

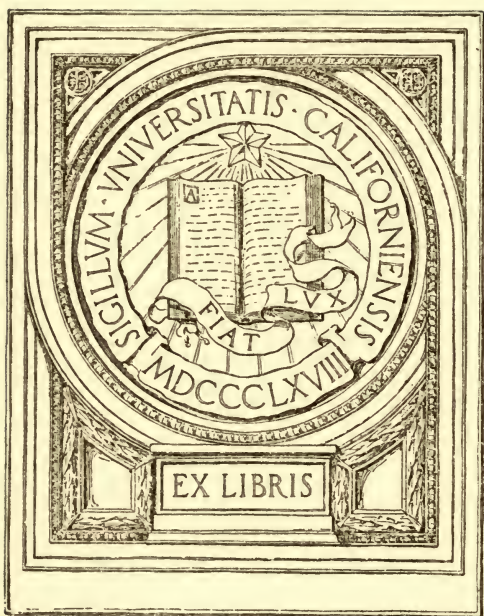
COLLECTED POEMS
1907-1922

—
JOHN ERSKINE

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COLLECTED POEMS

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POETRY

ACTÆON AND OTHER
POEMS

THE SHADOWED HOUR

HEARTS ENDURING
A Play in one Scene



COLLECTED POEMS

1907-1922

BY

JOHN ERSKINE

Professor of English at Columbia University



NEW YORK
DUFFIELD AND COMPANY

1922

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NOTE

The poems here gathered are those I care to preserve from previous volumes, *Actæon and Other Poems*, 1907, and *The Shadowed Hour*, 1917, together with certain poems that have appeared in magazines during the last fifteen years, and others that are now printed for the first time.

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J. E.

August 1, 1922

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACTÆON	I
THE SONS OF METANEIRA	9
IPHIDAMUS	29
PENTHESILEIA	36
ACHILLES AND THE MAIDEN	47
SIR GRAELENT	54
"GREAT VOICES OF THE PAST"	66
"BENEATH THIS BEAUTY"	67
SONG	68
"LOVE THAT NEVER TOLD CAN BE"	69
ROSE RIME	70
"LOVE, THE WINGED LORD"	71
PARTING	72
DE GUSTIBUS	73
"IN MEMORY I HAVE MY WILL"	74
FIREFLY	76
THE RETURN	77
EDGAR ALLAN POE	80
RHYTHMS	84
ECHOES	85
ON READING THE SYMPOSIUM	86
CATULLUS	87

CARLO LEONARDO SPERANZA	88
TO A POET IN THE MEDITERRANEAN	91
WILDWOOD	95
CHERRY BLOSSOM	101
WHIP-POOR-WILL	104
YOUTH DYING	106
THE CITY FLAG	114
DEDICATION	117
AT THE FRONT	118
APPARITION	123
HOSPITAL	125
SATAN	126
PARIS, HELEN'S LOVER	132
ASH-WEDNESDAY	138
"TAKE NOT THY HOLY SPIRIT FROM US"	149
CHILDHOOD	151
THE INN-KEEPER	152

COLLECTED POEMS

1907-1922



ACTÆON

Fair bloomed the happy world, fair bloomed the
May,

But over Lethe came no bloom nor change,
Only the ancient languor; soft and smooth,
Save where a slumbrous poppy, nodding low,
Trailed into ripples, Lethe slipped away;
And there the dead, fresh from the bright world,
came,

And drank forgetfulness—one cup for all,
Whether their crown of life were flower or thorn,
Their draught of life proved sweet or bitter wine.
There statesmen, soldiers, leaders of their times,
Heart-worn with blazing out new paths for truth,
Drank with their meanest follower, side by side;
Two lovers there, one with the passionate kiss
Of sweet lips clinging, one in patient love
Of those same lips, which never might be his,
Together drank, and equally forgot;

Thither came joy and sorrow ceaselessly,
And straight passed over, levelled unto peace.

But with them came a spirit not for peace;
Violently, as one half crazed, he came
Down to the banks of Lethe. There he stood;
As a true arrow, springing from the bow,
Cleaves a long arch, then quivers in the gold,
So fled the spirit to the banks and stood.

A moment so; then to the dead cried out:
"What drink ye here?" And one in answer
told,

Stammering for amazement, of the stream
That stills the love of life, and sweetens death
With pure forgetfulness. Then rang that land
And loud re-echoed with the strangest voice.

The strangest cry, that ever startled hell:
"Better a life of torture, death of shame,
And sorrow lasting on to many deaths,
Than peace for me, bought by forgetfulness!"

He stood erect, the rough wild hair blown back,
As from swift running; at his heart one hand,
The other raised as if to warn the dead

From Lethe; and his face—more than the light
Of life and youth and May burned in that brow
And flushed those lips, pain-set; his eyes seemed
blind

Of glory, as from gazing on the sun.
As when a tree falls prone across a brook,
'And gathers up its waters to a pool,
So rose the startled dead around him there,
And wondered at him.

Then a woman spoke:

“Wouldst thou remember now? When the
light goes,

Why lay another shadow on the dark?
Has sorrow met thee? There are double scars
For wounds remembered; here no memory
lives;

No more thy thought shall cling to what is
gone—

How can the ivy climb when the house falls?”

He almost smiled, for pity; then there flamed
Fire in his eyes, and his heart filled his voice.

“Oft as I hunted through the summer woods,

The wind would fly with me and spur me on,
The low pine-sweetness urge me, fern and flower
Lean to my flight, and whisper after me,
Till the wide forest fell to murmuring
Of sounds that echoed clearer than the pack,
And followed something swifter than the deer.
But when I rested breathless, at the noon,
The whole world came to silence suddenly,
With one refrain still lasting on to haunt me
Of what the woods sang:

‘Every flower of the world
Waits to be gazed on; all the honey of the earth
Waits to be gathered; no forbidden sweets,
And no forbidden beauty.’

So befell

This morning, that I hunted till the noon,
And thirsting, came upon a forest pool,
A silver mirror where the sun looked in.
I came a-tiptoe, for the forest song
Was on me—‘All the honey of the earth’—
when, hark!

A whirl of laughter never brook could sing,

Though silver pebbles teased it into song.
O perilous music! Marvelling I stood
For one dear moment, dreaming not at all
To break the age-long privacy of gods;
But then the breeze stirred—‘Every flower of
the world’—

O the music, O the wild refrain
That rapt my soul! I drew the leaves apart—
I looked on Dian!

Knee-deep in the pool,
So white against the forest; all her hair
Falling in tangles, dark against the white,
And dripping silver in the noonday sun.
She raised her eyes, the swift blush covered her,
One divine rose burning with terrible fire.
Lightly she dipped her fingers in the pool,
And lightly flung the silver in my eyes,
And I, amazed to be so gently used,
Still poring on her beauty—all at once
I felt the bow and quiver slip my fingers;
My hand was as the hoof of a great stag;
A hairy covering fringed my eyes, and clothed

My limbs with awful change; then keen I felt
The branching antlers cleave my brow, and knew
A sudden trembling, not like human fear,
Bite at my heart.

She watched me, still as death,
Nor longer cared to screen herself; the blush
Fell from her face like the deep set of sun,
That brings the stars out cold; but as I looked,
Her beauty grew and kindled in the cold,
Until my heart broke into fire before it,
And the fear passed away.

I heard the pack
Crying; deep pity changed her look. I knew,
But left her not, so marvellous the pity
That drew her eyes to mine. They slew me there,
My own poor hounds, but, ere I fell, I saw
Her face grow sorrowful. How can I forget
That divine face? Ye may forget, but I
Gazed once on beauty till her glance grew kind,
Suffered the cost of it, drank of the bliss,
And evermore remember."

High the voice

Rang o'er that dismal country, triumphing,
And a great glory flushed Actæon's face.
But ere the silence half resumed itself
Back from the echo, turned the spirit band
Incredulous, forth to their flight again.

As when strong rising waters burst the dam,
Sweep clear the river-bed, and only leave
One stubborn buttress stiff against the flood,
So stood Actæon while the dead rushed by.

"One draught of Lethe for a world of pain?
An easy bargain; yet I keep the thorn,
To keep the rose. I will remember Dian;
If I forget, who shall remain to tell
What beauty was? Perchance the gods have
kept

Some unilluminated corner of deep hell
To brighten with this memory. This I know:
They have no power to take her from me, more
Than she could keep me from her in the world,
Nor death could keep me!"

Slowly turned he then

Where the dark country sleeps beneath the
gloom;

And as he went, the glory of his face
Spread gleams before him, like the coming
dawn—

Trailed brightness after, like the fading day;
And when he passed, the quiet gloom returned.

THE SONS OF METANEIRA

I

Darkening the open door, in thought he gazed
On his ripe meadows, on the mountain road,
On the still trees above the shaded well;
Then inward to the twilight room he turned
Where Metaneira sat—

“Strange that a woman
Who fears not child-bearing, neither the pain
Nor peril, cannot face, save panic-pale,
The bringing up of children day by day.
With danger courage comes, and with thine hour
Comes on brave yearnings for this child unborn,
But no heart comes for the safe homely years—
Small fingers at thy bosom, growing hands
That cling to thine, and running feet beside thee,
And face upturned to love thee with quick smiles.
The boy we have, what dread was thine to rear!
Yet he takes life as one who loves to live;

Joy is the breath of him. This other child
As fair, I think, befalls, if but thy fear
Cloud not its spirit."

Leaning from the low couch
She answered—

"I feared no danger, nor shunned pain;
I thought only of what a man may share
With woman, the precious burden of childhood—
Not the nine months, the birth more exquisite
Of the young soul slowly finding the world.
O Celeus, when I brood on the frail bark
We dare be pilot for, and blindly grope
With clumsy guesses toward the eternal shore,
I think how reckless in the eyes of gods
Human desire must seem, and human love.
So thinking, I feel terror and loneliness;
Then I reach out for help to thee, but thou
Answerest as though these were but simple
things,
And life simple, and children in the world
No care."

"The gods who send desire," he said,

“Fear not to trust us with the incarnate dream.
But art thou lonely, Metaneira—thou
Who wouldst not keep handmaid, nor slave nor
free,

Near, if thy child need rearing? Lonely art thou?
Nay, jealous as the wild deer for thy young!
So fearful when the boy was born, and now
Thou hast sent thy woman away, even ere the
birth.

Do I not know?”

“Celeus,” she cried, “wherefore
Chide me for what is love? To thee the day
Brings a plain round, things simply to be done,
What happens, happens, and so to dreamless rest.
But I see what might happen, and the hours
Come fateful with hard choices, good and ill,
And the day’s labor is, by taking thought,
To seize the good. Therefore with all my love
I watch the lightest breath the infant draws;
The ill that might molest him comes on me,
I feel the blow that falls not. What hireling
Cares for another’s child so? Bruise and tumble

Are natural luck, they say; and the child's soul
Takes its luck too. I have sent them all away.
Nay, but the loneliness I feel is more—
A mystery that lifts me from the world,
A strangeness as if earth were not my home,
And our love but a visitant from afar.”

Celeus with earnest eyes looked from the door,
And saw Eleusis under summer skies,
The meadows and the mountain road—the world
Wherein he native was, and she was strange.
Then turning toward her—

“Thou art a wistful woman;
Dreams and weird thoughts are more to thee
than breath,
And the unsecret earth before thee, thou
Veilest with phantoms, with imagined clouds.
Wherefore dost thou reach ever out from life
With eyes for what cannot be seen, with hearing
For whispers and echoes where none else hears
sound?

Our loves, that made us one, in this alone,
Drive our two hearts asunder. Sorrow I see,

And mischief, yet the common fate is plain;
Nothing waylays nor haunts us; life, in itself
Clear, would ask but courage to be lived.
Earth is our brother, and light over all
Draws from our dust the destined fruit and
bloom—

Dreams, fears and hopes, rooted in what we are.
So I have thought, and the one child we have
Through his seven years confirms me. Hast
thou seen

How humanly he learns the arts whereby
Man and the gods within him build his world?
His hopes are better than the things he has,
And what he has, helps him to reach his hopes.
Nothing will harm him, no shadow threaten,
Save his own errors; nothing this child unborn
Will harm, if but the darkness of thy mood
Blight not its soul. Fate is man's handiwork,
I believe, whereon the gods look, and forgive,
And a dark fancy prophesying ill
Is but a true suspicion of ourselves;
The gods, whose eyes are clear, clearly behold

The seeds within us of our cherished doom;
They with immortal sorrow watch us all
Thwarting the good they will us; and most they
grieve

When love like thine, exquisitely alert,
Brings headlong on its danger, fancy-framed."

She answered sadly—"Celeus, the boy and thou
Feel not the mystery that oppresses me;
Would that I had thy nature, the sunshine,
The faith opening like earth after fresh rain;
But my love reaches, and I feel thy hand
Helping, but cannot find thy heart."

His hand

Reached out.

"I would a woman were here," he said,
"To share thy loneliness; I would the gods
Would send, however humble, a comrade for
thee,
Comrade for thee, and helper for the child."

With large eyes she questioned him—"A
stranger?"

II

All glamour, golden beauty arched with blue,
Eleusis, vale of peace, enchanted lay—

Meadows, and by the mountain road one house,
Dark trees, beneath their shadow a clear well,
And far away the immeasurable sea

Faint-sounding; drunk with autumn savors,
earth

Rich harvest-scent was breathing, and burnt
leaves—

When down the road a lonely wanderer came,
An aged form, that step by step between
Some place far back and some place far beyond
Measured the weariness. Grey was her hair,
Her eyes were grieving, her firm lips were
proud;

Her body, tall and stately, mantle-wrapped,
Majestic swayed like wheat in summer wind,
As slowly to the wellside she drew near—
There darkly paused, with folded patient hands,
Fixed as a carven stone.

Over the world

The magic gleam shone brighter, the low sun,
Slanting, reached to the grass beneath the trees
And robbed the well of shadow, save where still
The woman stood. Suddenly from the house
A radiant boy came running with light foot,
Balancing on his shoulder a water-jar—
Then at the shadow waiting unawares,
Marble-like, with bowed and grieving head,
He curbed his dancing mood and walked sedate,
Shamefaced before a stranger. While he drew,
She watched in silence till the jar was full,
Then in low tones that thrilled with pleasure-
 pain

Like the delirious chill from autumn fields
Swift after sunset—

 "Doth thy mother live,
A rich woman, that without envy looks
On strangers' children? Who of yon wide house
Is master?"

