stood  
A smiling hawk as red as blood.  
On which the bird, whose quiet nest  
Has always been in my left breast,  
Seeing that red hawk hovering there,  
And smiling with such deadly care—  
Flew fascinated to my throat,  
And there it moaned a feeble note.  
I saw that hawk, so red, and still,  
And closed my eyes—it had its will:  
For, uttering one triumphant croon,  
It pounced with sudden impulse down;  
And there I lay, no power to move,  
To let it kiss or bite its love.  
But in those birds—Ah, it was strange—  
There came at last this other change:  
That fascinated bird of mine  
Worried the hawk and made it whine;  
The hawk cried feebly—“Oh dear, oh!  
Greedy-in-love, leave go! Leave go!”

## Let Me Confess

LET me confess, before I die,  
I sing for gold enough to buy  
A little house with leafy eyes  
That open to the Southern skies;

Where I, in peace from human strife,  
Will wish no Lazarus brought to life.  
Around my garden I will see  
More wild flowers than are known to me;

With those white hops, whose children are  
Big, heavy casks of ale and beer;  
And little apples, from whose womb  
Barrels of lusty cider come.

Good food, and ale that's strong in brew,  
And wine, I'll have; clear water too,  
From a deep well, where it doth lie  
Shining as small as my own eye.

And any friend may come to share  
What comfort I am keeping there;  
For though my sins are many, one  
Shall not be mine, when my life's done:  
A fortune saved by one that's dead,  
Who saw his fellows starve for bread.

# Love's Silent Hour

**T**HIS is Love's silent hour, before the tongue  
Can find expression happy in a song;  
Yet your sweet, generous lips shall have their  
hour,

Believe me, when my song comes back to power;  
So shall those eyes, so dark, so warm, and deep,  
That wake for me, and for all others sleep:  
Meanwhile I do no more than sit and sigh,  
Watching your movements with a greedy eye.

Those birds that sing so sweet in their green bogs,  
Their season over, croak like common frogs:  
My thoughts, I hoped, would like those nightin-  
gales

Sing sweet for you, but still my music fails;  
My music fails, and I can only kiss  
Your cheek and chin, and to myself say this—  
There never was a thing so fair and bright,  
By sun or moon, by gas or candle-light.

## Now That She Gives

**N**OW that she gives my love consent,  
I hear an evil spirit near;  
A mocking spirit, day and night,  
That whispers threats in either ear.

“Since you are twice her age,” it says,  
“Thick-lipped, with features large and coarse;  
And she, so young and beautiful,  
Could all her life do nothing worse;

“Since she, poor girl, mistakes for love  
The feelings that possess her heart—  
She must be daft, and you, strong wretch,  
Should burn in hell for such a part!”

# You Interfering Ladies

**Y**OU interfering ladies, you  
That prove your minds enjoy less rest  
Than those poor mortals you advise,  
Whose habits shock your dainty taste—  
Peace, let the poor be free to do  
The things they like—be happy, you!

Let boys and girls kiss here and there,  
Men drink, and smoke the strongest weed;  
Let beggars, who'll not wash with soap,  
Enjoy their scratching till they bleed:  
Let all poor women, if they please,  
Enjoy a pinch of snuff, and sneeze.



## Ladies' Men

**M**EN that have strength to rule their sex  
Leave women still unmoved;  
Men that by women are preferred—  
By that strange sex adored and loved—  
Will rise by neither deed nor word.

When women's dainty heroes are  
Conferring with strong men,  
They sit in fear, as dumb as graves;  
So, ladies, your sweet darlings then,  
What are they but our strong men's slaves?



# The Song of Life



# The Song of Life

## I

**A**SNEEZE from Time gives Life its little  
breath;

Time yawns, and lo! he swallows Life in Death;  
When we forget, and laugh without a care,  
Time's Prompter, Death, reminds us what we are.

## II

O thou vain fool, to waste thy breath and theirs,  
Who pipes this day to make thy fellows dance;  
To-morrow Death will make thy body show  
How worms can dance without thy music once.

## III

We are but fools, no matter what we do.  
By hand or brain we work, and waste our breath;  
Life's but a drunkard, in his own strange way,  
Sobered at last by thy strong physic, Death.

## IV

Life is a fisherman, and Time his stream,  
But what he catches there is but a dream;  
Our Youth and Beauty, Riches, Power and Fame,  
Must all return at last from whence they came.

# The Song of Life

## v

Death gives a Royal Prince the same dumb grin  
As to the beggar's wayside brat of sin.  
The cunning Spider soon himself must lie  
Dead in that trap he sets to catch a Fly.

## vi

Time grants to man no freehold property;  
The power of man, however great it be,  
Is only granted here for a short lease.  
Voices the world has called divine must cease.

## vii

Fools that we think of Fame, when there's a force  
To make a coffin of this world of ours  
And sweep it clean of every living thing—  
What then becomes of man and all his powers?

## viii

Think of our giants now—they're auctioneers,  
That shout and hammer for the people's cheers;  
They blow in gales, but no good ear can find  
The small clear voice that deepens Nature's wind.

