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COLOMBINE

By HUGH McCRAE

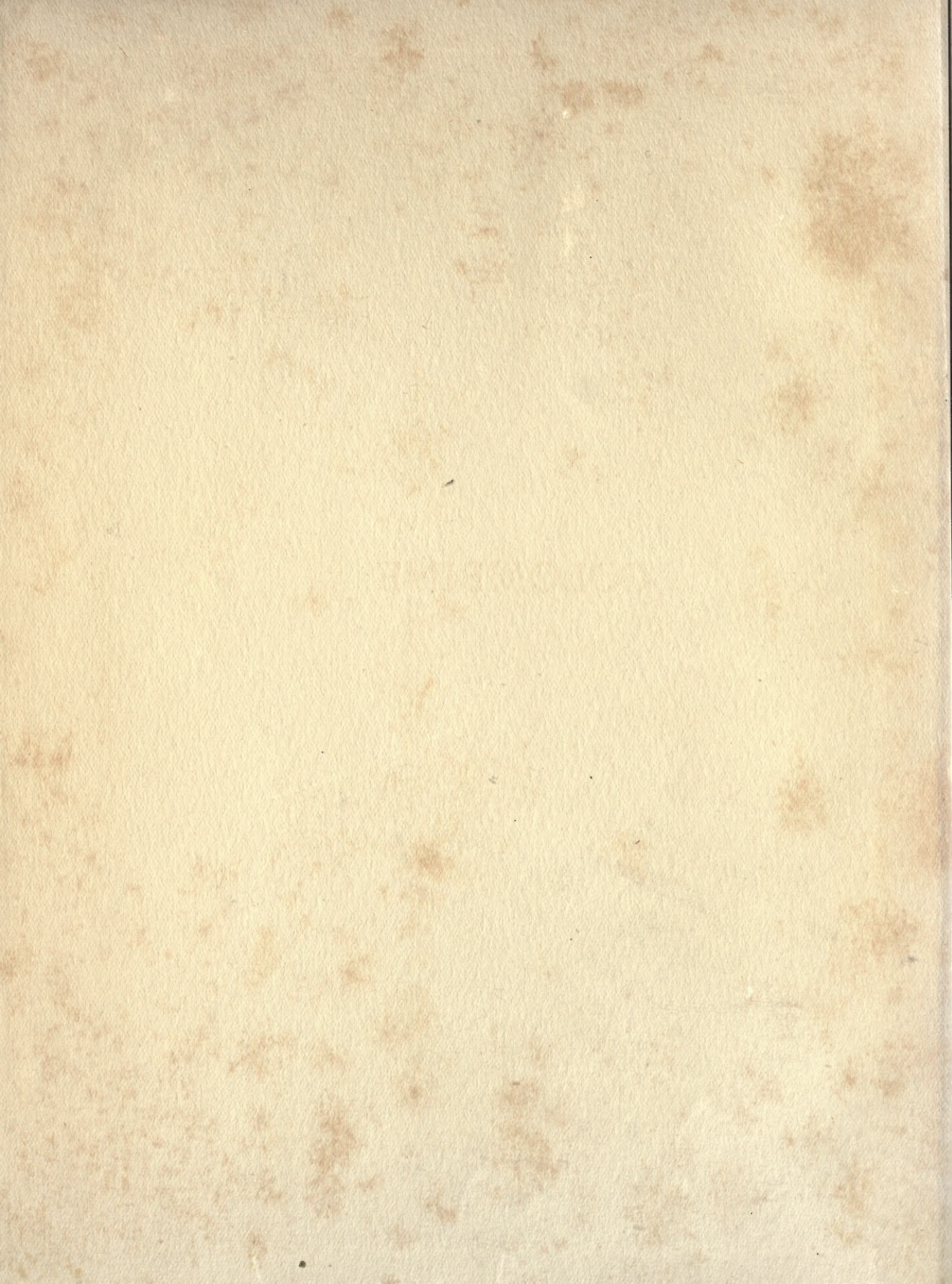


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With XI ILLUSTRATIONS by
NORMAN LINDSAY