 Brimming with joy to share, "Celeus,
My father—hark, my one brother weeping, born
This very day!"

He paused for sheer delight,
And she, kindling with sudden hope—"What
woman

Ministers to thy mother and the child?
Where is thy father? Run to him—bid him say
If there be timely service I can do,
Service that wisdom asks and practised hands;
Tell him, brief is the shelter age desires,
But long the recompense of pity endures."

Eagerly on his errand sped the boy,
Tasting a new adventure; soon he brought
His father, walking slow, whose earnest words
Challenged her—

"Woman, what thing of grief art thou,
Shadowing these waters with unbidden gloom?
What thing of grief and age, that dost desire
To handle joy newborn?"

Her quiet voice
Like a soft rainfall sang—

"Bitter the bread
The stranger eats and earns not; gods nor men
Who suffer alms are free; let me but serve.

Only to abide a little, to be still,
To seek for nothing, to buy with quiet hands
A quiet heart"—

"Quietness and to spare,"

Celeus broke in, "room by the hearth enough,
And work enough; abide here, since thou wilt."

When he had spoke, the boy, as if to unfold
Kindness out of the scant and measured words,
Reached for her hand and slowly toward the
home,

Silently to the doorway, brought her. There
With lifted arms of prophecy she prayed—
"To all this house the immortal gods be friends,
And chiefly to this lad, who gave me rest.
Master of field and meadow shall he be,
To plow, to plant, to reap—him and his sons
The earth obey forever!"

His boyhood felt
Exquisite shadowed beauty, earth under stars;
Her words startled like bird-notes in the dawn;
Suddenly for her presence the house seemed
small.

III

Autumn to winter, winter drew to spring,
And comfortable became her ways, like all
Love-service wrought by customary hands.
Sap in the vein, soft-stirring with the year,
And kindling at her presence, human love;
Strange wants unrealized, hungers of heart,
Mystical poverties of soul, she filled;
Even as common field-flowers casually
Borrow the sun and use the earth and sky,
The household without reckoning dwelt with her.

But when to autumn the year turned again
And the old poignant beauty filled the world,
The mother Metaneira, spirit-quick,
Felt the home troubled with awe wonderful.
She pondered long these motions of vague fear,
Still troubled more, till in a twilight mood
She broke them to her husband and the boy,
Under the spell of her strange insight rising
Mænad-mad,—wild eyes and haunted face;
With the intense flame of passionate thought

Her fragile body quivered as she spoke—
“Who is this phantom, this weird wayfarer,
Ye two brought in to aid me? Know ye not
The Shining Ones oft hide in human forms,
And darker spirits, brooding mischief, oft
Resemble to betray us?”

Celeus frowned;

“She is a quiet phantom, grant her that!
All that haunt us, the gods make old like her,
So quiet and so wise! Summer and winter
Has not her faithful toil prospered the year?
What strangeness has she done?”

Poised among fears,
Perplexed to choose, the mother hesitated,
Then answered not his question but her own
thoughts—

“She loves the child, she loves, but not as we
Love it, not with a simple heart; secrets
We cannot guess at, her deep manner hides;
Her service steals upon us like a spell,
Yet something fugitive in all she does,
Some touch of marvel, some too perfect skill,

Makes helpless those she helps. Oft she escapes,
As though her mood were hampered by our eyes,
And strangely broods or dreams or works alone.
Now for two nights, with the first dusk, I saw
her

Stealthily watch me,—then the cradled babe
She lifted to her breast and made pretense
To soothe, though it slept sound,—then to the hall
Yonder carried the child, and slyly drew
The bolts, I heard them creak, in the closed door.”

Celeus, still unpersuaded, comforted her—
“The skill of old hands is another youth;
Youth is the earliest magic, and the last
Is practice, nothing more; this woman’s skill
Came with her years, but sorrow makes her
strange.”

Instant upon the word, as at the return
Of half-forgotten fear, the mother cried—
“What is this sorrow, then, that shadows her?
A human grief with time unfolds to love,
And tears that are not shame are shared at last,
But all the kindness of our house melts not

The silence from her lips ; she may not will
Mischief, but power she has, she brings on fate—
Were not her words prophetic for the boy
That named him master of meadows and of fields,
Whom the earth should obey? Did not the grain
Ripen miraculous where she bade him sow?
Did not the grove she planted, the young trees,
Thrive beyond hope? Weird blessings fall on us,
Yet rather would I lose the alien gift
Than dread the lurking debt still to be paid.”

Wondering at his mother, the young boy
Pleaded, suddenly eloquent out of love—
“All that she taught me, of earth and sun and
showers,
Of seed and tilth and gathering of the grain,
To others I could teach—no weird secret,
But simple knowledge waiting to be used.
The things that beauty touches become strange,
I heard her say ; the strangeness thou dost fear,
Is it not beauty?”

The mother, following her dread,
Hearing him not—“ ‘Only a little while,

A little while ago I found her gazing
On the bare fields as one looks on the dead,
And from her moving lips came soft, wild words:
'O loveliness (she whispered) rapt away!
Who now, thy face beholding, gathers joy?
Ay me, the joy that from eternal love
Up from my bosom flowing bloomed in thee!
The wheat, the poppy languish meadow-shorn,
The summer dies. O thou that canst not lan-
guish,
Maiden lost, Immortal One!'"—

The voice

Of Metaneira faltered and grew faint,
Uttering the remembered cry; but Celeus
With deeper pity reproved her perverse mood—
“Hast thou not heard of lost loves in the world,
Of hearths vacant, of hopes precious but vain?
She in her years is wounded with old sorrows;
This babe of ours, soft-breathing on her breast,
Brings back through tears the frail unburied
ghost,

Some girl long dead, whom grief hath made
divine.

Ah, Metaneira, that having lost no child
Knowest not the faithful pain, the abiding grief!"

"And wouldst thou lose him," Metaneira cried,
"The babe that helpless lies on her strange heart?
Have I not said, when the day ends she carries
To yonder room the sleeping child away,
Stealing with furtive glances, and with guile
Barring the door? Now hearken! Underneath
And over, by the hinges, through the latch,
Sharp gleams shoot out, long blades of eerie
light,

That all but pierce the nailed and paneled wood.
After a space the light fades, stealthily
The latch withdraws, and with too perfect care
She enters crooning slumber-songs—O clear
The triumph in her face, the evil shining!
And when I take the child, dim meadow-scent,
Damp odors, flood ethereal o'er my brain,
And the child's eyes, on more than infant depths
Brooding, grow wonderful with calm—Celeus!

See now," she cried, "the light streams through the door!"

Flinging her fragile body, she burst the latch,
And frenzied saw the woman holding outstretched
The child, and waves of weird light washing it,
Fire that from the hearth seemed not to flame,
But like a rolling sea filled the whole room.
One glimpse—and Metaneira, crazed with love,
Tore fiercely from those hands the flame-wrapped
babe.

Then from the earth the woman rose, a queen
Celestial, young and fair; the glowing sea
Ebbd from the room into her burning heart,
As to its source, and beautiful was her wrath,
Light-giving. And Metaneira stood aghast.

IV

Slowly a sad, majestic voice began,
"Blind, like all mortals! Ye withhold the gods
From their unfinished blessings. Know ye me?
Demeter; from vain walking in this world

To find the lost Persephone, Pluto's bride,
Hither I came, and here for a little rest,
A little quietness to sorrow in,
I laid my godhood by, and hid myself
In human poverty and mortal years.
Could ye not guess, such blessings as I brought
Come only from the gods? First I bestowed
On yonder lad the mastery of earth.
The labors that men do beneath the sun
Shall be for him no burden but sheer joy;
He shall have knowledge of this world as it is,
He shall love what is kindred to his fate,
He shall know men, and he shall know his gods.

But for this other child, this dreaming babe
That stirred the memory of my ancient heart,
I would have furnished immortality.
So frail he seemed, so pitiful, so pure,
And time so stern a teacher, and the path
So rough, where he must stumble, fall by fall
Painfully fashioning his eternal soul—
To spare him, I desired,—to make his days
All of such moments as the happiest men

Dream only at their best. Here by the fire
I washed in deathless love the mortal mind,
And fast the god grew in him, till your fear
Ruined the heavenly will. Now he shall be
Master of nothing, but dreams shall master him.
A pilgrim of confusion shall he be;
Two worlds alternate shall be his, but rest
In neither; painfully shall his hand, his eye,
On the obdurate face of things lay hold,
The while his dreams look on what never was;
And for he cannot tell the twain apart,
Madness and ecstasy shall envelop him,
Out of the world he finds but will not see,
Building a world he sees but cannot find.
Nothing that is shall teach him what it is—
Pain of this world, still knocking at the door,
Nor grief that stabs, nor joy that comforts him;
He shall be strange to thee, for all thy love,
And for thy sake, for him all things be strange;
Whate'er he loves shall whisper him farewell,
And waft him on the exile of his dream—
A human face, a shining on the sea,

The cold moon, or the still march of stars,
If but the inexorable beauty call,
Eternity, rising in him like a tide,
Shall from their bases lift and set afloat
The stranded accidents of time."

She ceased,

The light died from the room, and she was gone.
But Metaneira heard, far-off, the voice
Of Celeus, like a sound breaking on sleep.

IPHIDAMUS

There on the shore his lonely roof was set
Bordering the dunes, storm-beaten, and below,
The never-tiring breaker crashed and roared.
The sloping sands, wave-wrinkled and untrod,
Now kissed the feet of Theano, when she first
Gladdened the house, under the bridal stars,
And the warm hearth blazed welcome through
the door.

He would not mourn the summer, nor regret
The failing year, for Theano in his heart
Brought greenness on the barren sands, and
kindling

A warmer glory in the Thracian dawns,
Drew purple o'er the wave, grey with the winter.
The hearth that once flamed lonely to the skies,
Now sang of human comfort, and the girlish
Music, Theano's laughter, made her love
Hear not the broken sea. The thin young moon,
The silver-eyed, rose wondering on their joy,

And shining larger, found no love like theirs
From shore to shore. But all too soon she
waned;

And ere the nights were dark, their joy was
dead.

A Greek-born wanderer, resting at their door,
Grown thankful over generous meat and wine,
Paid them but ill, the idle woe-bringer!

"Friends, have ye made the mercy of the gods
So welcome, it will never dwell elsewhere?

How lightly here the breath of Eros moves,
Stirring the quiet air to music low;

But all my land bows to one gust of war,
As on the forest falls the bitter North,
Bending one way the marsh-flag and the pine.

Now all the sails of Hellas, raised in wrath,
Are set for Troy; false Helen and her love
Look seaward now, and count how many wings
Urge on the will of the rewarding gods.

Lo, now the seamen prop the dripping keels
High on the beach; the Argive spear is loosed,
And with it flies a swift unlovely sleep

For Trojan eyes; or in the reddened night
The glaring camp-fires through the Achaian host
Wake Paris from his dreams. Even, it may be,
Old Priam, fallen poor of younger arms,
Hides a white beard under the cloak of bronze
To pace the shaken walls."

He spoke the words:
And Theano listened sorrowful, with her eyes
Full of the grief of war; but ere he ceased,
On her the woe was fallen.

For now no more
Had he beside her pleasure, as of old,
In word of love or laughing, but his eyes
Followed her ever, restless with bright fear.
He found no comfort in the hearth—moodily
Stared at the flame unbrightened. The wave-
worn beach

All day he paced, revolving anguished thoughts,
Like one whose heart two purposes besiege;
And when against the sky some wide-winged gull
Flashed like a sail over the last billow,
Long would he watch its flight; and in his face,

Like carrion-ravens, trouble circled dark,
Low-brooding o'er the battle in his soul.

There came a sullen day in the late year,
Dim with low clouds, blown huddling from the
North,

And then at last his spirit bowed itself
To one possessing purpose. Down the coast
He called his men, old lovers of the sea,
Scarred from the fierce embrace of boisterous
waves,

Brave hearts that found their hope in bleak sea-
dawns.

Swiftly they shouldered down the unpropped
keels,

Freighted with arms and gifts, where the flood-
tide

With every wave more rudely tossed the bows,
And where the cliff robbed nothing of the wind.

Then from the ships, the seamen at their oars,
The rocking masts that spread out hungry arms
Wide-yearning to the wind—he climbed the
steps

To Theano, where she waited at the door.
She had no welcoming smile, but took his kiss
Quietly, and the words:

“O weep not, Theano!
Though with great mischief work the gods their
will.

They drive the plow of anger, and uproot
Slowly-blossoming, early-blasted flowers;
The joy of man they spare not. Was it I
Forgot the hungry days of love, expecting
The honey and the wine for evermore?
The dreadful Three have cloven the single
thread,

And weave us separate fates. O having thee
Who art my wisest goddess and most fair,
I could not go: but thee I have no more.

That day when he, the raven-throated, told
His evil tale of Helen and her wars,
And Priam stricken, shorn of friends—I turned
A selfish ear, and said, ‘He needs not me!
Truly, my father’s guest-friend, unto whom
My blood beats loyal and I owe it all,

But now he cannot ask it! Lonely souls
With no fair face to live for, let them die
A happy death for Helen; but for me
Love pours the cup of life, wine of desire:
I will not take away my lips.'

No more

Delight of dawn was mine, when the young day
Came stirring at the window, nor the song
Of breakers brought me slumber in the night;
For with the dawn I felt uncertain dooms
Gathering, and the sad reluctant sea
Wearily thundered woe. Lovely no more
Thy beauty seemed, and all thy words unsweet,
For Priam rose before me comfortless,
Shaken with age, and cried, 'May love forget
Him who forgets the ancient love of friends!'

Now, ere the curse strike deeper, I will go;
Late, but the wind is swift to overtake
The Spartan, where he seeks his worthless bride.
I, for a better love, have swifter wings,
And on the plains of Troy shall win again
The first unclouded vision, thee once more,

To cheer me home from deeds of friendly faith,
So to abide as when I saw thee first
Under a happy moon, and heard thy voice.

Lo, even now thy cheeks are rose again,
Flushed with the promise. Ah, remember, sweet,
Thou art not alone, though lonely, and our house
Not desolate, like that Lacedæmon home!
At night when we two sit by the warm blaze,
And hear the hungry sea, I think that Love
Stands in the doorway, and no harm comes in.
And when I go, the god himself sits down
Before the empty hearth and keeps the house.
Now Love and thou keep well my house for me!"