# The Song of Life

## IX

We call these rockets steadfast stars, and give  
Them honours, wealth, and swear their works will  
live;

We call them giants, while the greater ones  
Move like dark planets round those favoured suns.

## X

This world, that licks them with its pleasant  
slime,

Will swallow them in but a little time;  
Their Fame's like Death's, when that cold villain  
places

Bright looks of youth on dying old men's faces.

## XI

We pass away, forgotten and neglected.  
When thou, poor fool, hast lately filled thy grave,  
Thy friends will bring thee cut and costly flowers,  
Flowers that will leave no living seed behind,  
And fade and perish in a few short hours.

## XII

Perchance they'll set the soil with roots of plants  
To live and bloom again there, year by year,  
Moistened at times by Heaven's dew or rain—  
But never once a loving human tear.

# The Song of Life

## XIII

Plants that will need no help from human hands  
To make thy grave look lovely, warm and sweet—  
When all, except the fierce wild cat, has gone,  
That lies in wait to pounce upon those birds  
That beat the snails to death against thy stone.

## XIV

I hear men say: "This Davies has no depth,  
He writes of birds, of staring cows and sheep,  
And throws no light on deep, eternal things——"  
And would they have me talking in my sleep?

## XV

I say: "Though many a man's ideas of them  
Have made his name appear a shining star,  
Yet Life and Death, Time and Eternity,  
Are still left dark, to wonder what they are.

## XVI

"And if I make men weigh this simple truth,  
It is on my own mind the light is thrown;  
I throw no light on that mysterious Four,  
And, like the great ones, nothing I make known."



# The Song of Life

## XVII

Yet I believe that there will come at last  
A mighty knowledge to our human lives:  
And blessed then will be the fools that laugh,  
Without the fear Imagination gives.

## XVIII

Aye, even now, when I sit here alone,  
I feel the breath of that strange terror near;  
But as my mind has not sufficient strength  
To give it shape or form of any kind,  
I turn to things I know, and banish fear.

## XIX

I turn to Man, and what do I behold?  
What is the meaning of this rush and tear  
To ride from home by water, land, or air?  
We'll want the horses soon, when our life fails,  
To drag a corpse along as slow as snails.

## XX

Why should this toil from early morn till night  
Employ our minds and bodies, when the Earth  
Can carry us forever round the Sun  
Without the help of any mortal birth?

# The Song of Life

## XXI

And why should common shelter, bread and meat,  
Keep all our faculties in their employ,  
And leave no time for ease, while Summer's in  
The greenwood, purring like a cat for joy?

## XXII

For still the People are no more than slaves;  
Each State a slave-ship, and no matter which  
The figure-head—a President or King;  
The People are no more than common grass  
To make a few choice cattle fat and rich.

## XXIII

They toil from morn till eve, from Youth to Age;  
They go from bud to seed, but never flower.  
“Ah,” says the Priest, “we're born to suffer here  
A hell on earth till God Almighty's Hour.”

## XXIV

A hell on earth? . . . We'll ask the merry Moth  
That, making a partner of his shadow thrown,  
Dances till out of breath; we'll ask the Lark  
That meets the Rain half-way and sings it down.

# The Song of Life

## XXV

In studying Life we see this human world  
Is in three states—of copper, silver, gold,  
And those that think in silver take the joy;  
Thinking in copper, gold, the poor and rich  
Keep mis'ry in too little and too much.

## XXVI

Though with my money I could cram a mouth  
Big as an Alpine gorge with richest stuff,  
Yet Nature sets her bounds; and with a lake  
Of wine—to-night one bottle is enough.

## XXVII

If I can pluck the rose of sunset, or  
The Moon's pale lily, and distil their flower  
Into one mental drop to scent my soul—  
I'll envy no man his more worldly power.

## XXVIII

What matters that my bed is soft and white,  
If beggars sleep more sweet in hay, or there,  
Lying at noon beneath those swaying boughs  
Whose cooling shadows lift the heavy air.

# The Song of Life

## XXIX

Not owning house or land, but in the space  
Our minds inhabit, we are rich or poor:  
If I had youth, who dances in his walk,  
On heels as nimble as his lighter toes,  
I'd set no price on any earthly store.

## XXX

And wine and women, both have had their day,  
When nothing else would my crazed thoughts  
allow;  
Until my nerves shook like those withered leaves  
Held by a broken cobweb to the bough.

## XXXI

I touched my mistress lightly on the chin,  
That girl so merciless in her strong passion:  
"Since love," she said, "has reached that flippant  
mood—  
With no more care than that—I'd rather you  
Had struck my mouth, and dashed my lips with  
blood."

## XXXII

And is there naught in life but lust? thought I;  
Feeble my brain was then, and small, and weak;  
She held it in her power, even as a bird  
With his live breakfast squirming from his beak.

# The Song of Life

## XXXIII

Man finds in such a Woman's breast the tomb  
Where his creative powers must soon lie dumb;  
To kiss the tomb in weakness, hour by hour,  
Wherein she buries half his mental power.

## XXXIV

They say that under powerful drugs the tongue  
Will babble wildly of some sin or wrong  
That never happened—even virgins then  
Tell devilish lies about themselves and men.