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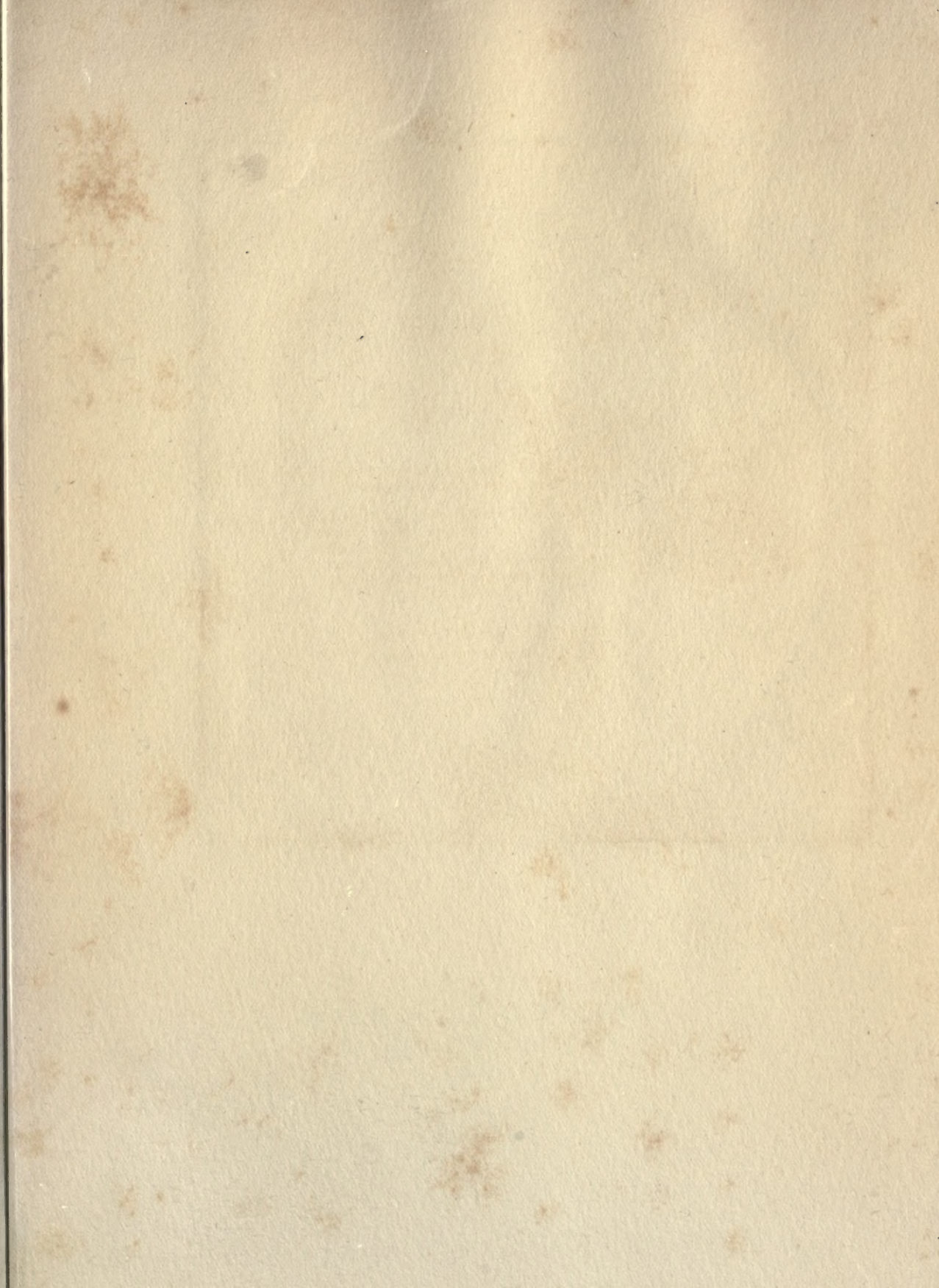


COLOMBINE

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COLOMBINE

By HUGH McCRAE
With XI ILLUSTRATIONS by
NORMAN LINDSAY

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To Norman Lindsay

"Professing thee, I lifted am aloft
Betwixt the forest wide and starrie sky."



MANY of the verses included in this volume are now printed for the first time. The author gladly acknowledges the kindness of the editors and proprietors of *The Bulletin*, *The Lone Hand* and *The Triad* in allowing republication of the remainder.



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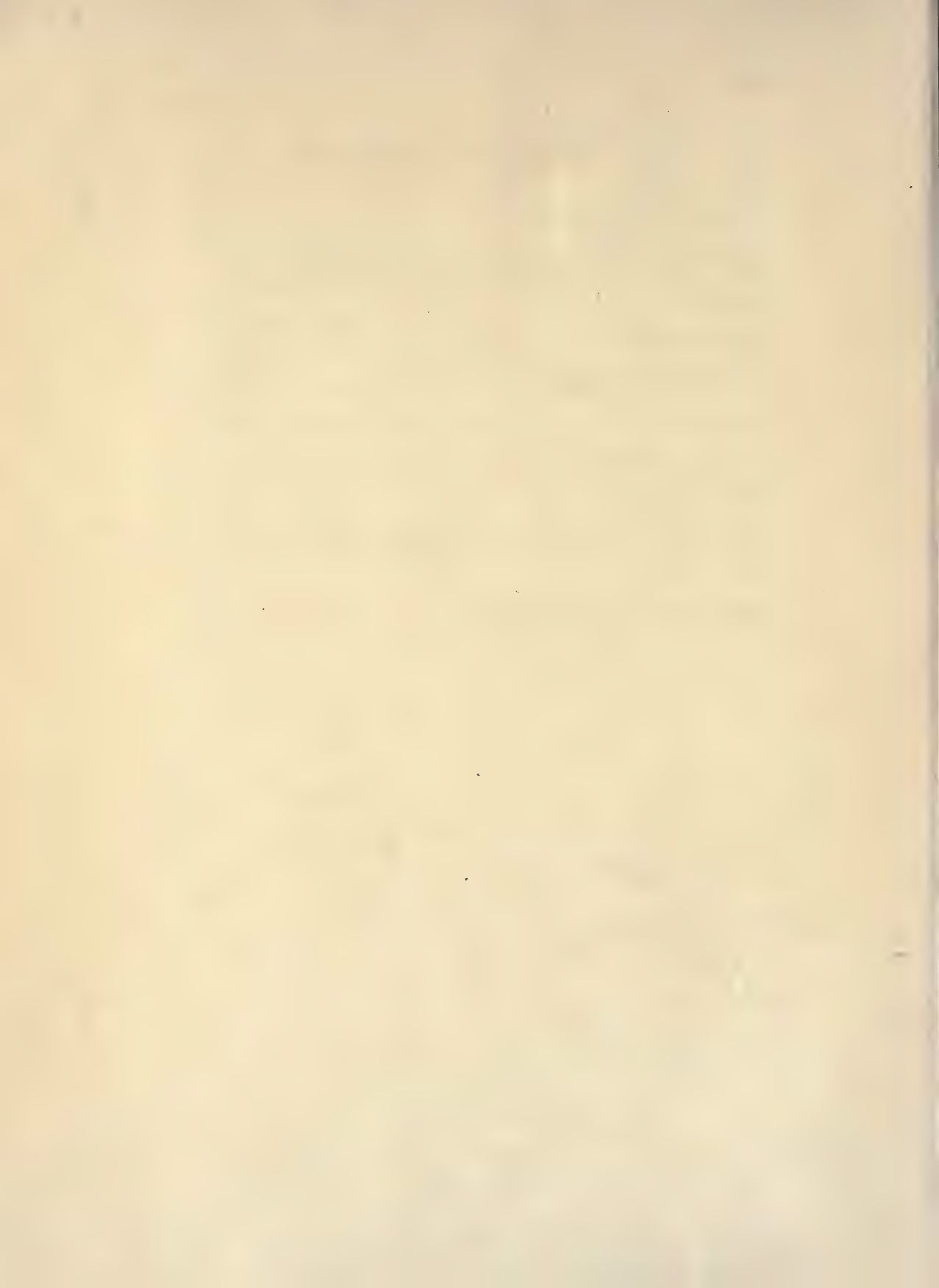
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FOREWORD