On her white lips his kiss, and on her cheeks
His warm tears fell, as from her arms he turned
Down to the ship, to the grey wind-combed sea.
On him she fixed her hopeless eyes amazed;
As when in hell unwelcome Hermes comes,
Earthward to lead Persephone, their queen,
And the wan dead, with infinite despair,
Knowing the woe at hand, the utter gloom,
Watch that fair comfort swiftly borne away.

PENTHESILEIA

So Hector fell, and Troy without defence
Looked for Achilles knocking at the gate;
There was no other heart to brave him thence,
The stubborn walls at last must let in fate.

But he, delaying, held away their doom,
For on a bleak hill far across the plain,
Beside his lost friend in the new-built tomb,
Whom Hector slew and for that death was
slain,

He grieved, and clasped his knees, and bowed
his head,
To hear no sound though night and day went
by,
Mourning the friendship and the glory sped,
And after Hector, his own turn to die;

Beholding now the end of mortal things,
He would not lift his armor from the ground,
He would not hear the pleading of the kings
To storm the city and be homeward bound.

Yet he would come at last, Troy knew, and woke
To daily respite and to daily fear,
And wild devices, thin as drifting smoke,
Crossed their dark hour with unconvincing
cheer;

So long he tarried when he might have come,
What if the subtle-planning gods intended
Another shift in the apparent doom,
Another Hector, Troy once more defended?

Two only undeluded met the woes
Long fated, and the approaching night of
dread;
Andromache, who when the wailing rose
Was weaving in her house a purple web,

And she had called for water on the fire,
That Hector, soon returning after toil,
Might wash away the battle and the mire,
And cool the wounds with delicate-scented
oil;

Even then she heard the sudden cry of death;
She said, "It was his mother's voice I heard,"
And hurried to the walls with choking breath,
To the pale throng that, pitifully stirred,

Made room, with boding silence on their lips,
And there she saw the chariot on the plain,
Swift horses dragging Hector to the ships;
She had seen this, she could not hope again:

And Priam, the sad king, who in the dark
Crept to Achilles and humbled his white head,
And brought again the body, torn and stark,
And gave it peace with the untroubled dead—

He too was hopeless and would live no longer,
But being king, he staggered to the close,
His desperate strength by each despair made
stronger,
And he was patient when fresh hopes arose.

Then out of Thermodon the huntress came,
The maiden warrior with her slender grace,
With her two spears, and her mysterious fame
That no foe lived before her cold, clear face.

Quietly she dawned as a dream doubly-bright
That unforetold we dream, on Priam's town,
Or as a moon that noiseless in the night
Rises with gradual silver and looks down.

She had no need to tell them, they beheld
What errand she was on—she was their lives,
Their city, and their safety, and she held
Death for Achilles in those gleaming knives.

They were as perished travelers in a waste,
Who see above salt grasses, parched and
thinned,
A cloud-like thing—is it a cloud?—and taste
Cool dampness coming on a ghostly wind.

King Priam watched this frenzy seize the throng,
Studying her bright youth with tired eyes,
And heard a voice beside him—"They are wrong,
She is no goddess walking in disguise;

"So slight a girl my Hector once could hold
Shoulder-high with his hand, and feel no
weight,
Yet he for all his strength was over-bold;
Priam, you will not send her to her fate?"

"No goddess," said the king, "yet she might
prove
A rescue, and this miracle might be,
That first a woman bound us with her love,
And at the last a woman set us free.

"But she will try her fortune, come what may;
She thinks to conquer, let the gods decide;
Were she my child, I would not bid her stay,
So many children have gone forth and died."

"O Priam, lingering shadow, hardly living,
Has the long slaughter dulled its own despair?
Once the fresh sight of blood was torture-
giving;
Now after so much battle can you bear

"This long procession of lost youth, and take
The sacrifice in unabating flood
Poured out, poured vainly, for the city's sake?
O King, they are your city, and their blood

"Is the red heart of Troy that ebbs away!
Rather a fury and a cruel wrath
Than this accepted horror, day by day;
Rather the storm that scorches in its path,

“Walls scattered to confusion, stone from stone,
Old folk with bleeding lips struck cold and
mute,

The skulls of children cloven to the bone,
And frantic women captive to the brute—

“Agonies that consume and then pass by—
Than horror stretched to habit, and the skill
To formulate another’s right to die,
Or utter the illusion that will kill.”

“Daughter, I love not war, though war has made
Sorrow indeed my habit, nor love to see
Youth come so straight on death—how I have
prayed
For my own end, and yet it will not be!

“Yet there is medicine in these perishings,
A kind of mercy in so many woes;
Even in peace the great departing brings
Anguish, and hearts are broken in its throes,

“But then the shadow falls so seldom, we
 Make us an armor of the interval;
Now here in war our shield is frequency—
 The shadows are less dark, so close they fall.

“And they who die at home, fall as the leaf
 Falls in a casual wind; but he who gives
A life for something, is a noble grief,
 He has a meaning, and his memory lives.

“Now if this maiden in her destiny
 Be not our savior, she may find her grave;
Achilles may be gentle, she may be
 Spear-booty, and go home his household slave;

“Or she may stay and never fight at all,
 Till the doomed city crumbles in the fire,
Then into long-drawn misery may fall,
 Living to serve a vulgar man's desire;

“She may return and wed in her own land,
And die in child-birth; or sons of her bearing
Like Paris, may bring mischief in their hand,
Like Hector, may be lost in battle-faring;

“Or she may never wed, but slowly fade
Into old age unnoticed, as a tree
In a wild forest, that to none gives shade
Or fruit, but moulders in futility.

“Is it for this you would draw back the wreath,
The laurel, that her fingers all but touch?
I am too old to quarrel much with death;
Life is our sorrow, we may live too much.”

“Grief is the savor of a woman’s lot,”
She said, “whether we wed or die unmated,
We cannot be a woman and taste it not;
But battle-wounds for us were never fated.”

“Daughter, if woman’s fighting grieves you more
Than war itself, is it less terrible
Men should be slain than women?” “No, all war,
Whoever falls—but if this maiden fell—”

“Daughter, you never pleaded so to shield
Our dearest, not our Hector!” She replied,
“I begged him to be prudent in the field;
Had he been not so bold, he had not died.

“But still there was a chance he might return,
None for this girl.” “You would have asked
him then
To stay at home and let the city burn
Had you been sure he would not come again?

“Out of our dangers come what life we have,
Our single fate, the separate name we cherish;
It was like Hector simply to be brave,
And to have stayed at home had been to perish.

“Now if this girl falls by Achilles’ sword,
Her beauty undiminished dies secure,
But if we save her, what shall life afford
In place of that one moment high and pure?

“Poets and priests and lovers fallen so,
Youth through clear doorways entering to the
dead,
Would you take from them the immortal woe
And give safe insignificance instead?”

So on her battle errand when the maid
Passed, in an ecstasy of faith the crowd
Hailed her their goddess on divine crusade,
And Priam watched her passing, young and
proud;

She, from her radiance in the morning air,
Looked smiling up at the forlorn old chief
She came to rescue—at his scant white hair
And grey skin wrinkled with the folds of grief.

ACHILLES AND THE MAIDEN

*Wind cannot bring so far the blood and dust,
But only raise your head up—do you hear
Faint bell-notes from the plain? Blade-stroke,
sword-thrust,
Shield-rattle! They are fighting, and you not
there.*

He would not heed the challenge, would not stir,
Though none so well as he that signal knew;
From his unhappy memories would not pause,
Though the breeze whispered and the danger
grew.

*No man, a maiden drives them from the field,
A wicked huntress out of the cold moon!
She touches them, they die, they have no shield;
What will you come to, if you come not soon?*

But he with bowed head let the voice go by,
And felt rebellious loathing, and behind
Impenetrable silence nursed disgust.

This, then, was this the great hour he should
find—

Brief, crowded with beauty, bringing fame?
Beauty? What beauty? Fame? Blown with
the dust!

*Take up your arms, come down and fight again,
They have bidden the wind carry their last cry.
You shall hear now the curse of dying men;
What will you say, Achilles? Must they die?*

It was the wind that freshened, or the wave
Of flight and terror toward his station broke;
At last he heard, and wearily bound on
Breast-plate, picked up the shield, the spear of
oak,

Toward the battle strode superbly down,
Wearing the armor lightly, a mere cloak,
Easy in his hand the spear; and bold he went

Unhelmeted, with insolent beauty brave,
His body moving in rhythm magnificent.

He came down from his lonely hill, by charred
And scattered ashes of abandoned fires,
Hoof-prints of stamping horses, and spilled oats,
Through the weird, empty camp, where yester-
night

The army took its shelter. Here were coats
Dropped at the first alarm, a wine-cup
With half its ruby burden yet untouched,
And the ironic dice lay on the board.
Beyond the tents he walked through a green
calm

Of clover, untrodden meadows poppy-sown,
And then the crowded plain and the loud fight.

Before him as he came the host made room—
All peril over, with him there, the one man!
Yet without shout they saw him, raised no cry,
No welcome, so many bodies lay, for whom
He came late to the rescue. But he strode by,
Bringing his solitude, and opened up

A wedge of silence till he reached the van.
Then from the other side the headlong foe
Following the maiden felt him in the track,
Caught sight of armor and his golden hair,
Fled unabashed, and left those two alone—
With awe and terror, both lines swaying back
Within a girdled silence gave them space.
She, when the battle ceased from round her, stood
Waiting for him, a little thrilled to know
The moment come at last, and see him there
Splendid as they had said, now face to face.
And he casually marked against the grove
Of slender cypress that behind her rose,
Her helmet crested, her corselet glittering,
Her belted sword, the two spears in her hand,
Twin javelins, light as a hunter's dart,
All gleaming against the shadowy green.
Illusive radiance on that vivid form—
Smoothness to sight and touch, the enchanted
 sheen
Of jade or porphyry—the gold sunbeams threw;
Caught from this world she seemed, and wrought
 in art,

Cut marble or ivory cameo.

What eyes the helmet hid, he tried to guess,
To trace her body under the bronzen dress,
He fancied her heart panting, her wild pulse
After the running and the rain of blows,
Yet asked again whether she breathed at all,
So motionless her beauty held its pose.

Each stood on guard to know the other's will.
With unexcited spirit, unlifted arm,
He studied the bright mystery until
The quiet weighed upon him like a charm.
With that she threw a spear, a silver flash;
He caught it on his shield, and the shaft broke.
Did her heart faint a little, certitude
Fall from her? She leapt toward him like a
 flame,
She cast that other javelin furiously,
And drew her sword. He only leaned aside,
Slipped from the peril, and reaching back for
 aim,
Drove true through the vain bronze his matchless
 spear,

Straight through the corselet to her living heart.
It never left his hand, she was so near;
His fingers on the weapon felt her death,
Felt the woman quiver along the wood.

He had not loosed a stream of fighting wrath
To ride him lightly over things like this —
To see her body crumble with quick breath.
He leaned, and gently turned the relaxed form,
To lift the armor on the wounded side;
How stubborn, as he raised it, seemed the bronze!
And how to draw the spear-head out? He tried
In pity not to disturb the delicate cloth
Blood-molded to her bosom, soft and warm.
With eyes impulse-averted he untied
The helmet from the limp and drooping head,
And lo, a face made for another fate—
Brown hair upon a white and queenly brow.
And dreaming lips that held no curve of hate,
Eyelids self-closed, as though content to sleep,
And cheeks with rose-bloom not yet ebbcd away;
Beauty that called for worship and the prayers
Of lovers tortured with their empty arms,

Yet in itself austere, remote, unmoved ;
A face to set on passion, yet beneath
Archness and ardor, beneath the golden breasts,
A maiden soul—as at evening when fleecy clouds
Blush in the east a farewell to the sun,
Glides, under the warmth, untouched, the new
moon.

He stood up to his height, gazed down at her,
Then stooping yet again as though he must,
Took up his scarlet spear from where it lay,
Then gazed once more on the face whitening
fast.

He that had killed her, found it ill to leave
The fragile danger he had laid in dust ;
Not well to stay, but hard to turn at last
To thread his journey through the evening camp,
Through cheerful noises around supper-fires,
Through laughter of soldiers at their lucky day,
With joke and ribald song. He heard one say
How he would use his safety after war—
What sort of woman, and what kind of wine.

SIR GRAELENT

I

"I will ride to the forest," Sir Graelent said;
 "The town walls shut me in, but the forest
 has clean air,
And trees have cool branches, but here are bitter
 tongues;
I will ride to the forest, I shall be alone there."

He rode to the forest—he clattered down the
 street

 Between old houses leaning close and high,
'And faces at the window-ledge thrust out to
 greet him,

 And mocked him in his worn coat riding by.
He came where the highway twines through field
 and vineyard,

 A ribbon white and dusty, mile on mile;

The men raised their heads from working in
the vines,

And had their word about him and a smile;
He came to the wood with the trees set out in
order,

And old women tending their sheep along the
border

Stopped knitting and looked up to watch
him go;

He turned upon a narrow path that promised to
be lonely,

And rode till he reached green quiet broken only
By near-by waters moving smooth and slow.

It was a magic river that wound among the trees,
Through a young glade sunlit with silver flame;
Red flowers through the carpet rose up in the
green,

And one was waiting there till Sir Graelent
came.

She was a queen of faëry, and she wore a blue
gown,

It was for her the red flowers rose up at her
feet,
Her slender hands were clasped, and two golden
braids
Forward o'er her shoulders were falling to
her feet.
He had not thought to find her, he drew a sudden
rein,
Spellbound he looked on her, and saw how she
was fair.
Whence she came he knew not, he never asked
her name;
She was a queen of faëry, and she waited for
him there.
She was a loveliness beyond words to measure,
She was a last and absolute delight,
More than you could dream of, of beauty in
the world,
Was standing in the glade, in the enchanted
light.
Her eyes were unstartled and her brow serene,
She kept a pleasant secret till he should come;

What had he asked, and her beauty was the
answer?

Spellbound he looked at her, and his lips were
dumb.

They met, as in a dream two strange hearts
meeting,

Know they are strange, yet cannot feel sur-
prise—

Come from afar, yet need no other greeting
Than silence of the lips and wonder of the
eyes.