## XXXV

Under that drug of lust my brain was mazed,  
And oft I babbled in a foolish way;  
And still she bounced the babies in her eyes,  
For Love's mad challenge not to miss one day.

## XXXVI

But that is passed, and I am ready now  
To come again, sweet Nature, to your haunts;  
Not come together like a snake and stone,  
When neither body gives the other heat—  
But full of love to last till Life has gone.

# The Song of Life

## XXXVII

A little while and I will come again,  
From my captivity in this strange place;  
That has these secret charms to lure me on,  
In every alley dark and open space;

## XXXVIII

That makes me like the jealous lover who,  
Eavesdropping at a keyhole, trembles more  
Because the silence there is worse to him than  
    sound,  
And nothing's heard behind the fastened door.

## XXXIX

To you I'll come, my old and purer friend,  
With greater love in these repentant hours;  
To let your Brooks run singing to my lips;  
And walk again your Meadows full of flowers.

## XL

I'll stroke again the foreheads of your Cows,  
And clothe my fingers in your Horses' manes;  
I'll hear that music, when a pony trots  
Along your hard, white country roads and lanes.

# The Song of Life

## XLI

Kissed with his warm eyelashes touching mine,  
I'll lie beneath the Sun, on golden sheaves;  
Or see him from the shade, when in his strength  
He makes frail cobwebs of the solid leaves.

## XLII

I'll see again the green leaves suddenly  
Turned into flowers by resting butterflies;  
While all around are small, brown, working bees,  
And hairy black-and-ambers, twice their size.

## XLIII

And there'll be ponds that lily-leaves still keep—  
Though rough winds blow there—lying fast  
asleep.  
And pools that measure a cloud from earth to sky,  
To sink it down as deep as it is high.

## XLIV

And many a charming truth will I discover;  
How birds, after a wetting in the rain,  
Can make their notes come twice as sweet; and  
then  
How sparrows hop with both their legs together,  
While pigeons stride leg after leg, like men.

# The Song of Life

## XLV

Nature for me, in every mood she has ;  
And frosty mornings, clear and cold, that blind  
The cattle in a mist of their own breath—  
Shall never come and find my heart unkind.

## XLVI

And I'll forget these deep and troubled thoughts ;  
How, like a saucy puppy, Life doth stand  
Barking upon this world of crumbling sand ;  
Half in defiance there, and half in fear—  
For still the waves of Time are drawing near.

## XLVII

Would birds, if they had thoughts of their short  
days,  
Stand on the boughs and carol such sweet lays ?  
Is it not better then that we should join  
The birds in song than sit in grief and pine ?

## XLVIII

Come, let us laugh—though there's no wit to hear ;  
Come, let us sing—though there's no listener near ;  
Come, let us dance—though none admire our  
grace,  
And be the happier for a private place.



# The Song of Life

## XLIX

A quiet life with Nature is my choice  
And, opening there my Book of Memory,  
The record of my wild young roving blood—  
I'll sail the seas again, and reach strange ports,  
And light a fire in many a silent wood.

## L

Under white blossoms spread all over him,  
Have I not seen the Ocean laugh and roll;  
And watched a boundless prairie, when it lay  
So full of flowers it could employ the whole  
World's little ones to pick them in a day?

## LI

I'll sail the great Atlantic, whose strong waves  
Could lift the ship "Tritonia" up so high  
That to my wondering mind it ofttimes seemed  
About to take the air above, and fly!

## LII

Up North I'll go, where steel, more cold than  
death,  
Can burn the skin off any naked hands—  
Down to those woods where I'll at midnight read  
By one fat glow-worm's light in Southern lands.

# The Song of Life

## LIII

I'll see again, in dreams, the full-rigged Ship  
Wearing the Moon as a silver ring at night  
On her main finger; while the water shines,  
Fretted with island-shadows in the light.

## LIV

With all the wealth of Heaven: those perfect stars  
That draw near earth in numbers to amaze;  
The bubble-light of others deep impooled,  
The shadowy lustre of those lesser rays.

## LV

I'll see again, in my long winter dreams,  
That iceberg in the North, whose glorious beams  
Fluttered in their cold prison, while the Sun  
Went up and down with our good ship, like one.

## LVI

I'll dream of Colorado's rushing stream;  
And how I heard him slap his thighs of stone  
So loud that Heaven had never power to make  
His cañon hear more thunder than his own.

# The Song of Life

## LVII

There will I live with Nature, there I'll die;  
And if there's any Power in Heaven above,  
A God of vengeance, mercy, and sweet love—  
If such a judge there be, I can but trust  
In Him for what is only fair and just.

## LVIII

I'll place my hope in some few simple deeds  
That sacrificed a part of my own needs  
All for the love of poor Humanity—  
Without a single thought, O Lord, of Thee.

# Raptures

SING for the sun your lyric, lark,  
Of twice ten thousand notes;  
Sing for the moon, you nightingales,  
Whose light shall kiss your throats;  
Sing, sparrows, for the soft, warm rain,  
To wet your feathers through;  
And, when a rainbow's in the sky,  
Sing you, cuckoo—"Cuckoo!"

Sing for your five blue eggs, fond thrush,  
By many a leaf concealed;  
You starlings, wrens, and blackbirds sing  
In every wood and field:  
While I, who fail to give my love  
Long raptures twice as fine,  
Will for her beauty breathe this one—  
A sigh, that's more divine.