I ALWAYS think of Hugh McCrae as the painter-poet. For him, as for Gautier, the visible world exists, with the difference that the Australian poet visualizes it in lyrical effusion, sometimes fantastically. He sings matter into form; he does not shape it.

In McCrae perception is sensory. His fine rare senses divine the essence of a stimulus. His song is the joy of his discovery. "June Morning," typical of his soul and its style, is painted with the brilliant surety of a Fragonard. This is reality transfigured by feeling—life awakening with joy of life and light, colour and scent and sound.

No smoke of the literary lamp tarnishes the freshness of McCrae's inspiration. He feels. He sings. Once the song was bolder; to-day it has become more subtle; but whether inspiration comes from the clear sky or chambers haunted by the luxury of Eros, the poet's song preserves the first warmth, the first intensity of his sense impression.

What a delicate, almost spiritual, thing is this newest *Fête Galante*—Colombine! You can compare it with nothing in art but a Venetian etching by Whistler, only that the aroma of the poem floats and faints in an ecstasy more strange.

Here he has thrown his Pandean pipes aside and blown his song upon a silver flute, long lost in a garden of Cythera by one of the Italian comedians of Watteau. How gay, yet how deliciously sad is the passage of this divine thing! Such a poem is the crown of art. It has been breathed upon the paper as from the mouth of a god, and has taken shape by that miracle which is art.

Hugh McCrae, because of his high emotional sensitiveness, his swift technical achievement, and because long intervals separate his poetic impulses, has suffered from the melancholia which is the heritage of mind. But never has he given to art anything but his passionate belief in beauty, for he has the high courage of the true artist. I love his gallantry, his strange and exquisite taste, the passion of his touch. Brave and joyous, he goes his free way singing, unmindful of Fate's despite or of a world that scarcely heeds the beauty and wonder of his song.

LIONEL LINDSAY

COLOMBINE



COLOMBINE

EXIT the ribald clown—
Enter like bubbling wine,
Lighter than thistle-down,
Sweet little Colombine.

Whisht! and behold the game,
Long eyes and pointed chin;
Paler than candle-flame,
At her feet Harlequin.

Look how their shadows run,
Swift as she flies from him!—
Moths in the morning sun,
Out of a garden dim.

Faint through the fluttering
Fall of a flute divine,
Softly the 'cellos sing:
“*Colombine, Colombine.*”

.

Softly the 'cellos sing :
“*Colombine*” . . .
“*Colombine*” . . .