Down from his steed where the glade begins,
He stood by the bridle, too happy to draw
nigh,

Flutter of a leaf he heard among the branches,
Whisper of the smooth river-water slipping by.

Long, long ago she knew that he would come,
Now that he was silent, she did find it strange;
Lightly he breathed, and stirred nor foot nor
finger

Lest the charm should break, or the dream
change.

Though she was beautiful beyond speech to tell
of,

It was not her body whereon his wonder dwelt ;
It was not her face, though, as she stood before him,

Light of it and color within his blood he felt.
These were but instruments her magic was playing on,

To call up another beauty in his soul ;
He looked at her, and marveled at the world unrolling

Within him, horizons of delight unroll.
Like one who listens to a noble singing

When the tide of music lifts the heart along,
Tone after tone earth-wrought but heaven-reaching,

And one forgets the voice, and goes with the song—

So in the glade, in silence gazing

On the tall strange woman beside the forest stream,

Not her slender body his eyes found wonderful;
He looked at her, and saw not her, but saw a
dream.

“Long have I sought for you!” he said, and
suddenly

Remembered he had never sought for her at
all;

Quietly she heard him: she turned her stately
head

And listened, as though to hear a far-off call.

“Long have I waited for you,” she answered
slowly,

She listened again—“yet I must leave you
soon”;

She watched his eyes, and saw the quick pain
there,

“Love with us, at daybreak now, will die ere
noon!

Easy in your words and open on your lips

Will you waste your dream, not hold it in
your heart;

You will waste my beauty, I will wait no more,
And empty will the forest be when I depart."

"Let me be silent then," he cried, "do you but
stay;

Leave words for desire, but never love be
spoken!"

Faintly she smiled, "We shall be happy for a day,
Then you will tell it, and our love be broken."

Sadly he looked at her, and knew it would be so;

Silence is for winter, when the frost is come,
But the high sun draws blossoms from the
heart—

Living in her beauty, how could he be dumb?
"Lady, till our speech be handmaid to our seeing,
Till words give out again the eyes' delight,
We cannot seize the wonder we have gazed upon,
And half of beauty escapes our cheated sight!"

Quiet still she listened; she too was sad for him—

"Is there not a beauty that walks the world
alone?

Is there no wonder that takes the heart unaided,

And sight of her, and love of her, and speech
of her, are one?

Frail are the words we have—frail and fleeting;
Can they build a beauty that never will grow
old?

Keep your dream in secret now, or tell your
dream away!

For you have looked on beauty that cannot
be told."

II

Graelent, silent lover, came again to the town;
Bitter tongues were harmless, scorn was light
to bear,

For he had learned the way now, he could
mount his steed

And ride to the forest, and find her waiting
there.

Oft in the market-place, sometimes in the court,
He heard men speaking of a beauty beyond
price;

He held his tongue with them, but his thoughts
ran before him

To the tall lady in her glade of paradise.

Then he would take the white road between the
vineyards

To the cool shadows and the path through the
wood,

To where the placid river whispered, and red
flowers

Rose in the grass before her feet—and there
she stood.

Smoothly he came to her, like the soft waters

Flowing between grassy banks without foam ;

Sure he was to find her, like a chord of music

Waiting for the falling cadence to come home.

But once in Spring-time, when the sap was stir-
ring

And secrets in young hearts burned to be
said—

Sick they were of loneliness, and weary of
longing

For blue eyes that passed them, or a golden
head—

When bright names sounded in many a boasting
And a fair body became many a prayer,
They marked how Graelent listened without
speaking,

The one happy lover among them there.

“Speak up, Sir Graelent, were you never
young?”

It was a girl mocked him, and their glee was
loud:

“Don’t you know,” a neighbor said, “Graelent
never loved?”

Pride likes an empty heart, and he was always
proud.”

Their words were unkind, but he thought of
the forest—

“Once he gave his heart away, but his love
was shame.”

He saw the queen of faëry by the quiet river—

“Once a woman loved him, he has forgot her
name.”

He cried, "I have loved beyond your wit to
guess at,

"I have looked on beauty no one of you could
see.

Ask me not her name, no one of you could find
her,

She is the queen of wonder, and she waits
for me."

"Tell us," they mocked him, and his tongue was
loosed.

Sir Graelent's heartache! They drew around
to hear.

"In a glade in the forest"—one said beneath
his breath,

"That's where my uncle cut fire-wood last
year!"

"Grass like a carpet spread beside the river,
Sunlight falling silver on the green blade,
There she waited for me"—a rough voice
shouted,

"'Tis Bess the hunter's daughter kissed him
in the shade!"

O for a word to bring before their blindness
All that her happy presence said to him!
But even as he told of her, the memory faded;
Even as he praised her, her face grew dim.
Like as a dream from which we wake in rapture,
So clear the path joy led us, height to height,
We can tell the plot of it, but cannot capture
The riding heart again, the wings of the delight;
And telling it too often, we wear out at last
The glamour we would overtake, the elusive
glory,
Wear away with telling, the wonder, till at last
It is a dream no more, but becomes a story.

“Cool is the forest; here are bitter tongues;
I will return to beauty in the blessed wood!”
He came to the forest, to the cold river,
And lonely was the glade where once she
stood.

“GREAT VOICES OF THE PAST”

Great voices of the past she knows and loves,
And most of all the poets are her friends,
Such eager kinship in their singing moves,
And to 'their ancient mood her spirit bends;
Surrey his Geraldine to her makes known,
Sidney's highway of love her heart delights;
The faith her poets held she makes her own,
Nor thee, dear Saint whom Chaucer loved,
she slights.

St. Valentine, this lady be thy care!

The days are evil, and thy service sweet
Uncherished dies from our ungente race;
Another heart like hers when shalt thou meet?

Happy her fate be ever! With the prayer
Thy day I honour and my lips I grace.

“BENEATH THIS BEAUTY”

Beneath this beauty when my spirit swayeth

And with the praise of it my soul is stirred,
Love on my lips a wary finger layeth

And bindeth in my heart the eager word!
My heart, that for love's sake these long years
holdeth

One dear desire to win all ways of speech,
Whose secret, love himself, I dreamed, un-
foldeth—

O, is it silence, Love, that thou wouldst teach?
I have desired to suffer thy sweet burning
And prayed thy fiercest blow should on me
fall;

I have grown scarred and wise in bitter learning,
But not to love I never learned at all.
Now to thy mischief, Love, add not this choice—
To know not love, or never use love's voice.

SONG

Thrilled with heavenward-flaming fires,
When my eyes meet yours,
Mingled joy and pain divine
My prisoned heart endures.
Prisoned still my heart aspires
And never has its say,
Till your dear lips, set to mine,
Drink my soul away.

“LOVE THAT NEVER TOLD CAN BE”

No bird hath ever lifted note so clear,
Or poured so prodigal his lyric breast,
But carried still some music from the nest,
When Winter laid the seal of silence there.
No sea hath ever woo'd the shore so fair
But turn of tide left something half expressed ;
Nor true love every burned so strangely blest
That words could hold it all or heart could hear.

And yet the tide will turn again, and tell
Its sweet persistent story o'er and o'er—
The bird take up the cadence where it fell,
And pipe it towards the ending more and
more—

And only love be inexpressible,
The endless song, the sea that hath no shore.

ROSE RIME

Fair rose, that fortune favors so,
So near her heart to die,
Her tenderest-spoken word to know,
To share her gentlest sigh;

I fear me, rose, we both shall miss
Joy's perfect measure—thou
Who knowest not, yet hast, the bliss,
And I, who only know.

"LOVE, THE WINGED LORD"

Love, the winged lord of art,
That all sweet song inspires,
First-fruits from the gentle heart
Evermore requires.

Not in every field he sows,
Never sows he long,
But the swiftest path he goes
Blossoms into song.

Catch the flying seed who may,
Ere the god go by;
Little love has come my way—
Little song have I.

PARTING

Music's meaning first is known,
 Though the bird sing all day long,
When the last faint-falling tone
 Divides the silence from the song.

Not in absence, nor when face
 To face, thy love means most to me,
But in the narrow parting-space,
 The cadence of felicity.

DE GUSTIBUS

One used his pinions eagle-like,
And straight against the sun would rise
And scout among the stars, and strike
His quarry from across the skies;

And one was as the bee that strives
Against no wind, but simply blows
Across the garden, and arrives
Upon an unsuspected rose.

“IN MEMORY I HAVE MY WILL”

I

When in the garden-walk you stayed
Beside the rose-bush, grace to grace,
I saw the happy rose persuade
A sister-fragrance in your face.

Who would not wish to pluck it for you,
So utterly you twain were one!
But my slow heart, delaying o'er you,
Only wished—till you were gone.

In memory I have my will!
Still in the garden-walk you stand;
By the rose-bush I see you still;
And now the rose is in your hand.

II

When in the garden of your days
You took the scent of flower and vine—
Your summer-bloom of love and praise—
And paused beside this heart of mine,

I saw your eyes upon me darken,
My sorrow dimmed them unaware;
My mirrored hope that you would harken,
My frustrate silence, I saw there.

Ah, to be master only of
The rhetoric of memory!
Now in my dream I tell my love,
Now in my dream you hark to me.

III

And since you died, I seek in vain
Words for my grief to labor through;
For all my eloquence of pain
Turns inward, and remembers you.

FIREFLY

Last night, in the garden—no stir of leaves—
A firefly, twinkling from spray to spray,
Flew to my lips, and I brushed it by.
Now at dawn the voice of my love grieves;
“Last night, dreaming I was a firefly,
I flew to your lips, and you brushed me away.”

THE RETURN

Walking in the garden
At the heart of noon,
In my hand a flower,
On my lips a tune,

I saw a face before me,
Dim eyes, dim eyes I knew!
I saw a shadow-woman,
The garden glanced her through.

She hid no branch behind her,
Through her the rose-bough ran;
She was a ghostly woman
To meet a living man.

"What change, what change, my lover!

Ah, heedless God!" she cried,

"If help there were in love or prayer,

Dear lad, thou hadst not died!"

"'Tis thou art dead," I faltered,

"The futile prayers are mine;

My foot still marks the garden walk—

No print nor sound from thine!"

"Lie soft," she cried, "vext spirit

That once wert true and brave!"

Her dim eyes sorrowed on me

As though they watched my grave.

"Wouldst thou sell me as the living sell,

An old love for a new?

Dream not so wild! Thou hast no choice—

Lie soft!—the dead are true.

"From their life-moulded passions
Didst thou dream the dead were free?
The rose thou comest bringing
Thou bringest still to me.

"Wouldst thou sing to another bosom
Love-rhythms phantom-fine?
Still, still thou comest singing
Thy heartbeats set to mine.

"Yea, though her magic call thee
To rise and put death by,
Though thy body walk to meet her,
Thy perished heart have I.

"For the lure the maiden fashions
To snare the ghost of thee,
Ere thou wert dead, my lover,
Was what thou lovedst in me."

EDGAR ALLAN POE

Who is this, of all our Voices hushed beyond the
singing shore,
Where the foamless roll of silence cradles peace
forevermore,
Who is this, that still returning, mourns his
eerie dream of Aden,
And his mystic, bloodless music chants the spell
of lost Lenore?

Was thy singing ever mortal, warmed by human
fierce desires,
Ere the living passion flickered into pale sepul-
chral fires?
Or was life to thee but shadow,—song to thee
but friendless yearning,
Thy first home the spirit vision whither still thy
heart aspires?

O thy high and pallid singing, fugitive from
baffled death,

Surely moves from phantom lips, and pulses
with unearthly breath!

Not of earth thou wert, dead singer,—thee
hath also death rejected?

Hath nor death nor life its laurel for thy song's
ethereal wreath?

Changeling of the Muses, bearing mortal exile all
thy days,

Rapt from starry heights of faëry to endure
earth's heavy ways,

'Alien from what land, and pilgrim to what
shrine—here lost and lonely?

Even praise of thee will falter; scarce we know
the man we praise.

Lost indeed and hither fallen, as the proud light-
bearer fell,

Out of harmonies eternal, out of peace ineffable,

Into discord, into darkness, into bitterness infernal,—

For to wear our wingless vesture, for a soul like thine was hell.

Shadow-lover, building twilight-worlds of swift-enfolding doom,

Where the haunted soul is mirrored in its own demonic gloom,

Yet from utter darkness kindling still the tragic flame of beauty,

Till from death, from hate, from horror streams its melancholy bloom;

Dreamer of the dauntless will, that darkened soars to perfect sight,

Dauntless, though this muddy garment weight its wings and dull its flight,

Up from lesser gloom to lesser gloom a finer ether winning,

Till the thought escape the body into skies of cloudless light;

Shall we call thee lost, dead poet,—we whose
fate is kin to thine?

Shadows are our world, and phantom half the
stars that o'er us shine;

Shall we call him lost, who faithful toward the
light of beauty beacons,

And our days his mystic singing floods with
loveliness divine?

RHYTHMS

Poet, you that build the rhyme
Dear to the Muse, the lovable maiden,
Breathe again the beauty-laden
Breath of wisdom's earlier time!

Now the people fancy more
Popular art, sensational poses,
Not the rarer-chosen roses,
Not the laurel Tennyson wore;

But to you my wreaths belong,
Wrought of Apollo's hyacinth-treasure,
You that tread to every measure
Dainty steps of delicate song.

ECHOES

I

Thou on the stars divine
Gazest, O star of mine!
Would that I were the skies,
To gaze on thee with many eyes.

II

'A star of dawn thou wast to me;
Now I have twilight, missing thee:
But O, how bright the spirits are,
Shined on by thee, their evening star!

ON READING THE SYMPOSIUM

To George Edward Woodberry

Plato, what splendid names I link with thine!

My poets all, who had from thee their dream:
Sweet Spenser first, who of our English line

Love earliest learned and Beauty made his
theme;

Milton the next, from whom no veiled sun

Could Wisdom hide nor Virtue's lamp remove;
Then Shelley, heart of hearts! and nearest, one
Loyal to these, who bred me in their love.

He taught me Shelley, who his own youth nurst,
Taught me the loftier music Milton sings,
Spenser he taught, and thee through these to
trace;

Now have I felt thee mine, as the eaglet first
Craves the deep heaven, and clothes his heart
with wings

To join the star-wide hunting of his race.