# Confession

ONE hour in every hundred hours  
I sing of childhood, birds and flowers;  
Who reads my character in song  
Will not see much in me that's wrong.

But in my ninety hours and nine  
I would not tell what thoughts are mine:  
They're not so pure as find their words  
In songs of childhood, flowers and birds.

# Easter

**W**HAT exultations in my mind  
From the love-bite of this Easter wind!  
My head thrown back, my face doth shine  
Like yonder Sun's, but warmer mine.  
A butterfly—from who knows where?—  
Comes with a stagger through the air,  
And, lying down, doth ope and close  
His wings, as babies work their toes:  
Perhaps he thinks of pressing tight  
Into his wings a little light!  
And many a bird hops in between  
The leaves he dreams of, long and green,  
And sings for nipple-buds that show  
Where the full-breasted leaves must grow.  
Winter is dead, and now we sing  
This welcome to the new-born Spring.

# My Love Could Walk

**M**Y Love could walk in richer hues  
Than any bird of paradise,  
And no one envy her her dress:  
Since in her looks the world would see  
A robin's love and friendliness.

And she could be the lily fair,  
More richly dressed than all her kind,  
And no one envy her her gain:  
Since in her looks the world would see  
A daisy that was sweet and plain.

Oh, she could sit like any queen  
That's nailed by diamonds to a throne,  
Her splendour envied by not one:  
Since in her looks the world would see  
A queen that's more than half a nun.

# My Old Acquaintance

**W**ORKING her toothless gums till her sharp  
chin

Could almost reach and touch her sharper nose,  
These are the words my old acquaintance said:

“I have four children, all alive and well;

My eldest girl was seventy years in March,  
And though when she was born her body was  
Covered all over with black hair, and long,  
Which when I saw at first made me cry out,  
“Take it away, it is a monkey—ugh!”

Yet she’s as smooth and fair as any, now.

And I, who sit for hours in this green space  
That has seven currents of good air, and pray  
At night to Jesus and His Mother, live  
In hopes to reach my ninetieth year in June.

But ere it pleases God to take my soul,  
I’ll sell my fine false teeth, which cost five pounds,  
Preserved in water now for twenty years,  
For well I know those girls will fight for them  
As soon as I am near my death; before  
My skin’s too cold to feel the feet of flies.

God bless you and good day—I wish you well.

For me, I cannot relish food, or sleep,

Till God sees fit to hold the Kaiser fast,  
Stabbed, shot, or hanged—and his black soul  
Sent into hell, to bubble, burn and squeal;

Think of the price of fish—and look at bacon!”



# A Winter's Night

**I**T is a winter's night and cold,  
The wind is blowing half a gale;  
I, with a red-hot poker, stir  
To take the chill off my old ale.

I drink my ale, I smoke my pipe,  
While fire-flames leap to fight the cold;  
And yet, before my bedtime comes,  
I must look out on the wide world.

And what strange beauty I behold:  
The wild fast-driven clouds this night  
Hurled at the moon, whose smiling face  
Still shines with undiminished light.

# Birds

WHEN our two souls have left this mortal  
clay,  
And, seeking mine, you think that mine is  
lost—

Look for me first in that Elysian glade  
Where Lesbia is, for whom the birds sing most.

What happy hearts those feathered mortals have,  
That sing so sweet when they're wet through  
in spring!

For in that month of May when leaves are young,  
Birds dream of song, and in their sleep they  
sing.

And when the spring has gone and they are  
dumb,

Is it not fine to watch them at their play:  
Is it not fine to see a bird that tries  
To stand upon the end of every spray?

See how they tilt their pretty heads aside:  
When women make that move they always  
please.

What cosy homes birds make in leafy walls  
That Nature's love has ruined—and the trees.

## Birds

Oft have I seen in fields the little birds  
Go in between a bullock's legs to eat;  
But what gives me most joy is when I see  
Snow on my doorstep, printed by their feet.

## Jove Warns Us

**J**OVE warns us with his lightning first,  
Before he sends his thunder;  
Before the cock begins to crow,  
He claps his wings down under.  
But I, who go to see a maid,  
This springtime in the morning,  
Fall under every spell she has,  
Without a word of warning.

She little thinks what charms her breath  
To cunning eyes reveal;  
The waves that down her body glide,  
That from her bosom steal.  
Her moth-like plumpness caught my eye,  
I watched it like a spider;  
By her own hair my web is made,  
To fasten me beside her.

## The Excuse

“**W**HY did you kill that harmless frog?  
Tell me, my little boy.”  
He hung his head for shame, and gone  
Was all his joy.

But now a thought comes to his mind,  
He lifts his head with pride:  
“I only *half*-killed it,” he said—  
“And then it died.”

## In the Snow

**H**EAR how my friend the robin sings!  
That little hunchback in the snow,  
As it comes down as fast as rain.

The air is cold, the wind doth blow,  
And still his heart can feel no pain.

And I, with heart as light as his,  
And to my ankles deep in snow,  
Hold up a fist as cold as Death's,  
And into it I laugh and blow—  
I laugh and blow my life's warm breath.