NOW DO THE ENTERING- TRUMPETS SOUND

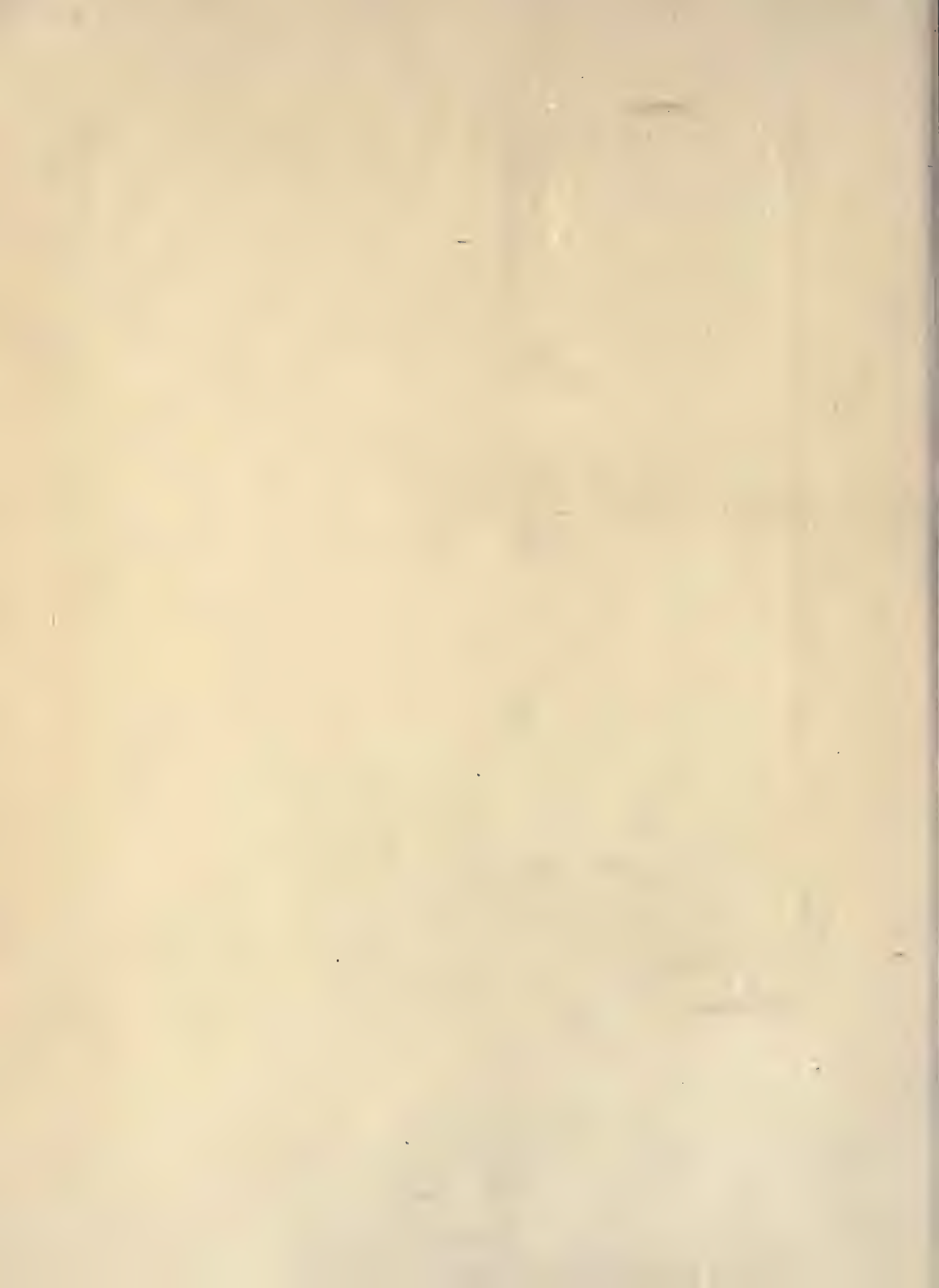
O H, have you seen the red fire burn? . . .
From Shooting Hill I saw the flame,
Blood-dropping, like a dragon turn
Mid-over Castle Corrilame.

And scattered down the river-bank,
The thin white thirsty stars
Dabbled the water while they drank
Between their vizor-bars.

A thousand men are on the hill,
A thousand tread the vale
In Almaine rivets, hake and bill,
From Finch to Borrowdale.

Too late old Upwell smells the pitch,
The thorns and straws that bite his gate,
What 'vails him now the foreign bitch,
Her curls of gold and fat estate?





NOW DO THE ENTERING-TRUMPETS
SOUND—*Continued*

A cannon-stone by lucky stroke
Hath split his tower-bell,
The pluckt heads on the portcul post
Fry crisp in fire of Hell.

By Peter's face, I'd give this hand
To steek him in his den,
Who brake my back and pilled my land . . .
And, worse, among his men

Did halve my women for their lust;
I saw one's creeping eyes
Steal down my wife . . . *once* did I thrust;
There, where he fell, he lies.

Now do the entering-trumpets sound,
The young Lord goeth in,
All wreathed in smiles and clean of wound
As e're his heart of sin.

NOW DO THE ENTERING-TRUMPETS
SOUND—*Continued*

Again he cometh out, this Lord,
As went he in, secure ;
But, swinging at his saddle-board,
Old Upwell's head for sure.

His milk-white steed doth seem a cloud
But newly 'scaped from Heaven,
The sparks that blow about her hooves
Red stars down driven.

THE MUSIC OF THE MOON

I WHO, awake, have never heard
The magic nightingale on earth,
This eve, in dream, beheld the moon
Lift, like a bell, its round white girth
All garlanded with cherubim ;
And, from its mouth, there came a stream
Of such sweet ringing that I sank
Faint on my pillow ; while a gleam
Of lovely splendour o'er the night
Bloomed, as a flower, in the bell,
And shewed the swaying tongue within,
The old world Grecian Philomel.

JUNE MORNING

THE twisted apple, with rain and magian fire
Caught in its branches from the early dawn,
I, from my bed, through the fogged pane see, and desire
Of its sharp sweetness, something; green the lawn
And stiff with pointed spears of daffodils run wild;
The sluggard sun draws the drowned Daphne back to life—
And all the drowsy doves, brown sparrows, husband, wife,
Are stirring on the house-tops—child to early child
Coo-ee-ing and calling; blind windows open eyes . . .
And in the air the bitter fragrance floats
Of someone's gardener's pipe; I will arise
And in the stinging shower forget gold motes,
Thick pillows, blankets, books; travel the wholesome road
And give my body to the sun.