CATULLUS

When we can sound the ocean from the beach,
Counting how oft the waves rise and return,
Then from thy words, Catulus, we may learn
All thy heart surging on the bounds of speech.
What swift design the lightning-fork would
teach,

The startled eye not wholly can discern;
So into sudden words thy sorows burn,
So darkness has them back beyond our reach.

Had thy love waned, clear were its history;
After the tide the cliff informs the skies
How the majestic waters scarred the stone;
But thou from life passed to proud mystery,
As when a rose escapes the praise of eyes
And all night long blooms to itself alone.

CARLO LEONARDO SPERANZA

Where the strong tide bears you, Master,
 Silent freight from our lonely shore,
Where the dim sail, fast and faster
 Lessening, fades forevermore—
What welcome waits on what pale strand?
 Do ghosts you loved make shadowy room
For the soldier come to his long-lost land
 Bringing his battle-laurels home?

Sentinel, outpost, they shall greet you
 Home at last from the bleak frontier,
Comrade, shall the captains meet you—
 You who carried their standards here;
Deep in your nature Dante's belief,
 And Pulci's laughter in your eyes,
Midwinter gloom of Tasso's grief,
 Sunlight of Ariosto's skies.

Tears on your cheek, as they ever started

When face to face we gave you praise?

Ay me! Many's the time, child-hearted

Master, we gave you tearless days!

Nor praise nor silence sapped your will,

But from the fortune of your birth

Exiled and strange, you bore life still

With human-sweet Chaucerian mirth.

Master of antique courtly bearing

Though uncourtly fate befell,

Farewell, who go your long wayfaring—

Safe to the shore of rest, farewell!

How could we wish more years to you

Where Song, outwearied and baffled, faints,

And Beauty, heard of a random few,

Utters but small and timid plaints?

Ah, the still small voice we cover

With silly fret and cheap uproars;

Only comes the silence-lover

Death, as of old, through quiet doors

So quietly you slipt away
And carried from ignoble stress
Thoughts graceful as Italian day,
Acts of Italian gentleness.

TO A POET IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Master who knowest song, the spell of mystical
rhythm,

The lure of the cry of the soul, the beat of her
mounting wings,

Lover of poets, and lover of youth, and lover of
freedom,

Lift for us over the sea the song that no one
sings!

Who hath sung of the hour that stalks the land
like a phantom,

The fear that starts at its shadow, and turns
on itself, and is dumb?

And the land that outbraves her fate with in-
destructible beauty—

When will the singer to praise her, lover and
poet come?

Mediterranean wanderer, haunting the shrines of
the poets,

Surges and strains no homeward prayer in thy
heart for the free—

There where earth and ocean plead for the free-
dom-lovers,

Torrent and crag for Byron, for Shelley the
stars and the sea?

Never so far they wandered, never so drear their
exile

But their hearts still beat in England, and
still her need was near;

How they would bid thee, poet, harken thy
country's anguish,

If thou so far canst hear it, or carest at all
to hear!

What Vergilian odors of earth, what silvery-
fountained

Garden that lulled Catullus's heart-ache draws
thee now,

Where olive and ilex bear their freight of a
poet's blossoms—

Breath and blood of the Muses in the scent
and sap of the bough?

Would thou wert here, my poet, where rioting
orchards take us,

Meadowy dreams waylay us that lurk in the
mothering loam,

And over the hillroads set with whitening shoals
of laurel,

Clear as the heaven of Italy, the Northern
skies of home!

Comrades that walk beside me have left their
hearts behind them

In the long Virginia valley, on the Carolina
hill;

Love, to the last horizon, beggarly pleads to be
uttered,

And thou, the voice God gave us, art wander-
ing, wandering still!

Thou hast the shrines of silence, the ghosts
that cannot answer,

The paths that would not miss thee, though
one less pilgrim came;

Here are the passion, the hope of the song that
craves the singer,

And the hearts that are waiting, waiting to love
him into fame.

WILDWOOD

In Memory of Edward Hitchcock

Let us go up to Wildwood,
Haven on the starry hill,
Where one by one beneath their names
Men we knew lie still ;
Still as the shadows touch them
And the west pales from its red ;
Still in the fresh September night
The mist creeps on the dead.
Grey mist and green earth-cover
Between the dead and the skies,
Or the sunset on their cheek would blush,
The dawn would light their eyes ;
Half to the east are sentinel,
Half are a watch in the west ;
And the trees stand above them all,
Rooted deep in rest.

The branch that takes the weather,
And moves in rain or sun,
Lays hold below on buried men
And their two lives are one.

Is it ghosts that talk, or branches
Planted in Wildwood's trust,
Who by the open grave rebuke
The solemn "Dust to dust"?

*Why hurt with mournful speech—
Our pleasant comfort, Brother,
That children of one mother
Shall mingle each with each?*

Is it ghosts that walk in Wildwood,
Or only living trees,
That shimmer past beneath the stars
And touch us with the breeze?
This tender, frail beseeching,
This presence tremulous,
Is it man to earth outreaching,
Is it earth that yearns to us?
Let us go up to Wildwood
And think on men we knew,

Who from the peace wherein they lie,
Brother to earth and tree and sky,
Still through quenchless love draw nigh
And watch to keep us true.

The day is ended of boyish greeting
On the village street, in the college halls,
The summer-scattered comrades meeting
With laugh and jest and happy calls,
Ah, single in the glee and riot,
Who is this boy with shining eyes
That in a manful cloak of quiet
Wraps his tumult of surprise?
Through surges of delirious clamor
Aloof with his new thoughts he moves,
And, lonely, sees in brighter glamour
The household of his homely loves.
He feels with unsuspected power;
No nerve seems habit-worn or dim;
Edged with a weird-illumined wonder,
All sights and sounds take hold of him;

The hillsides from the chapel tower,
How the bell haled the hours by,
How his room looked, and the valley yonder,
He will remember till he die.
This answer to the world that calls him,
This reach of heart, shall he outgrow?
This spirit infinitely thrilling
Ever be dull? We cannot know;
Keen-thoughted now, with quick desires,
Ah, for a friend to walk beside,
Through the fierce dividing fires
Where the fate of youth is tried!
Would not the eyes that watched this venture
Kindle to judgment less and less?
Would not the voice of cheer or censure
Sound at last of wistfulness?
Let us go up to Wildwood,
Star-home of faithful men,
And bid the new earth lightly cover
Boyhood's most forgiving lover,
Such a friend, the wide world over,
Boyhood shall not find again.

Who is this walks the Wildwood road
In the soft starlight,
Who plies his staff, his shoulders stooping,
And hurries through the night?
The sombre hat, broad brim, high crown;
The long hair white with many snows;
The prophet beard that squarely down
A span's length on his bosom flows;
Winthrop's counsellor, or Bradford's,
Comrade of Cotton Mather's men,—
What Puritan, what Pilgrim Father
Is summoned from his rest again?
He strikes his staff with quick impatience,
Yet we hear nothing meet the ground;
His lips—what errand troubles him?—
Move and mutter without sound.
His bent head suddenly he raises,
He takes us sharply in his view,
He sights at us along his beard,—
He is the man we knew!
Into the wistful phantom eyes
We ask—ah me, without avail!

We gaze—we almost hear once more
His sudden, sharp, emphatic hail.
He will not tarry,—well we know
His trouble and his journey's end;
Yonder a boy away from home
Has need of him for friend!
Ah, lad, could you but see him here,
Could he but find you with his love,
The passion of the forest-breath
Would draw you hillward till your death,
The yearning of the earth beneath
And the clean stars above.

Trees that stand in Wildwood,
How firm your love endures,
Now he, your best interpreter,
Mingles his life with yours.
We cannot tell you twain apart,
Tree-lover from the trees,
Who move beneath the stars together
And touch us with the breeze.

CHERRY-BLOSSOM

I

Easter in the Pelham hills—Easter late, as Pelham likes—

Northern boughs need time enough to sprout
their tardy cones and spikes!

Checkered squares of shimmering green promise faintly, one by one,

Where the orchards, long besieged, surrender
to the ardent sun.

From dawn till eve the promise ripens, changing tints from noon to noon,

And through the mist of breathing things nightly
climbs the Paschal moon.

Oh, were you now in Amherst, it's walking
you'd be now

The pathway up the chapel hill, and a white
tree crowns the brow!

It rises from the moonlight—still foam from a
waveless sea—

And Amherst boys are walking there, beneath the
cherry-tree.

It rises from a random thought—old love from
an old perfume—

And Amherst boys that are far away still walk
beneath the bloom.

II

Easter in the Pelham hills, Easter blossoms as of
yore,

And earth, that bears the bloom anew, maiden
seems forevermore.

Yet what if earth remembers, when the warm
familiar rain,

Driving in a joyous fury, stirs her languid
blood again,

Stirs the sleeping branch where beauty folded
close in darkness shrouds,

And from every bud the cherry-blossoms burst
in snowy clouds?

You cannot bloom so strangely, O phantom
tree I love,
But my heart, like earth, remembers where—
from your beauty throve—
Perished Spring, and Spring that's here, and
Spring that's still to be,
And o'er them all the Paschal light—and, lo, my
cherry-tree!
Your sailing boughs are wrapped in dreams,
— your flower is white, like truth;
Boyhood walks beneath your branches; under-
neath your shade is youth.

WHIP-POOR-WILL

We traveled through the soundless night
And breathed the fragrant June,
Tumultous fragrance, flooded bright
With an unwaning moon;
Till from the whitened field the wood
Rose dark along the hill,—
And there with sudden joy we stood
To hear thee, whip-poor-will!

O Bird, O Wonder! Long and high
Thy measured question calls!
I marvel, till thy perfect cry
Almost too perfect falls.

What art thou singing, voice divine,
Heart of the poignant night?
What utter loveliness is thine,
Of suffering or delight?

Delight too lovely, all but pain,
 Would thy frail spirit pour?
Would sorrow, in thy perfect strain,
 Be joy forevermore?

Thou hadst no answer but thy song—
 Clear as the soft June light,
Sweet as the fragrant earth, and long
 As that immortal night.

YOUTH DYING

Ye who love youth, bring tears and aching
 hearts;

For now the dark hour calls, and youth departs,
 Where the red scythe swings close o'er crowd-
 ed fields,

And stroke by vivid stroke the moment yields
Our bravest, our most beautiful, our most loved.

Against such loveliness Time would have moved
 Gently, to do his work with gradual grace,

 Marking with all but unseen lines the face,
Whitening the hair and making dim the eye.

Love, feeling the slow change, "Can beauty die?"

 Would ask, and mourn in poet-strain youth's
 dying.

But now the bullet's speed outwings Time's
 flying;

The bursting shell makes haste; the poisoned air
Brings darkness, though the wild eyes start and
stare:

And song is stilled, so close the horrors break,
Only youth's name repeating, for love's sake.

Over wide seas and far away youth dies,
Yet here on us the growing shadow lies;

First the brown khaki spreading through the
room,

As one by one death brings his hopes to bloom;
Then vacant seats, and thoughts of youth at
drill,

And sense of near disaster mounting still,
And wonder if these rooms again shall fill

With boys young-hearted—or only phantom
men

To their accustomed seats shall come again,
Haunting young hearts to follow where they led.

Ye that love youth, come ere their hour be sped,
And gazing in their eyes, behold if hate
Drive them, or reckless pride bring on their
fate;

No hatred dwells in them, but quietness,
Slow hearts to curse, and ready hands to bless,
Slowness to cruelty, slowness to shame,
And readiness to die. The dark hour came
Thwarting with malice their supreme desires,
To kindle the ancient torch with clearer fires,
More poignant music, the new world set to
song,

And art with modern pulses beating strong,
Knowledge and justice free at every door,
No more disease, and poverty no more,
And man, their brother, by their aid to rise;
Such dreams, not hatred, smoulder in their
eyes,

Such hopes the kindred stars above them rouse,
Such starlike loves—true lips and happy vows.

Their hearts are like the hearts of those with
whom

They share youth's dying; only a swifter doom

At Antwerp, at Liège, ended such dreams;

Such marching youth as theirs from London
streams,

From Sydney, from Cape Town, from
Montreal,

From Edinburgh, most beautiful of all—

Such hearts, whom death called from their
hopes away;

Paris, twice great in trial, more brave and
gay

The darker grew the danger, in the wrack

Gave up her youth and turned the peril back;

Florence and Rome, firm in accomplished
glory,

Cities eternal, set in timeless story,

And many a hamlet on far Russian slopes

That dreamed of forward time and new-born
hopes—

Death called to them, to us: "Now come
away;

When Youth is ready, why should Age delay?
Mourn not for these; why grieve, when all
must go!"

Ye that love youth, ah, what of youth the foe!
Alas, man's folly, and the mindless sin
That bade this strife of youth with youth
begin!

They, too, imagined a new world; they, too,
Had dreams to brood on, and their work to do;
Hate came not easy to them, nor their flesh
Yearned to be dust again; only a mesh
Of ancient lies ensnared them—die they must,
And their true empire withers in their dust.

Ye that love youth, ah, not alone they perish
Whom the sword covets and the ravens
cherish;
We who remain to win the towers of truth,

How fares our battle, with no aid from youth—

Our battle with the darkness evermore?

Age yields the torch and follows, youth before
Lifts it—but in what hands now shall it rise?

The world grows old, time darkens, and youth
dies.

Ye that love youth, mourn not with tears, but
pray

Curses on the black hearts who willed this day,
Who willed that youth should die, or, being
blind,

Pulled down pillars of wrath on lost mankind.
May they know the last foulness they have
wrought;

May their huge guilt come to them thought by
thought,

Like water dropping on the shaven skull;

May their racked conscience, quickened to the
full,

Build a new hell for their new depths of crime,
Till, thinking of themselves throughout all time,

Their plea shall reach up to the Crucified
To die by their own poison, as youth died.

Nay, let them die and pass and be forgot,
Our grief die, and our wrath, but perish not
The justice-loving, the crusading heart,
This will of youth to take the righteous part.
So youth shall pass through death and still live
on;

Youth dies not—'tis the shadowed hour is gone;
To these rooms shall the springing steps re-
turn,

And radiant the familiar eyes shall burn,
New beauty gathering round us, and new truth,
New wisdom, and new kindness—yea, new
youth!

Then not alone the supreme soul of France
Shall light new paths for the new world's
advance;

Beethoven then shall stir with tragic power
The children of men dying at this hour;

Goethe shall speak to them—and they shall
hear

Their youth true-mirrored by the poet seer;
And smile a little at the note of strife
In Heine, who made such hard work of life.