# Molly

**M**OLLY, with hips and ankles plump,  
With hands and feet and waist so small,  
Whose breasts could carry flowers unpinned,  
And not one blossom fall—  
Give me your answer plain and true,  
Do you love me as I love you?

Molly, as timid as a sheep  
That trembles at the shadow  
Of any harmless little bird  
That flies across its meadow,  
Are you a sweet good-tempered maid?  
“Sometimes I’d crush a grape!” she said.

Molly, as gentle as the sun  
That lifts the dew to Heaven’s breast,  
Of all the lovers you have had,  
Am I the one that’s loved the best?  
“By all the men betrayed by me,  
I swear I love you true,” said she.

# Killed in Action

(Edward Thomas)

**H**APPY the man whose home is still  
In Nature's green and peaceful ways;  
To wake and hear the birds so loud,  
That scream for joy to see the sun  
Is shouldering past a sullen cloud.

And we have known those days, when we  
Would wait to hear the cuckoo first;  
When you and I, with thoughtful mind,  
Would help a bird to hide her nest,  
For fear of other hands less kind.

But thou, my friend, art lying dead:  
War, with its hell-born childishness,  
Has claimed thy life, with many more:  
The man that loved this England well,  
And never left it once before.



## Lovely Dames

**F**EW are my books, but my small few have told  
Of many a lovely dame that lived of old;  
And they have made me see those fatal charms  
Of Helen, which brought Troy so many harms;  
And lovely Venus, when she stood so white  
Close to her husband's forge in its red light.  
I have seen Dian's beauty in my dreams,  
When she had trained her looks in all the streams  
She crossed to Latmos and Endymion;  
And Cleopatra's eyes, that hour they shone  
The brighter for a pearl she drank to prove  
How poor it was compared to her rich love:  
But when I look on thee, love, thou dost give  
Substance to those fine ghosts, and make them  
live.

# The Shameless One

**S**HE comes to see her brother John,  
She's with a man not met before;  
To bring her brother's house to shame,  
She comes a hundred miles and more.

And when her brother leaves his home,  
She finds her sisters Maud and May;  
She's drunk, and with another man,  
And both her sisters hide away.

She'll follow them from place to place,  
She'll find them yet, be sure of that;  
And John will be a shivering dog  
Before the eyes of a black cat.

The beggar-man has not more nits  
Than she has sins, yet she'll not die:  
The lightning, that would blind a child  
A second time, has passed her by.

## Cowslips and Larks

**I** HEAR it said yon land is poor,  
In spite of those rich cowslips there—  
And all the swinging larks it shoots  
To heaven from the cowslips' roots.  
But I, with eyes that beauty find,  
And music ever in my mind,  
Feed my thoughts well upon that grass  
Which starves the horse, the ox, and ass.  
So here I stand, two miles to come  
To Shapwick and my ten-days-home,  
Taking my summer's joy, although  
The distant clouds are dark and low,  
And comes a storm that, fierce and strong,  
Has brought the Mendip Hills along:  
Those hills that, when the light is there,  
Are many a sunny mile from here.

# We Arm to Fight

**W**E arm to fight the Kaiser's troops,  
And every man will do his part;  
One song was mine, a call to arms,  
To cheer my country's heart,  
My love—  
To cheer my country's heart.

Yes, I who have the power of song  
To arm maybe a hundred men,  
Have made one call, and only one,  
And armed no more than ten,  
My love—  
And armed no more than ten.

For now we meet, and my one cry  
Is "Molly, Molly," night and day;  
We fight the foe, and I am dumb:  
Oh, kiss my shame away,  
My love!  
Oh, kiss my shame away!

# Forgiveness

**S**TUNG by a spiteful wasp,  
I let him go life free:  
That proved the difference  
In him and me.

For, had I killed my foe,  
It had proved me at once  
The stronger wasp, and no  
More difference.

## That Day She Seized

**T**HAT day she seized me like a bee,  
To make me her weak blossom,  
I felt her arms so strong that I  
Lay helpless on her bosom.  
But cunning I, by artful moves,  
Soon had her in my power:  
“Ah, Molly, who’s the strong bee now—  
And who’s the poor weak flower?”

That time she thought I was a fly,  
And she a great big spider,  
She held me fast, my breath was gone,  
As I lay bound beside her.  
But cunning I, by artful moves,  
Could laugh at last and cry:  
“Ah, Molly, who’s the spider now—  
And who’s the poor weak fly?”

# The Bell

**I**T is the bell of death I hear,  
Which tells me my own time is near,  
When I must join those quiet souls  
Where nothing lives but worms and moles;  
And not come through the grass again,  
Like worms and moles, for breath or rain;  
Yet let none weep when my life's through,  
For I myself have wept for few.

The only things that knew me well  
Were children, dogs, and girls that fell;  
I bought poor children cakes and sweets,  
Dogs heard my voice and danced the streets;  
And, gentle to a fallen lass,  
I made her weep for what she was.  
Good men and women know not me,  
Nor love nor hate the mystery.

# A Strange Meeting

**T**HE moon is full, and so am I;  
The night is late, the ale was good;  
And I must go two miles and more  
Along a country road.