HOME - COMING

BY blink of dawn I came
Where the faint field embowers
The brown bee round with flowers,
Thorned-stalks of scented flame,
Gold cups and fluted bells,
And long flat-seeded shells,
Black earth and sweet green sleeves
Of early aspen grass.
Between the leaning leaves
I felt the soft wind pass.

O God, for this good time,
For sun and warm white rain,
For hedge and stone and grain,
My very heart doth chime—
Glad to be home again.

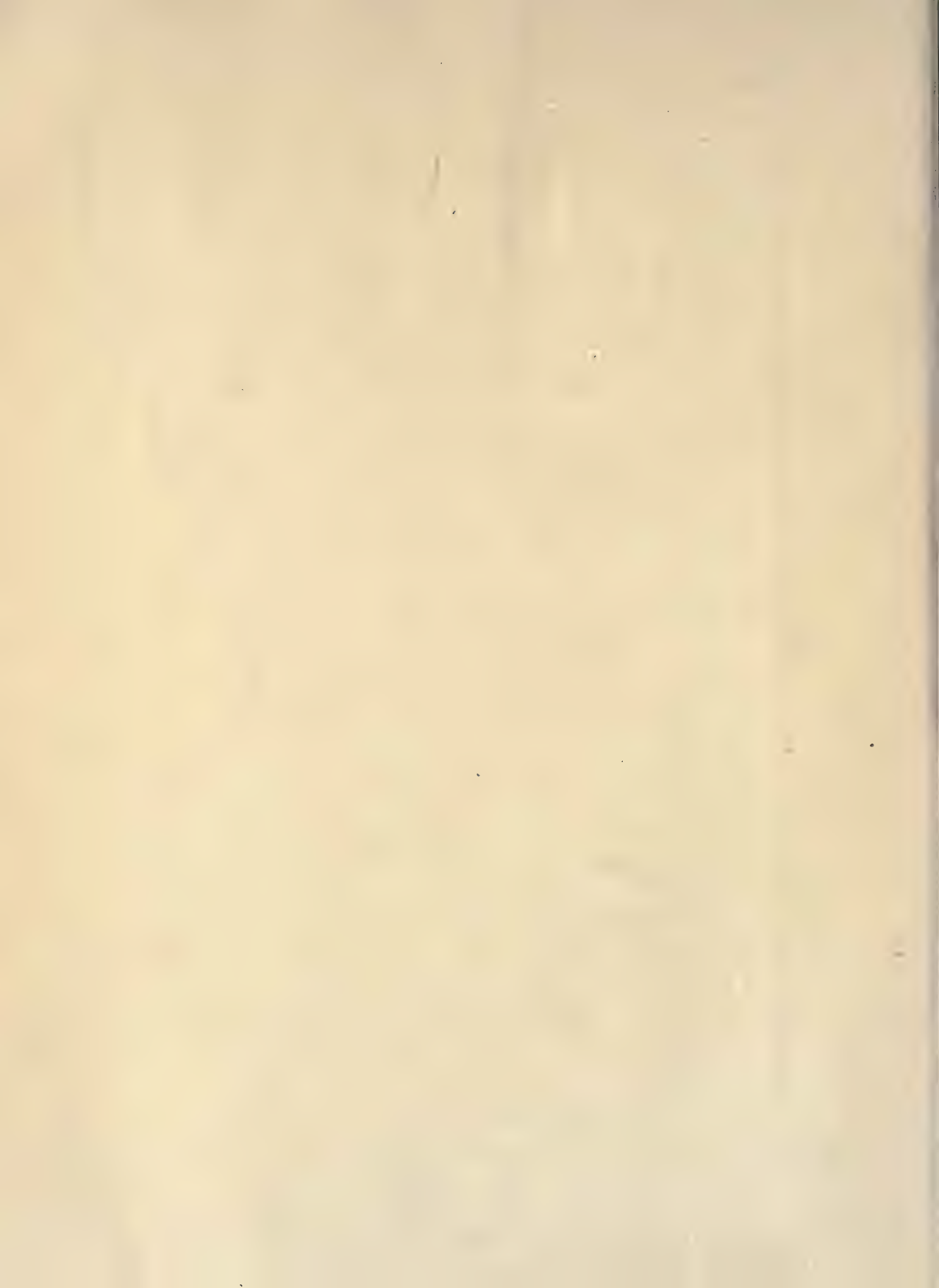
ENIGMA

I WATCH her fingers while they prance
Like little naked women, tango-mad,
Along the keys, a cup-shot dance—
Music, who'll say, more joyous or more sad?

A mystery . . . but not so strange
As she. Enigma is her pretty name ;
And, though she smiles, her veiled eyes range
Through tears of melancholy and shame.

She laughs and weeps . . . Is it because
Only to-night she gave herself to me ?
The new bud frightened to be glad . . .
The child's first vision of the insatiate sea.





WHILE THE NIGHT COMETH ON

LIKE a star made pale by the sun,
Leaping upon it at dawn,
Like a rose whose petals have run
Under the thrust of a fawn.

She for the other made place,
The old love unto the new,
And face in my heart changed face
Swifter than dew follows dew . . .

Merrily cresting the years,
Hautboy answering fife,
Tearless to challenging tears,
Steering my galley through life.