Yea, let us pass with the dark hour of hate,
So wisdom come at last—though late—how
late!

And youth be free to follow deathless wars,
Ardent for love, still striving for the stars.

THE CITY FLAG

Flag of our hope, out of our heritage woven,
Flag for a storied city, forever new,
What shall you mean to the myriads you wave
over?

What master-loves shall be lifted up in you?
Strangely will you greet the endless dream the
city harbors,
Greet the astonished eyes the ships bring to
the city shore,
Greet the adventurous hearts with surprise of
familiar welcome,
Weird as a face remembered, yet never seen
before.

Here where the rivers divide, where the eastern
bridges
Carry their ant-like streams, where crag
upon crag

The walls of Aladdin gleam with sunlit windows,
Here, looking up, they shall look on you,
bright flag.

No banner of ancient traffic, realm of the Nether-
lands, rule of England,

Ghost of adventure long ago, nor of names
gone down with the past;

Flag of a nobler faring, flag of the port of
vision,

They shall look up—and behold! their mirage
come true at last!

Here in their hearts' horizon they find haven,

Dawns that lured them hither, here they find;

Here is the threshing-floor of the tireless spirit,

Here on new bread feeds the eternal mind—

Infinite purpose, infinite reach, infinite aspira-
tion,

Desire of the starlike beauty born of the com-
mon dust of things,

Beauty changing the restless street with faëry
glamour,

Lifting the city towers light as a song with
wings.

Flag of our fathers, out of our heritage woven,

Flag for a city of hope, forever young,

Fling to the winds of earth our ageless chal-
lenge,

Skyward man's faith in man once more is
flung.

Still may the ships come riding home, thronged
with alien faces

That yearn with light disguised, that glow with
unsuspected power,

Till our happy eyes, grown old, look up and see
you waving

Welcome to younger days and newer dreams
than ours.

DEDICATION

When imperturbable the gentle moon
Glides above war and onslaught through the
night,
When the sun burns magnificent at noon
On hate contriving horror by its light,
When man, for whom the stars were and the
skies,
Turns beast to rend his fellow, fang and
hoof—
Shall we not think, with what ironic eyes
Nature must look on us and stand aloof?
But not alone the sun, the moon, the stars,
Shining unharmed above man's folly move;
For us three beacons kindle one another
Which waver not with any wind of wars—
We love our children still, still them we love
Who gave us birth, and still we love each other.

AT THE FRONT

French Army, January-March, 1918

Is this the front—this level sweep of life,
This pageant without pulse of haste or fear?
Can this calm exercise be mortal strife?
Is the last reach of passion measured here?
We looked for angry blade and poisonous breath
Striking the floor of judgment, flail and fan;
Here lurked, we thought, crude agonies of
death,—

But here, in one wide dignity, is man.
Others behind the conflict, safe and far,
Still wage with lips their travesty of war;
We catch the rumor when the cannon cease.
Here at the front, when most the cannon rage,
The dream-touched actors on this mighty stage
In silence play their parts, and seem at peace.

II

Framed in with battle, this weird pantomime,
This dignity of action, conjures up
Shades of old heroes—Lancelot in his prime,
Galahad, questing for the holy cup,
Beautiful Hector marching to his fate,
Tristram and Palamides, rivals twain,
And Roland sounding his proud horn too late—
These quiet actors play these parts again.
And in the lull the critics far away,
Who have not seen, nor ever read, this play,
Who cannot act, who never trod the stage—
Their quarrel mingles with the threatening cry
Of the scene-shifters watching Roland die,
Who seize the moment for a better wage.

III

If this world be a stage, what hours we give
To tedious make-up in the tiring-room;
How simply comes at last our cue to live,
How, ere we know it, we enact our doom!
The wisdom that impels us to the play
Is patient with us while we choose our parts,
But without warning sounds our judgment day;
The curtain rises—life, the drama, starts.
How late it starts! Ere this grim curtain rose.
How long we practised attitude and pose,
Disguise of accent, costume, mood or mind!
Yet in this inventory of our art,
Living at last, we play our naked heart;
How brief a reckoning counts us with our kind!

IV

If character be fate, no need to ask

Who set the stage, who cast you for the rôle ;

Put on what man you are, put off the mask,

Put on the tragic pattern of your soul,
At last be true ; no gesture now let spring

But from supreme sincerity of art ;

Let him who plays the monarch be a king,

Who plays the rogue be perfect in his part.

So when this hour had rung, the scene began.

One played the rash, one played the patient man,

And one, the hero, drew the dragon's fangs ;
One heard death's bugler calling, and obeyed ;

And one, a rose-cheeked boy, the martyr played ;

One played the traitor well—see where he
hangs.

V

We yet may play more rôles than we believed,

Since to himself at last each man is known,
Since now the actor studies undeceived

The part he learned, and lived, and has out-
grown.

And those, the few and flawless, the sublime

Whose poignance of perfection strikes us
dumb—

Even for themselves, in the surprise of time,

Doubt not another reckoning will come.

“Comrades, we shall rehearse more wisely—yea,

There shall be nobler persons in our play,

We shall rebuild the plot on kindlier laws.”

So at the front they act, and see, and ponder,

And win with simple gratitude and wonder,

Peace in themselves, which is their sole ap-
plause.

APPARITION

I

I walked my fastest down the twilight street;
Sometimes I ran a little, it was so late;
At first the houses echoed back my feet,
Then the path softened just before our gate.
Even in the dusk I saw, even in my haste,
Lawn-tracks and gravel marks. "That's where
he plays;
The scooter and the cart these lines have traced,
And Baby wheels her doll here, sunny days."
Our door was open; on the porch still lay
Ungathered toys; our hearth-light cut the
gloom;
Within, round table-candles, you—and they.
And I called out, I shouted, "I am come
home!"
At first you heard not, then you raised your eyes,
Watched me a moment—and showed no surprise.

II

Such dreams we have had often, when we stood
Thought-struck amid the merciful routine,
And distance more than danger chilled the blood,
When we looked back and saw what lay between;
Like ghosts that have their portion of farewell,
Yet will be looking in on life again,
And see old faces, and have news to tell,
But no one heeds them; they are phantom men.
Now home indeed and old loves greet us back,
Yet—shall we say it?—something here we lack,
Some reach and climax we have left behind,
And something here is dead, that without sound
Moves lips at us and beckons, shadow-bound,
But what it means, we cannot call to mind.

HOSPITAL

They who look up from white beds in the ward,

slave Handless, | disfeatured, | pitifully lamed, |

hurry Seem often those whom suffering least has
marred, |

slave The body broken but the soul unmaimed. |

hurry Even it seems a richer life is theirs,

As though these shattered hours had left them
wise; |

slave Even a ghostlike smile the poor mouth wears,

As though a pleasure took them by surprise.

Is it that to have walked the road of pain,

Or fainted half-way, neighbor to the slain,

And still to be alive, makes life more sweet?

Is it, we ask, that when the reckoning calls us,

Merely to face whatever doom befalls us

Is peace of mind, and more than hands or feet?

SATAN

In the last hour, the utter lapse of time,
Shrill from the vast the voice of Satan cried—
“Hail, Lord of Heaven, Almighty Loneliness,
World-maker! thou who not in love but wrath
Didst shape this plot of sham infinitudes—
Earth, the day-fire, stars and the useless moon,
And man and creatures meaner, and called them
good!

Good for how long? Lord, Lord, shall goodness
end?

Where shines the light that healed thy want of
me,

Light-bearer once, thy shadow-bringer now?
Behold, the unsteady sun, now glow, now gloom,
Like a spent coal blown on by wind and sand,
Is quenched with sifting dust of the dead stars.
Where is that world for which the heavens
were made,

That globe unquiet of the lava-spume
Which from thine anger dript and cooled itself,
That world whereon thy breath malign, thy vast
Ponderous loom of motion, force, and rhythm
Stroking the planet-paths, at length begot
Man in thy image, infinitely small,
To squirm, and breed, and marvel at his race—
Even of us, much more of things much less,
To take the measure and impose the name,
And fear us, or desire us, or forget?
Where is that world by thee for man designed?
See where yon little whiteness near the sun
Walks virginal, a moon of innocence,
That hell reformed, which of our deathless war
Remembers nothing, nor of man's debauch
In futile lusts he never learned from me,
His godlike wallowings in the slough of love
And fattenings of his purposeless desire;
Nor of man's end remembers, nor its own
Foresees, but coldly haunts the dying sun,
Thy little world, which, being dead, is pure."

So at the vaulted shell of utmost heaven
Challenging toward the impenetrable beyond,
The eternal questioner waited upon God.
Merely to stand in that great light he strove;
Even as a bird in a strong wind pendulous
With league-long flight only his station holds,
So beating up into the sight of God
Satan no headway made, but with fierce wing
Pushing from darkness, the orbèd vacancy
Retraced of an annihilated star.
Soon, unrebuked, he shouted up through space—

“Thou who didst build this crumbling universe,
O Boaster, who wouldst bruise me with the heel
Of man, but first wouldst play me for his soul,
Alas, the pieces and the board wear out
Ere the game quite begins! Omnipotence,
Did prudence whisper thee to this shrewd end,
Or thy weak will that could not well create?
Or hast thou played, Gambler Divine, as one
Who sits no longer at a losing game,
But sweeps the board away?”

Still unperturbed

The blessed silence of the face of God
Came luminous against Satan as he strove.
He then with moderated insolence—

“Forgive, Almighty God; for well I know
Not from thy weakness flows this huge decay,
But from thy central virtue, Change. Forgive
One like me steadfast, who from star to star
Tracked in exile my yearnings and my faith,
The azure promise of my heart of light,
Eternity, that only in me was;
Whereon man gazing fed his want therewith,
Like the cool stars to endure perpetually.
How should he dream of goodness but from thee?
And this desire was good; who then but thou
Should be his everlasting, his length of days?
Thou knowest, who knowest all, in honorable
Intent the least advantage to abjure,
Though my own nature bred it, I drove out
This strong delusion from man’s clinging soul;
Me only eternal, me the evil one

He by my aid beheld; and worshiped thee
The various, the time-server, the manifold death.
Though I have helped man to a little truth,
Lord, blame not me that his excited mind
Hath thrown thee in these meshes of thyself,
Thinking, since all things alter, God must
change;

Seasons of climax limit even the arc
Of godhood, flowering ever from age to age,
Full blown, then fading, then in bud again.
But why, O Prudence, who alone art wise,
Didst thou proclaim thyself Absolute Good?
Man with his maggot reason sapped thy boast:
The perfect evil must at last be good,
The perfect good be evil, for all evolve.
Lo, man hath reconciled us, who before
Diluted never our happiness of hate—
Yea, in a twilight kinship hath confused
What in our will were strange as night and day;
Evil uprooted from me I have felt,
With alien pang some graft of goodness known,
And, though I look not on thy holy face,

Wearest thou not some scars that once were
mine?"

On venom more sinister meditative
Circlewise through wide heaven the Serpent
swayed
Cobra-headed, darting his vibrant tongue—

"The secret of thy treacherous plan for him
Did man not solve, the terminus foresee
Of breath-departed dust and cooling earth—
Unfathomable emptiness at the last?
Yea, did he not forestall thy trick, O God,
And ere his end, annihilate thee first?
For him were not all causes but deceits
Raised by mirage in his hot, barren soul,
Thou the mere shadow of his little self
Cast large in front by me, his following light?"

Wrath-wearied, yet defiant, Satan abode;
Then baffled from the eyes inscrutable
Of the First Patience and the Ultimate Good,
Into profounder hate the fiend withdrew.

PARIS, HELEN'S LOVER

I

Things of immortal beauty that are grown

Lovelier with love, with worship more divine,
Dreams that command us from the bronze or
stone,

Music that draws the heart out, line by line,
Pageants of fate that from a trivial story

Took life-blood, and on humble lips began,
And oft rehearsed, grew to heroic glory,

And speak at last the destiny of man—
“Oh shroud yourselves and be of earth again;
Will you expect a passion to sustain

Your unrelenting loveliness?” we cry,
We, frailer than our fathers, and our eyes
Look down, and ask for lowlier gods to rise—

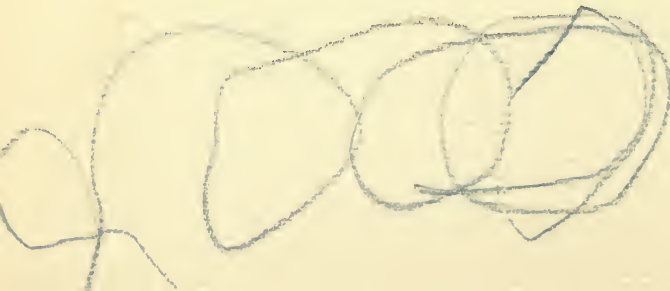
Things of immortal beauty that pass by!

II

Helen's remote forefathers would we be,
Happier the more remote, is our belief;
Excused from worship and from wonder free,
Crude beauty serves our passion rude and brief.
Such humble tribute to Oenone came
When Paris on the mountain spied her charms,
And kept his herds and followed the wild game,
And when the mood was on him, sought her
arms,
Until he saw Queen Helen in her bower,
And her imperious beauty had its power.
He knew not then his poverty of heart;
He only knew he had a way with beauty,
And kiss and touch were all a lover's duty,
And not to love too much was half his art.

III

Helen's remote forefather, when he chose
An easy mate for soul and body, learned
A faith in love that out of love arose,
And beauty kindling upon beauty burned;
Some Spartan girl he took by casual choice
Brought to the vacant shrine the sacred fire,
Some grace of body, some delight of voice,
That laid a consecration on desire.
Then on the passing rapture memory fell,
And glamour even through absence kept its spell,
And the deep-brooding intervals of passion
Glimpses of this new wonder would beget—
That beauty gives love being, and is yet
Of love sustained, and takes its form and
fashion.



IV

"Things of immortal beauty that are grown

Lovelier with love, with worship more divine,
Bring us to Helen on her queenly throne!"—

Whether this yearning stirred her ancient line,
Or only a blind fate around them played,

Fairer through generations fell their lot;
Radiant, more radiant, maid was born from maid,

And nobler lovers nobler loves begot,
Torch lighting torch; and the up-leaping flames,
All but immortal under earthly names,

Promised the things of beauty that abide—
A stream of gathered loveliness and growing,
Swifter with time and clearer from long flowing,
And toward eternal meaning drove the tide.