Now what is this that's drawing near?  
It seems a man, and tall;  
But where the face should show its white  
I see no white at all.

Where is his face: or do I see  
The back part of his head,  
And, with his face turned round about,  
He walks this way? I said.

He's close at hand, but where's the face?  
What devil is this I see?  
I'm glad my body's warm with ale,  
There's trouble here for me.

I clutch my staff, I make a halt,  
"His blood or mine," said I.  
"Good-night," the black man said to me,  
As he went passing by.



## When yon Full Moon

**W**HEN yon full moon's with her white fleet  
of stars,

And but one bird makes music in the grove;  
When you and I are breathing side by side,  
Where our two bodies make one shadow, love;

Not for her beauty will I praise the moon,  
But that she lights thy purer face and throat;  
The only praise I'll give the nightingale  
Is that she draws from thee a richer note.

For, blinded with thy beauty, I am filled,  
Like Saul of Tarsus, with a greater light;  
When he had heard that warning voice in Heaven,  
And lost his eyes to find a deeper sight.

Come, let us sit in that deep silence then,  
Launched on love's rapids, with our passions  
proud,  
That makes all music hollow—though the lark  
Raves in his windy heights above a cloud.

## Till I Went Out

**T**ILL I went out of doors to prove  
What through my window I saw move;  
To see if grass was brighter yet,  
And if the stones were dark and wet;

Till I went out to see a sign—  
That slanted rain, so light and fine,  
Had almost settled in my mind  
That I at last could see the wind.

## The Soul's Companions

**T**HOUGH floods shall fail, and empty  
holes

Gape for the bright eyes of seas,  
And fires devour stone walls and trees—

Thou, soul of mine, dost think to live  
Safe in thy light, and laugh at these?

Thy bravery outwears all heat

And cold, all steel, all brass and stone;

When Time has mixed my flesh and bone

With rocks and roots of common plants—

Thy shining life will not be done.

Thou hast two children: one called Hope,

The other Doubt, who will not play,

And drives that brighter child away:

How sweet this life, if Hope alone

Would walk with me from day to day!

## To my Thoughts

**S**TAY home and hear the birds and bees,  
And see the blossoms grow;  
And mock them both—when Echo mocks  
The bird that cries “Cuckoo”;  
For Love, alas!—now understood—  
Has many a feather stained with blood.

Though you are my own children born,  
I cannot keep you home;  
For though I lock my body up  
Inside an iron room,  
You thoughts can still pass through the walls,  
To follow her who never calls.

# The Holly on the Wall

**P**LAY, little children, one and all,  
For holly, holly on the wall.  
You do not know that millions are  
This moment in a deadly war;  
Millions of men whose Christmas bells  
Are guns' reports and bursting shells;  
Whose holly berries, made of lead,  
Take human blood to stain them red;  
Whose leaves are swords, and bayonets too,  
To pierce their fellow-mortals through.  
For now the war is here, and men—  
Like cats that stretch their bodies when  
The light has gone and darkness comes—  
Have armed and left their peaceful homes:  
But men will be, when there's no war,  
As gentle as you children are.  
Play, little children, one and all,  
For holly, holly on the wall.

## How Late

**N**OW thou hast made me blind,  
And I can only see,  
In all the world, what comes from thee;

Now thou hast made me deaf,  
And I can only hear  
Thy voice, or body's motion near;

Now thou hast made me dumb,  
And my two lips are mute,  
Till yours have bid them follow suit;

Now blind and deaf and dumb  
To all the world but thee—  
How late thou art forsaking me!

# Brothers

**T**HEY lived together day and night,  
Two brothers, all alone:  
Six weeks had gone, and neighbours said—  
“We see no more than one.

Where is thy brother Charlie, Tom?  
And is he sick?” they said.  
Said Tom, that man so queer and quaint—  
“My brother’s still in bed.”

And every night they heard his voice,  
Down on the stairs below:  
“And are you still in bed and sick—  
How are you, Charlie, now?”

They forced the doors and entered in,  
Found Charlie on the bed:  
“I see a dead man here alive,”  
The old physician said.

“For see the worms! They bubble here  
In pools upon his flesh:  
They wag the beard that’s on his chin—  
This body is not fresh.”

## Brothers

Then came a voice all sharp and clear,  
Down on the stairs below:  
“And are you still in bed and sick—  
How are you, Charlie, now?”



## Exalted Flower

**N**O more of that, you butterfly,  
That lie so still on this green leaf,  
Pretending you're a flower again,  
And wings but bring you grief:  
You have no cause, exalted flower,  
To doubt your flying power.

No more of that! You with a gift  
Not granted yet to any bee  
Or bird that's flying in the air:  
The precious gift to see  
Dark tunnels in this open light,  
And vanish out of sight.

# What Thoughts are Mine

WHAT thoughts are mine when she is gone,  
And I sit dreaming here, alone;  
My fingers are the little people  
That climb her breast to its red steeple;  
And, there arrived, they play until  
She wakes and murmurs—"Love, be still."

She is the patient, loving mare,  
And I the colt to pull her hair;  
She is the deer, and my desire  
Pursues her like a forest fire;  
She is the child, and does not know  
What a fierce bear she calls "Bow-wow."