I gaze on the land I foresaw—
Inlet and desolate cape,
Now faint as the gold of a straw,
Now blue as the bloom on a grape.

And I laugh while I rise with the tide,
And sink with the tide to the sun,
My eyes to the eyes of my bride,
While the night cometh on.

AUTUMN TWILIGHT

(After *Régnier*)

WITH wan white cheeks, and hand in hand like friends,
Sorrow and Peace move softly through the shade
Of mournful darkness in the garden glade,
Where the last rose its sleeping breath suspends.

Rapt Silence sees her image (while she bends
The fountain o'er) drown in the blue cascade
Of water, drop by drop . . . The doves, dismay'd,
Are waking on the gold-leafed poplar-ends.

Tis mellow Autumn, and this twilight breeds
A phantom of dead youth that still recedes
With mocking smiles before your graveward way.

On bloomless boughs the thorn of menace grows,
And, eve by eve, the pregnant Past scowls grey,
As drop by drop, Time dwindles . . . rose by rose.

UNDER THE SKY

HERE will I lie
Under the sky,
Green trees above me,
All birds to love me . . .
Nature and I.

Wish me good den
And leave me then . . .
This sweet forest wind
Is more to my mind
Than cities or men.

And in the morn
I will see born
That doe's dappled young,
Whose father was sung
To death by the horn.

Here will I lie
Under the sky,
Green trees above me . . .
Nature and I.

FAIRY STORY

THE river is softly sighing,
And one star listens only . . .
While I, in the shadow lying,
Sigh too, for my love so lonely.

I lie in my boat 'neath the willow,
My boat that is telling the water
Of her master, this insolent fellow
Who loves a king's daughter.

When out from the bank of the river
A gentle young merrow comes swimming,
"Lover, I'll ferry you over,"
And soon we are silently skimming—

I and my boat o'er the water,
While legions of angels are ringing
Gold bells for Lenore, the king's daughter,
Whom cherubs with lanterns are bringing

To me, the insolent fellow,
To me, o'er the whispering water,
Whose house is the bole of a willow . . .
With lanterns, Lenore, the king's daughter!





SONG OF THE RAIN

NIGHT,

And the yellow pleasure of candle-light . . .

Old brown books and the kind fine face of the clock

Fogged in the veils of the fire; its cuddling tock.

The cat

Greening her eyes on the flame-litten mat;

Wickedly wakeful, she yawns at the rain

Bending the roses over the pane.

And a bird in my heart begins to sing

Over and over the same sweet thing.

“Safe in the house with my boyhood’s love,

And our children asleep in the attic above.”

TO MY MOTHER

LET the tears flow . . . far better so
Than that the heart might break
He loved, we know.

Dear, for your own sweet sake,

This comfort take :

Cometh plenty after a dearth,

Sun after rain.

Surely he'll meet you, somewhere, again,

Whether on earth

Or in the villages of Heaven,

Whose cottage-lights are dim

To us, below our swaying seven

Green-crested elm-boles. Swim

To clearest ether, on wide wings

Uplifted silently,

Companioned by the whisperings

Of angels, he

Will send to lead you through the lonely skies

Where the slim lightning, turning in his sleep,

Winks fiery eyes.

Look down and mark this earth-speck creep,

Smaller than grit.

So small is your sorrow : smaller than it.

THE MOUSE

ALL Christmas night upon the shelf,
Among the apples yellow-faced,
There played a pretty maiden mouse,
Divinely slim and very chaste.

Who, when I held my candle up,
Did wink her little eyes at me,
So mad, so bright, so mischievous,
I thought of *you*, dear Dorothy!

DESIRE FOR APATHY

AH, let me soon, as statue-like as she,
Grow deaf and dumb, and even blinder be,
Else shall I die for sharpest memory
Of how that once she spoke, and looked on me;
Yea, of my smallest words made treasury . . .
Alas, that love, full-flowing like the sea,
Must ever have its ebb . . . Dead lovers, we,
Sweet-sickened, each a living enemy.

GARSTON

July 19, 1916

THE dew hangs heavy on the twinkling stars
Of wistful jasmine round my window-bars;
Wan pictures on the drowning panels grow
More vague; and, by the darkened trees, I know
The Night hath drawn the moon into her breast . . .
As when some saddened virgin, and opprest,
Seeks in the shadow of her garden-close
The consolation of a lovely rose.

A SORCERESS

PERT Mimi and lean Polydore,
Friends both—by compact and long trial—,
Of kisses take a shameless score,
Ha-ha! beside the garden-dial!

“Ah, Mimi, might this day, this hour,
For ever be!” thus Polydore . . .
She, pensively, upon a flower
Fastens her glances all the more.

“Then have your want” . . . ’tis Mimi speaks,
“Behold, I bid the minutes stand!”
While Polydore with anxious cheeks
Awaits some hocus-pocus grand . . .

Some incantation, waxen doll,
Some priceless drop from witch’s vial—
She only hoists her parasol
Across the gnomon of the dial.



NORMAN. LINDSAY 1918



GOOD WEATHER

THIS steady wind is just the thing
The village children fancy most
To fly their kites with—such a host
Fishing for stars with bits of string!

Pale paper-boats of azure sheen
Above the melancholy sun . . .
Odd emblems of my thoughts that run,
Skyward, away from paths terrene.

My Myrtil, time it is to wend
For babes and crazy-headed men,
Sweet-lips, like you and I are, when
The fluttering crowd of kites descend.