V

Leda at last no lover among men

Worthy to meet her loveliness could find;
It was a god, she thought, that wooed her then,
And matched her beauty with his heavenly
mind;

Her body, yielded to his bright desire,
Took whiteness from his heart, and swanlike
grace,

And, lips to lips, she learned celestial fire,
And starlike were their glances, face to face,
Till all-surrendered in delicious swoon,
Yet maiden-minded as the stately moon
That has the unceasing ardor of the sun,

She knew this miracle of ecstasy
Some birth of marvellous delight must be,
Some god-like thing exquisitely begun.

VI

Then Paris, Helen's lover, to this stream
Of loveliness unfolding, set a stay;
Led by his hand, the child of Leda's dream
Went seaward, and the sails were salt with
spray,
But ere the mariners made the happy coast,
He would have turned from Helen if he could,
He would have left her when she charmed him
most
To seek again Oenone in the wood.
For when he saw with terror open-eyed
That fixed immortal beauty by his side,
Impeccable, invincible, sublime,
He yearned for beauty of the earlier strain
That could relax a little and be plain,
And rest a lover's heart from time to time.

ASH-WEDNESDAY

After hearing a lecture on the origins of religion

Here in the lonely chapel I will wait,
Here will I rest, if any rest may be;
So fair the day is, and the hour so late,
I shall have few to share the blessed calm with
me. |

Calm and soft light, sweet inarticulate calls! |

hurry { One shallow dish of eerie golden fire
By molten chains above the altar swinging,
Draws my eyes up from the shadowed stalls
To the warm chancel-dome; |

Crag-like, the clustered organs loom,
Yet from their thunder-threatening choir
Flows but a ghostly singing—|
Half-human voices reaching home
In infinite, tremulous surge and falls. |
Light on his stops and keys,

And pallor on the player's face,
Who, listening rapt, with finger-skill to seize
The pattern of a mood's elusive grace,
Captures his spirit in an airy lace
Of fading, fading harmonies. /

anxiety { Oh, let your coolness soothe
My weariness, frail music, where you keep
Tryst with the even-fall; /
Where tone by tone you find a pathway smooth
To yonder gleaming cross, or nearer creep
Along the bronzed wall,
Where shade by shade through deeps of brown
Comes the still twilight down.

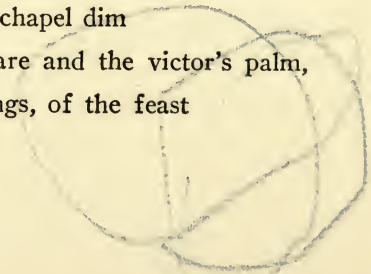
Wilt thou not rest, my thought?
Wouldst thou go back to that pain-breeding
room
Whence only by strong wrenchings thou wert
brought?
O weary, weary questionings,
Will ye pursue me to the altar rail
Where my old faith for sanctuary clings,

And back again my heart reluctant hale
Yonder, where crushed against the cheerless
wall

Tiptoe I glimpsed the tier on tier
Of faces unserene and startled eyes—
Such eyes as on grim surgeon-work are set,
On desperate out-maneuverings of doom?/

Still must I hear
The boding voice with cautious rise and fall
Tracking relentless to its lair
Each fever-bred progenitor of faith,
Each fugitive ancestral fear?
Still must I follow, as the wraith
Of antique awe toward a wreck-making beach
Drives derelict?

Nay, rest, rest, my thought,
Where long-loved sound and shadow teach
Quietness to conscience overwrought.
Hearken! The choristers, the white-robed priest,
Move through the chapel dim
Sounding of warfare and the victor's palm,
Of valiant marchings, of the feast



Spread for the pilgrim in a haven'd calm.
How on the first lips of my steadfast race
Sounded that battle hymn,
Quaint heaven-vauntings, with God's gauntlet
 flung,
To me bequeathed, from age to age,
My challenge and my heritage;
"The Lord is in His holy place"—
How in their ears the herald voice has rung!
Now will I make bright their sword,
Will pilgrim in their ancient path,
Will haunt the temple of their Lord;
Truth that is neither variable nor hath
Shadow of turning, I will find
In the wise ploddings of their faithful mind;
Or finding not, as in this frustrate hour
By questions hounded, waylaid by despair,
Yet in these uses shall I know His power,
As the warm flesh by breathing knows the air.

O futile comfort! My faith-hungry heart
Still in your sweetness tastes a poisonous sour;
Far-off, far-off I quiver 'neath the smart
Of old indignities and obscure scorn
Indelibly on man's proud spirit laid,
That now in time's ironic masquerade
Minister healing to the hurt and worn!
What are those streams that from the altar pour
Where goat and ox and human captive bled
To feed the blood-lust of the murderous priest?
I cannot see where Christ's dear love is shed,
So deep the insatiate horror washes red
Flesh-stains and frenzy-sears and gore.
Beneath that Cross, whereon His hands out-
spread,
What forest shades behold what shameful rites
Of maidenhood surrendered to the beast
In obscene worship on midsummer nights!
What imperturbable disguise
Enwraps these organs with a chaste restraint
To chant innocuous hymns and litanies
For sinner and adoring saint,

Which yet inherit like an old blood-taint
Some naked caperings in the godliest tune,—
Goat-songs and jests strong with the breath of
Pan,

That charmed the easy cow-girl and her man
In uncouth tryst beneath a scandalous moon!
Ah, could I hearken with their trust,
Or see with their pure-seeing eyes
Who of the frame of these dear mysteries
Were not too wise!

Why cannot I, as in a stronger hour,
Outface the horror that defeats me now?
Have I not reaped complacent the rich power
That harvests from this praise and bowing low?
On this strong music I have mounted up,
At yonder rail broke bread, and shared the holy
cup,
And on that cross have hung, and felt God's pain
Sorrowing, sorrowing, till the world shall end.

Not from these forms my questionings come
That serving truth are purified,
But from the truth itself, the way, the goal,
One challenge vast that strikes faith dumb—
If truth be fickle, who shall be our guide?
“Truth that is neither variable, nor hath
Shadow of turning?” Ah, where turns she not!
Where yesterday she stood,
Now the horizon empties—lo, her steps
Where yonder scholar woos, are hardly cold,
Yet shall he find her never, but the thought
Mantling within him like her blood
Shall from his eloquence fade, and leave his
words
Flavor'd with vacant quaintness for his son.
What crafty patience, scholar, hast thou used,
Useless ere it was begun—
What headless waste of wing,
Beating vainly round and round!
In no one Babel were the tongues confused,
But they who handle truth, from sound to sound
Master another speech continuously.

Deaf to familiar words, our callous ear
Will quiver to the edge of utterance strange;
When truth to God's truth-weary sight draws
near,

Cannot God see her till she suffer change?
Must ye then change, my vanished youth,
Home customs of my dreams?
Change and farewell!
Farewell, your lost phantasmic truth
That will not constant dwell,
But flees the passion of our eyes
And leaves no hint behind her
Whence she dawns or whither dies,
Or if she live at all, or only for a moment seems.

Here though I only dream I find her,
Here will I watch the twilight darken.
Yonder the scholar's voice spins on
Mesh upon mesh of loveless fate;
Here will I rest while truth deserts him still.
What hath she left thee, Brother, but thy voice?
'After her, have thy will,

And happy be thy choice!
Here rather will I rest, and harken
Voices longer dead but longer loved than thine.

Yet still my most of peace is more unrest,
As one who plods a summer road
Feels the coolness his own motion stirs,
But when he stops the dead heat smothers him,
Here in this calm my soul is weariest,
Each question with malicious goad
Pressing the choice that still my soul defers
To visioned hours not thus eclipsed and dim,
Lest in my haste I deem
That truth's invariable part
Is her eluding of man's heart.
Farewell, calm priest who paces slow
After the stalwart-marching choir!
Have men through thee taught God their dear
 desire?
Hath God through thee absolved sin?
What is thy benediction, if I go
Sore perplexed and wrought within?

Open the chapel doors, and let
Boisterous music play us out
Toward the flaring molten west
Whither the nerve-racked day is set;
Let the loud world, flooding back,
Gulf us in its hungry rout;
Rest? What part have we in rest?

Boy with the happy face and hurrying feet,
Who with thy friendly cap's salute
Sendest bright hail across the college street,
If thou couldst see my answering lips, how mute,
How loth to take thy student courtesy!
What truth have I for thee?
Rather thy wisdom, lad, impart,
Share thy gift of strength with me,
Still with the past I wrestle, but the future girds
thy heart.
Clutter of stubborn yesterdays that clothe us like
a shell,
Thy spirit sloughs their bondage off, to walk
new-born and free.

All things the human heart hath learned—God,
Heaven, earth and hell—

Thou weighest not for what they were, but what
they still may be.

Whether the scholar delve and mine for faith-
wreck buried deep,

Or the priest his rules and holy rites, letter and
spirit, keep,

Toil or trust in breathless dust, they shall starve
at last for truth;

Scholar and priest shall live from thee, who art
eternal youth.

Holier if thou dost tread it, every path the
prophets trod;

Clearer where thou dost worship, rise the ancient
hymns to God;

Not by the priest but by thy prayers are altars
sanctified;

Strong with new love where thou dost kneel, the
cross whereon Christ died.

"TAKE NOT THY HOLY SPIRIT
FROM US"

I

Sigh and thunder, pause and roar—
Unwearied on the foam-laced shore
Since the changing tides began,
Speaks the ocean-voice to man.

How silently, ere man was made,
Up and down the long tides swayed,
Weaving under sun and moon
Song without meaning, word or tune.

II

Above the altar's silk and lawn
 The lips of patience, sorrow-drawn,
 Lean from the cross toward my heart;
 Then in His sufferings have I part.
 Of mortal sins the wounds divine
 That racked His spirit, rescue mine.
 Homeward in peace we go,—and see,
 The unmoved sexton turns the key!
 The dying Christ upon the rood
 Hangs in unworshiped solitude,
 And that which made God's mercy known
 Is loveless carving, speechless stone.

III

If our thought of them can give
 The sea its voice, the stone its word,
 So in Thy thought of us we live!
 Take not Thy Spirit from us, Lord.

CHILDHOOD

To be Himself a star most bright
To bring the wise men to His sight,
To be Himself a voice most sweet
To call the shepherds to His feet,
To be a child—it was His will,
That folk like us might find Him still.

INNKEEPER

“I said, don’t thank me. Well, if you insist,
It was my father thought of it, thank him.
I told you at the gate there was no room;
No more there is, and I will not pretend
I wanted you. I said the inn was full;
I did not say the stable was to let.”

But Joseph heard him to the end, and had
The quiet of the stars above his head,
Past midnight, in the courtyard, and replied,
“Use now what words soever, yet you were kind,
You and your father both, to shelter her,
Such kindness to remember, to tell over”—

“Man, if you can’t forget, don’t speak of it!
Don’t say you lodged with us; you don’t, you
know.

Frankly, we have a name for comfort here,
Our guests lie easy; it would hurt the house
To have you for a witness to our fare;

You are no guest, you see, you pay nothing,
We give you nothing; the stable for a night"—

Then Joseph spoke: "You have a name for
comfort;

Why not a name for kindness? I have known
No innkeeper in his high tide of trade
Take in the poor; shall I not speak of it?"

The other shook his head in slow contempt,
And threw up thin, exasperated hands:
"Who would believe you, even if you spoke?
It was our meanness, all your friends will think,
Thrust you into the stable, though you know
There was no room. But better to be frank
And take no praise for kindness we don't feel.
We've just so many rooms, and the worst is,
The gold a late guest brings won't build a room,
And the late-comer never will take no.
Innkeeper's art, I say, is keeping out;
My father's passion is for taking in.
He says a door was made to open. God!
I camp at our door, just to keep it closed.
Since the son left us, he has gone clean mad.

"His son?" asked Joseph; "Are you not his son?"

"Only the elder brother. I keep the inn.
The other was my father's son, hating
The business as my father hates it; I
By toil and thrift made fortunes for them both,
Till one fine day he said, 'Give me my portion,
Father, I must go'; he gave it, and he went,
Where, we don't know, with part of what I
earned.

Good-bye to that! But now my father grieves
And must be entertainer to the poor,
A specialist in guests who cannot pay;
Lame, halt or blind, the heathen or the strange,
We have them all in now, so they be queer.
A while ago, when your rough callers knocked,
Would I have turned a key, and past midnight,
Had I the say? Well then, I am a fool
Talking so much, so late, under the sky."

"I have troubled you; my going thanks you
best,"

And Joseph through the darkness to the stable

Door moved, a shadow and a sound of steps.
Then down the stairway of the inn a taller
Shadow, a heavier step: "Well then, what voice
Was that, my son? or was it yours I heard
Raised in rebuke? What scolding at this hour?"

"It was your stable-tenant; there he goes.
A busy night for him! His wife, you know,
Gave him a child, it must be now two hours.
That business scarcely ended, then we had
A band of shepherds banging at the gate
To inspect the baby. In they trooped, of course,
And hardly with persuasion were got out,
When comes the happy father with profuse
Thanks for the great convenience of your shed.
Here we have talked till morning, as you see;
The hour means nothing to us. I said, thank you,
Not me. He'll thank you, and I'll get to bed."

The innkeeper, remembering, to himself,
"That woman with the weary face, I knew
Needed quick shelter when I saw her first."

"I knew it too; that's why I told the man
To go elsewhere. Oh, children must be born,

And travelers must be lodged and warmed and
fed,

But how to manage both in the same place?"

He laughed, but stopped at the Innkeeper's
tone—

"You said this to the father? You could touch
His happiest moment with your selfish spleen?
It was your voice, then, sounded that tirade
To rouse the sleepers in my house! Who else
Would hurt the man? I told you when he came,
Whether or not you liked it, they should have
What we could give them, little though it were.
You could not keep them out, the inn is mine,
So you take a mean way to shade their joy!"