But, Lord, when her sweet self is near,  
These very thoughts cause all my fear.  
I sit beneath her quiet sense,  
And each word fears its consequence;  
So "Puss, Puss, Puss!" I cry. At that  
I hang my head and stroke the cat.

## Angel and Mystery

LO, I, that once was Fear, that hears  
His own forgotten breath, and fears  
The breath of something else is heard—  
Am now bold Love, to dare the word;  
No timid mouse am I, before  
He'll cross a moonbeam on the floor.  
So sit thou close, and I will pour  
Into that rosy shell, thy ear,  
My deep-sea passion; let me swear  
There's nothing in the world so fair  
As thy sweet face that does, and will,  
Retain its baby roundness still:  
With those two suns, thine eyes, that keep  
Their light from clouds till Night brings sleep.  
Forget my features, only see  
The soul in them that burns for thee;  
And never let it cross thy mind  
That I am ugly for my kind.  
Although the world may well declare,  
"One is an angel sweet and fair,  
But what it is that sits so close  
Must rest with God—He only knows."

# They're Taxing Ale Again

**A**LE'S no false liar; though his mind  
Has thoughts that are not clear,  
His honest heart speaks boldly out,  
Without reserve or fear.

Though shaky as that bird the bat,  
In its first flight at night,  
Yet still old Ale will stand his ground  
For either wrong or right.

Though Ale is poor, he's no man's slave,  
He'll neither fawn nor lick;  
He'd clap proud monarchs on the back,  
And call them Ned or Dick.

They're taxing Ale again, I hear,  
A penny more the can:  
They're taxing poor old Ale again,  
The only honest man.

## The Girl is Mad

SHE changes oft—she laughs and weeps,  
She smiles, and she can frown;  
Should tears of sorrow fill her eyes,  
Then laughter shakes them down:  
The girl is mad—and yet I love her.

She smiles, and swears her jealousy  
Would tear out my two eyes,  
And make me swallow them by force:  
These words are no strong lies,  
For she is mad—and yet I love her.

“Ha, ha!” says she; “I’ve killed two men,  
And you’re the third I’ll kill!”  
If I keep time with her fierce love,  
’Tis certain that she will:  
The girl is mad—and yet I love her.

## In Time of War

**A**S I go walking down the street  
Many's the lad and lass I meet;  
There's many a soldier I see pass,  
And every soldier has his lass.

But when I saw the others there,  
The women that black mourning wear,  
"Judged by the looks of these," I said,  
"The lads those lassies court are dead."

# England

**W**E have no grass locked up in ice so fast  
That cattle cut their faces and at last,  
When it is reached, must lie them down and  
starve,  
With bleeding mouths that freeze too hard to  
move.

We have not that delirious state of cold  
That makes men warm and sing when in Death's  
hold.

We have no roaring floods whose angry shocks  
Can kill the fishes dashed against their rocks.

We have no winds that cut down street by street,  
As easy as our scythes can cut down wheat.

No mountains here to spew their burning hearts  
Into the valleys, on our human parts.

No earthquakes here, that ring church bells afar,  
A hundred miles from where those earthquakes  
are.

We have no cause to set our dreaming eyes,  
Like Arabs, on fresh streams in Paradise.

We have no wilds to harbour men that tell  
More murders than they can remember well.

No woman here shall wake from her night's rest,  
To find a snake is sucking at her breast.

Though I have travelled many and many a mile,

## England

And had a man to clean my boots and smile  
With teeth that had less bone in them than gold—  
Give me this England now for all my world.



## Come, Let Us Find

COME, let us find a cottage, love,  
That's green for half a mile around;  
To laugh at every grumbling bee,  
Whose sweetest blossom's not yet found.  
Where many a bird shall sing for you,  
And in our garden build its nest:  
They'll sing for you as though their eggs  
Were lying in your breast,  
My love—  
Were lying warm in your soft breast.

'Tis strange how men find time to hate,  
When life is all too short for love;  
But we, away from our own kind,  
A different life can live and prove.  
And early on a summer's morn,  
As I go walking out with you,  
We'll help the sun with our warm breath  
To clear away the dew,  
My love,  
To clear away the morning dew.

## The Birds of Steel

**T**HIS apple-tree, that once was green,  
Is now a thousand flowers in one!  
And, with their bags strapped to their thighs,  
There's many a bee that comes for sweets,  
To stretch each bag to its full size.

And when the night has grown a moon,  
And I lie half-asleep in bed,  
I hear those bees again—ah no,  
It is the birds of steel, instead,  
Seeking their innocent prey below.

Man-ridden birds of steel, unseen,  
That come to drop their murdering lime  
On any child or harmless thing  
Before the early morning time:  
Up, nearer to God, they fly and sing.

## Rags and Bones

**T**HIS morning, as I wandered forth,  
I heard a man cry, "Rags and Bones!"  
And little children in the streets  
Went home for bottles, bones and rags,  
To barter for his toys and sweets.

And then I thought of grown-up man,  
That in our dreams we trust a God  
Will think our rags and bones a boon,  
And give us His immortal sweets  
For these poor lives cast off so soon.