(Queer dream ! But Myrtil swears last June
She saw the Angel of the Lord,
His fingers on the tautened cord
Guiding the super-splendent moon !)

MARGOT

DEAR Margot, in that high-backed chair,
With languid fingers trailed along
A mandoline, awakes the air
Of some delicious old-time song;

The while her Marquis, with the twigs
Outspread of her own dwarfish fan,
Upholds the burden of his wig's
Deaf opulence the best he can.

To drink the rippling roundelay—
Anon the rimes more fiercely strut,
Singing the princess, foul Ah Fay
Loved but in vain, who both arms cut

Clean from the shoulder, whence there sprung
Twin wings of flame wherewith she rose
To Buddah's bosom. The star she flung
So straight, it shattered Ah Fay's nose!





MARGOT—*Continued*

Poor Ah Fay sees more stars than one,
His thread-wide eyes begin to leak,
His spectacles with tears o'er-run
In monster spoonfuls down each cheek.

. . . .

Thus ends the song: Good Margot, yet,
Learn from your footboy, hear me swear
(More than your ape and parroquet)
I've loved you truly all this year.

LOVE'S PRISONER

BEHOLD, I am Love's prisoner—
Yet would I not go free
Though all the Queens of Nineveh
Bared golden breasts for me.

Of Nineveh and Babylon—
Of Sheba and of Spain,
I may not change with anyone
Nor wander wild again.

Like Samson, lo, my close-croppt hair—
'Twere death for me to press
Out o' the spikes while that I wear
Love's arrows on my dress.

Anon, she'll say "This caitiff dies!"—
I beg no parson preach;
Only a cup to pledge her eyes,
A kiss my dying speech.





THE MOON

HOW tenderly the evening creeps between
The fading curtain of this apple-bough,
A ghost of rose and grey, 'mid foliage green,
Jewelled with stripes of rain.

Ah, look where now,
Trembling, but joyous, like a challenged bride,
The Moon, along a bed of daffodil,
Opens a cloud against her golden side
As one expectant of her lord's sweet will.

REASSURANCE

THAT was a hare (no Satyr as you thought)
That leapt behind us when we crossed the stile;
How pale your face is by the March moon caught—
And paler for your smile!

Why needs your timid heart to flutter so?
My faith! Where does this teasing ribbon run
Provocative? . . . and what a mulish bow!
There now . . . *'tis all undone . . .*





EARTH

GREEN grows my grave in the grass,
Somewhere . . . ? Oh, let it be
Here in the land that I love,
My heart's own Italy.

The bee will hum to the bud,
And the bud will whisper to me
Of the dawn and the dew and the flood
And the season's mystery.

The song of the brook through the stones,
The song of the thrush through the tree,
Will mingle and marry and hush
With the music of moonlight and sea.

And mad with their musical chant
I know that my heaven will be
To go through the wild olden wood
Of earth-sweet memory.

SLANDER DEPICTED ON AN ANCIENT RING

IN this corroded stone a face appears,
With curled inhuman lips, and full-fleshed ears
Like trumpet-flowers up-raised for wasps of sin
And sticky-legged flies to whisper in . . .
The master, more that we might understand,
A book of mirrors set within his hand,
Composed of crooked metal, so a dove
Should see an ape ; or Love, in quest of love
Find hate . . . And, for his irreligious deeds,
Upon his heart a great soar-eagle feeds.





THE FLIGHT OF ALCIPPE

(Suggested by a Norman Lindsay pencil-drawing)

I WAS alone, and all the forest slept
The green leaves fanned the stars to brighter flame,
When suddenly two yellow flambeaux leapt
Between the branches where a figure came
Goat-footed . . . black, like Vulcan, and as lame.

.

With hideous noise he plunged into the stream,
A torch in either hand held flaming o'er his head,
The while he pricked and probed the rotted covert-bush
(Thigh-deep in bine, and dagger-bladed lily-shoots)
With hoof obscene; or snuffed, with open nostrils spread,
The living mud that wriggled round the willow roots . . .
Then paused to listen, when, in bells of plangent bronze,
Against the moon the distant clamouring of swans
Fell faintly down . . . and he, poor blank-faced Belus' son,
Across whose cheeks the gods ordained should never run
The sharp relief of tears, did cry "O Alcippe!"
"O Alcippe! . . . O star-bright little Alcippe!"

TO CECIL E.

FIE, roguish hoyden! Did you think
 Beneath a boy's name thus to hide
A woman's softness, while your pink-
 Rose cheeks begged kisses either side?

And, if a man you would be still,
 Don't ever ask to change with me . . .
For, though I played the part you fill,
 How could I live . . . yet wanting ye?





TO-DAY

THE grass has drawn its tide across thy grave,
And, like a pearl within its heart of wave,
A daisy lifts its head ;
While, sweeter than the double reeds of Pan,
Or violin of some soul-trembling man,
The river sings a-bed.

And, in the fragrant, blossom-spotted hedge,
Or where the clover ripples in the sedge,
Glisten the wings of bees.
O heart o' me, O heart o' me, my love,
Canst thou not hear the cooing, milk-white dove
Between the crested trees !

I have forgiv'n thee—And thine error, too,
I have forgot; O dear one, let me woo
Thee, as thou art, in Death.
I will thicket thy grave with roses red
And gold—with thorns to guard and buds to spread
Jewels at ev'ry breath.