"We can be frank, my Father; you and I
Know where we disagree. The inn is yours—
How long it would be so I cannot tell
If all your princely humor had its way.
If food and lodging are for giving free,
Where do we get the food and roof to give?
This inn is all you have; prosperity
Never took hold here by your open hand;

And even this I made for you—I saw
That honest men were served, and what is more,
Made sure they paid like honest men. Day-long
I slave for you, at night I watch your gate,
Keeping a cat-like ear for thieves, or oft
As now awake for you almost till dawn.
You are revered for a large-hearted man,
I hated for a mean one; would they knew
What you are generous with is what I earn!
For this I have no thanks, no praise from you;
You, too, see meanness in me—but you loved
My idle brother, generous like yourself.
Know me at least, then, for sincerity;
My duty is to you, but my own thoughts
Are mine, and I have never worn a mask.
When this man offered thanks for what he got,
I told him to thank you; had I my way,
He never had come in. True, is it not?
Now I tell you what I would not tell him—
'Tis I who buy, not you, his food and straw,
The welcome you commanded. I alone
Lose sleep between two heavy days for him;

You who came quickly to reprove my speech,
Stirred not a foot to serve him, all night long."

He paused, and in the darkness the two men,
Facing each other, heard the small night-
sounds—

The breathing house—far off beyond the town
A faint call from the fields—and then a voice,
A word or two, caught through the stable door.
Stillness. In husky syllables at last
The older man half-whispered,

"Your own thoughts
Are yours; indeed, what truth you see, you tell.
By the slow turning of incessant toil,
Your unrelaxing vigilance, our wealth
Has come on us like fate inexorable.
The house itself, the habit of our trade,
My father gave me; whatever came besides,
You chiefly earned—so far, all that I have
Is yours. And were the silver in the hand
The one bright end of hospitality,
Your duty were well done, and I had failed.
Even what I give away, so far as lies

Within a trader's science to compute,
May well be something you have earned for me.
Yet if I give kind greeting, use a tone
Above the warmth the body understands,
That to the soul says hospitable things,
I part with what never belonged to you.
And if your brother had the neighbors' love
For headlong sheer delight in daily life,
Prophetic tasting of the human lot
And zest for the strong flavor of the world,
So that whoever lodged here found an eye
Kindling, an ear friendly to traveler's talk,
A heart inquisitive of space and light—
This comrade interest prodigally given
Was what you never had. Shall we be frank?
If in this course of duty you perform
The inn makes silver for us, thanks to you,
Therefore you feel some dedicated breath
Exalt your service and refine your zeal.
How know you this is duty? Who desired,
But you, to make the inn more than it was—
A house of warmth for wayfarers, a home?

Did anyone but you ask to be rich?
Who asked to be 'an innkeeper? Not I!
Nor our true boy who rose and went away;
If ever he comes back, it will not be
To rival you, nor envy the inn-trade.
When I am dead and the inn yours at last,
Do anything you like, and call it duty,
But while I live and the house bears my name,
Just for that human name I turn away
No poor soever, coming as these came—
Not while I have a stable and some straw.”

“Your human name?” the elder brother asked.
“Your human name will never profit by it;
Men being so, they never will be sure
Whether the stable was a gift of love,
You having nothing better, or a sign
Of meanness, to treat poor folk like dumb
beasts.”

“Well, have they not excuse?” his father said.
“No innkeeper was ever hospitable,
Nor ever could be, while he plied his trade,
Or if he was, it never could be known.

The least of men will share what food he has,
What roof, what fire, with whomsoe'er God
sends;

If I have food before me, and one knocks
And steps across my threshold, of that meat
I proffer him—yes, though he were my foe,
Yet if he eat with me he goes in peace,
So binding is the sacrament on mankind—
On all save innkeepers; but how on them?
Remember what you said—if they give aught,
Lodging or food or fire, how shall they earn
The things to give? No, if the innkeeper
Sits down to eat, and one knocks at the door,
He bids him in and shares the meal with him,
And makes him pay for both. Or if he show
Kindness, the rumor will be that he made
Profit no less, but handsomely disguised.
This from my youth I felt about my trade,
Your brother felt, and this you did not feel;
To go a lifetime through this happy world
And never have a friend draw to the table,
Nor casual guests at twilight in the rooms

Bidden to share the ritual of bread
And ceremony of the household wine,
But diabolic thoughts of who should pay
Must steal away the blessing. For the feast
We pay indeed—always some sacrifice,
Hardship or drudgery, buys the right to give;
But gifts cannot be sold. This many a year
I would have left the inn and fled the curse,
But old roots held me to the earth, and you
Furnished me with a duty to remain.
But when your brother asked to leave us both
I knew what called him hence, what drew him
out

To make the large escape I failed to make,
To have a free soul and a liberal heart,
And taste unsoured the natural grace of life.
He may not come again, though I shall wait,
He may not come again, he may be dead,
But some of us who breathe have never lived;
Had but this house been what a hearth should be,
He would have found a good life here."

"My father,

You are unjust, you make me out too base
And him too fine, but so you always did.
And I who toil here——”

“As you said. Enough;
Have you to rest or watch beside the gate;
No visitor I think will now invade
Your quiet.”

Ready to answer, the elder son
Thought better of it, and deliberately
Walked to his station by the gate. Straightway
His father, turning toward the stable door,
Knocked softly and turned back, and stood wait-
ing.

Into the starlit courtyard Joseph came
Quickly: “Who calls?” and the Innkeeper said,
“It is a blessing for the child, who merely
By being born puts wonder on my house.
We welcome here many a chance arrival,
Rarely a life itself.”

“You are the master?”
The other said; “I would have brought the news
Earlier of your guest, of this new life

Your mercy welcomed to a crowded world.
Your kind voice is good omen—may he find
Among men of good will his friends hereafter.
It is as though he heard and thanked you now,
So well he will remember, growing up
In the strong habit of our gratitude.”

“A son—a son.” Slowly the Innkeeper
Said the word over; “Is there an elder son?”

“There is no other.”

“The one child of your heart,
To taste your life again, the best of it,
Radiant as he lives it with the bloom
Your own days wore only in memory.
The pleasures he must come on, the delights,
The traps and tangles in the way foreseeing,
Your hand will steady him from many a fall,
Or since mistakes may have rich meaning, oft
You will look on and trust him to himself.
—What is your trade?”

“A carpenter,” he said.
“I envy you,” said the Innkeeper; “yours
Is happy trade—you build, you make us doors

That open, thresholds to be crossed, tables
For gathering round; from life to life the home
Handles your work; your carving on a chair
That had a charm, it may be, for a child—
One glimpse of it in age brings childhood back,
'And fills with spirits the old room. Your mark
Cuts deeper than you purpose. I say, the boy
Is happy, born to such a trade."

Joseph
Caught at the word—"He will not follow it!"
"Not follow it?" asked the Innkeeper. "Why
not?

Are you so soon acquainted with his mind
These first two breathing hours? Or why fore-
bode

Evil so early? Where the father's work
Is happy, it is happy for the son,
Or custom, even when the work is dull,
Sometimes compels us, and may bring content."

"I did not think of evil," Joseph said,
"Nor of the infant's will, but of my own;
For me my life is happy, yet for him

I wish far better."

"Man, if you are happy,
Nothing is better. To be content at home,
Rooted in memories, sheltered among friends,
Measuring experience by steady hours
Through broadening angles of the arc of life—
First leaning on the love that gave you birth,
Then turned away, ungraciously it seems,
Little by little, irresistibly,
To contemplate new passions of your own,
Then, meaning to be selfish, step by step
Entering by miracle of unnoticed change
The newer lives your centered love begot,
Till you awake to where your father stood
And find yourself rehearsing what he was,
Your own spontaneous acts ghostly with his—
All this to taste deliberately, and miss
None of the richness; is life more than this?"

"Seldom it is," Joseph replied, "and yet
It might be more. To keep him, as you say,
With us at home were happiness—and yet
There is another and a larger way,

If happiness is something to be shared.
Households there are where memory is grim,
And ghosts insisting and unbeautiful
Beset old age; not all fires on the hearth
Burn comfortably—too feeble, or they scorch.
There are whole lands, they say, that never had,
Like us, the light to choose a good life by,
Never found out the secret of the home,
Nor reached our usage of still moving time—
This looking back on age when we are young
And forward over youth when we are old;
No gracious art, as you to us have shown,
Of welcome and receiving, but they grope
Baffled in darkness. Why should we alone
Walk under stars? Someone must bring them
news,
Someone who merely being what we all
Might be, will loose to utterance their sleeping
Spirit, and teach their sightless eyes to see.
What miracle, if only through the world
One kind and understanding heart should go,
Spreading the temper of your own innkeeping,

Making the earth his home, from land to land
Arriving a blood-brother among men!

O were I young, with courage to begin,
Into the far countries would I journey.
The boy will do it; he will grow to this
By daily subtle promptings of the home
And hearing how the world has need of friends,
And how the nations in our time have fallen
Like an old house whose tired rafter-ends
Unwatched, dead where they touch, moulder
apart;

And how old timbers can be used again,
Yet now for lack of skill we let them lie;
And no one knows his neighbor, but suspects
Meanness, and would be safe, and bars life out.
O, if the best of us would only stand
Patient before strange doors, and knock, and
cry,

'Open, and let me in!' and stay an hour,
How startled they would whisper, 'His own folk
Are then like us? How well the youth behaves!
Good manners where he came from!' Or per-
haps,

Touched to a deeper frankness, they would say,
'Where he was bred, a blessing we have missed,
A grace, a wisdom, grows.' Would not the
thought

Pull us together with good will toward peace?
If he can spread the thought, should he stay
home?"

"The benefit you hope for will not be,
Friend carpenter—and that way should not be.
Peace at the hearth we need, and every house
Long-memored with consecrated days,
Yet if the road to wisdom is increase
Of hospitable rites and homely love,
Shall we be happier with one hearth the less,
With him a wanderer who best loves the home?
He dwelling constant had set up a lamp
Eloquent far off of a sacred fire,
But now, a wistful looker-in at doors,
A tarrier for the night, a passer-by,
He is a question poisoning their peace,
Why goodness should be exiled and astray.
For to be hospitable is sometimes sad.

Pleasant to greet the twilight guest, and open
Your life for sharing with the fire and food,
So for a moment he is of the house—
Pleasant, if in this language he can speak,
Having himself the ritual of the hearth.
But if the guest be homeless, what you do
Will be your private ceremony, rather
A cloak for queerness than a tongue to touch
Exquisitely the heart; foreigners meeting
With nod and smile, who have no other speech,
Such you will be with him; you will sit down
Inside your household words, and wish you knew
What sounds to reach him with, or shamed to be
So rich, you will touch lightly and avoid
Things precious—for you know he has no hearth,
He has begot no child, nor lived through passion
From the red kindling to the steady flame;
These are as jewels not decent to put on
Full in the open face of poverty.
So sad a presence would he be, your son,
Lover of earth and human things, yet lonely,
Being not of earth, with no part among men;

Where he was entertained, disquietude
Would linger, the pale shadow of his fate,
Something uneasy in the household ways
That till he came were natural as sunlight
And rain, and soil, and fruit, and bread, and
wine.

And he, having no home nor place in earth,
No habit of the flesh toward flesh, no sense
Of heart with kindred heartbeat keeping time,
How should he seem but vain and vanishing
Like a fine music we forget to play?
Will he be entering at all doors, yet never
Have his own door to ask the traveler in?
Will he take all, and never give again,
'And have no knowledge of the grace he spreads?
This is no joy, I say, no peace at all,
Only a wandering from the few great paths
We walk in all alike—and so to fill,
By parting more, the gulfs between us now!
This hospitable lesson you would teach
Is the one art mankind learned long ago;
Who in what foreign land, will call it news

That not the body only but the soul
Sits at the board?—or if some have not learned,
Perhaps we need the lesson close at hand.
Better to rest unshaken, and take life
One lifetime further, each where he was born,
Studying our little place to know the world
And understanding others through ourselves.
Keep the boy home, strike roots, open the door—
And have a door to open.”

“You would be right,”
Said Joseph, courteous and unconvinced,
“For other children, or for common times,
And right if all this traveling here and there
Were a retreat from what he did not love,
An exile, or a searching for delight.
Even at the best, some sorrow with high thoughts
Goes hand in hand; the healing of the world
Is costly. Yet to have seen the stars, and read
Heavenly patterns, and to prefer content—
Though one were rooted in an ancient home,
Would be to vanish like a ghost, vainer
Than music no one plays. It is his star,

His calling, his one end; this to decline,
Would be his blotting from the book of life.
What you have said to-night, how many times,
From lips how various, will he hear again—
Lips kind as yours, or treacherous with a smooth
Temptation; for to him who has a star,
Pressure to follow lowly things may prove
Fiend-counsel, caught from hell. The boy will
go.

With so much to be done, and with a way
To do it, we are not free to rest in peace.”

The Innkeeper was silent, seeing well
What end the talk had found—then softly
laughed

As at the general quaintness of the world:
“Yes, if the child is called, he will be called,
But often it is age that does the calling;
Too late grown wise, what things we left undone
We call the young to do, and our desires,
More poignant since we know our power is gone,
Sound to us like the authentic voice of heaven.
You and I argue of the boy’s career,

Who has not yet set lips on mother's milk;
It is our own lives we would live again.
You say the boy is called, as though our fate
Were grooved in orbits waiting to be filled,
And you had found for him a track that fits;
I say we call ourselves, and first the heart
Conceives whatever pattern the eye finds—
Happy indeed if we have but the will
To follow what we find, the plan we dreamed.
And this world is so poor of dreaming hearts
That one man with a plan seems sent from God.
Having the dreams God gave us, and the eyes,
Facing the chance and changes of the world
We see what we have dreamed, no more, no less;
And this is to be called. A pile of wood
Thrown pell-mell from a cart—what should it
mean
To clerk or lawyer but a pile of wood?
To you, a chair, a table, or a shelf,
What you had thought of, and the wood could
serve;
You would be called to make it. Time itself,

So much a tangle, was it ever else
Than a vast timber-pile thrown from a cart
By the great Forest-Cutter passing by?
If we but have a plan, the time comes apt—
To you, for all this journeying in the world,
To me, keeping a hearth; opening a door;
But if we have no plan, it is all blind,
A pause of blowing dust and bitter flame.
What plan will your boy have? Your plan, you
think.

Perhaps. I have known sons who would not
trace

Their fathers' pattern. Let it be his own,
Whate'er it be, the dream of his own heart;
There is no other calling—What voice was that?"

It was the elder brother from the gate:
"Knock till you're weary, then, you can't come in,
There's not a bed—What's that you're looking
for?

Not sleep! What? Wise men, are you? O,
you are!



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