The mind, they say, will gather strength  
That broods on what is hard to know:  
The fear of unfamiliar things  
Is better than their parents' love,  
To teach young birds to use their wings.

But riddles are not made for me,  
My joy's in beauty, not its cause:  
Then give me but the open skies,  
And birds that sing in a green wood  
That's snow-bound by anemones.

## The Dancer

THE great white Moon is not so fair—  
When not one trembling star will dare  
To shine within her zone of air.

And lo, this blue-eyed maiden soon  
Moves lightly to the music's tune—  
Light as a water-fly in June.

As she goes spinning round and round,  
Her nimble toes, without a sound,  
Sip honey from the common ground.

Like the humming-bird that, swift and strong,  
Will never suck but, flying along,  
Just lick the blossoms with his tongue.

Dance, dance, thou blue-eyed wonder, dance!  
I still believe there's one small chance  
Thou'lt fall into my arms in a trance.

# On Hearing Mrs. Woodhouse Play the Harpsichord

**W**E poets pride ourselves on what  
We feel, and not what we achieve;  
The world may call our children fools,  
Enough for us that we conceive.  
A little wren that loves the grass  
Can be as proud as any lark  
That tumbles in a cloudless sky,  
Up near the sun, till he becomes  
The apple of that shining eye.

So, lady, I would never dare  
To hear your music ev'ry day;  
With those great bursts that send my nerves  
In waves to pound my heart away;  
And those small notes that run like mice  
Bewitched by light; else on those keys—  
My tombs of song—you should engrave:  
“My music, stronger than his own,  
Has made this poet my dumb slave.”

## Passion's Greed

**H**IS constant wonder keeps him back  
From flying either far or straight;  
Confined by thy great beauty here,  
    My life is like that butterfly's,  
With every source of wonder near.

Let me go burning to my death:  
    Nothing can come between our minds  
To ease me of this passion's greed:  
    We'll bite each other's necks like dogs,  
And ask our fingers if we bleed.

## Late Singers

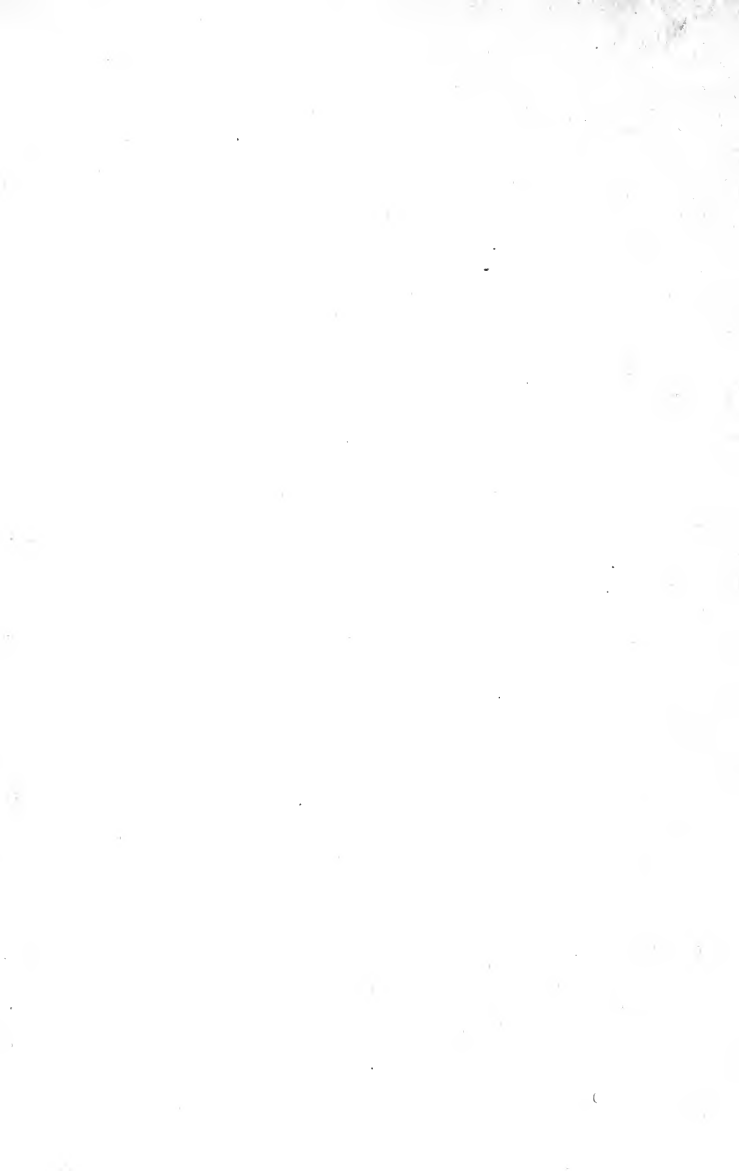
**T**HE Spring was late in coming, so,  
Sweet bird, your songs are late:  
Have you a certain number, then,  
Of verses to create?  
If late to start means late to end,  
You comfort me, sweet friend.

It was the summer of my life  
Ere I began to sing:  
Will winter be my summer, then,  
As summer was my spring?  
No matter how things change their hue,  
We'll sing our number through.

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