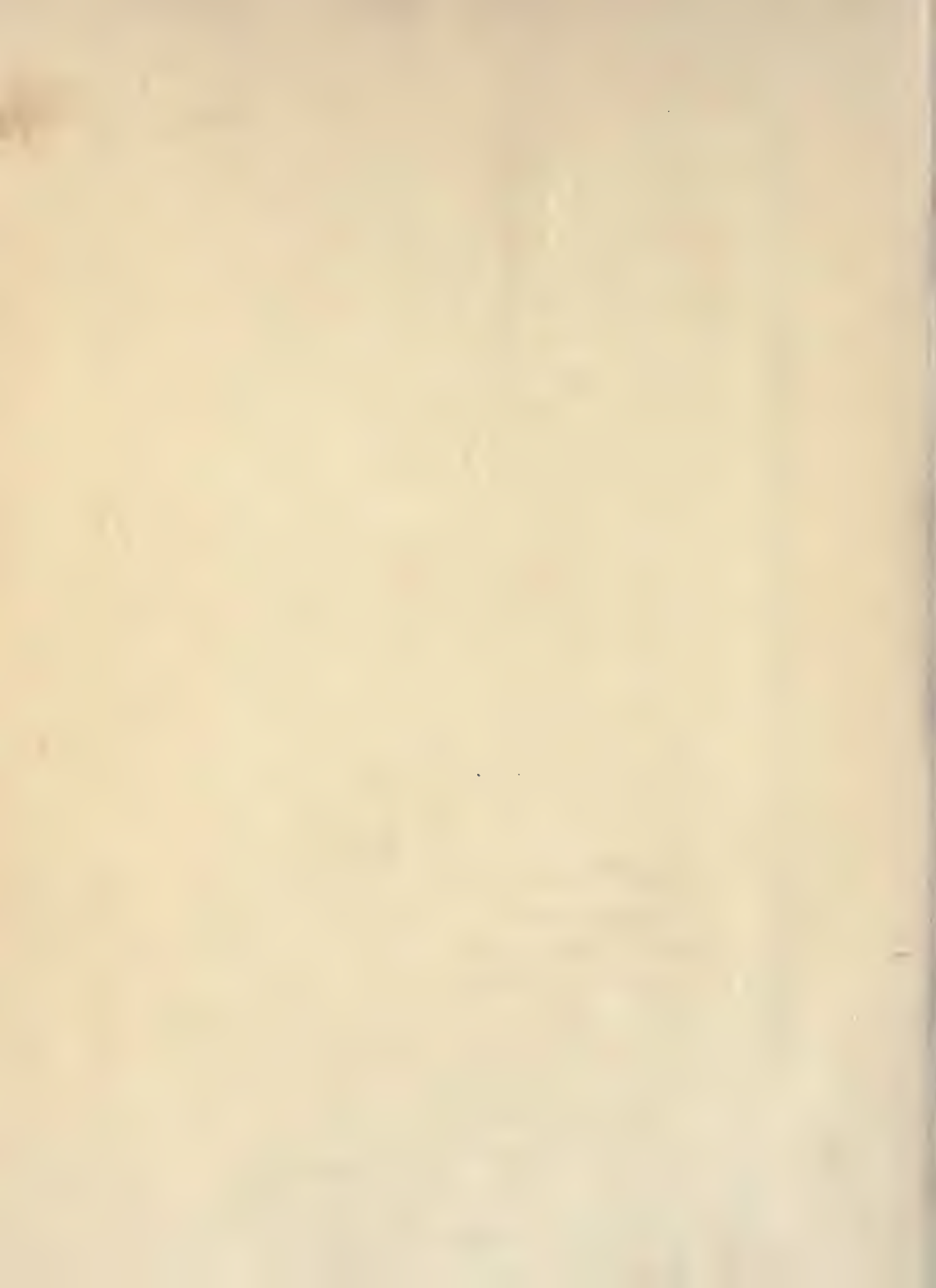
DOWN THE DIM YEARS

CLEAN running wave and sunward-soaring flower,
The great hot sky, the colours of the wood
Troubled with shadow, and the sudden shower
Of heavenly fire across the solitude
Of some green praying-place, with steps of stone
As sorrowfully white as winter moon.
The thin far calling of a trumpet blown
To dead men hunting in the afternoon.

The pink-faced boy who kissed the crying witch
Upon her wet flat mouth, and wailing went
Down into Hell . . . while she, a snuffing bitch,
This way and that bewrayed the tasselled bent,
Howling the pain of Doom.

The quiet Christ
Leading his children surely through the dark
By the clear lantern of his wounds, to tryst
With God, of men their refuge and their ark.





WINDS

THE wind takes colour from the trees ;
Through trees the wind grows green,
And like a blue wave from the seas,
The ocean wind is seen.

The red road paints the road-wind red,
And down the ripe gold corn,
The chuckling wind with golden head
Trots merrily at morn.

The black lake gives the black wind birth,
The brown breeze blows along
The ploughed brown cocked-up smoking earth
To the tune of a hunting song.

The white wind moves in the moon's white wake
With straight white streaming hair,
And ever she wails, in words that ache,
The burthen of her despair.

O gusty soul that lives within,
Why dost thou flush and fade,
Wind-like, to flame and icicle—
Red Rahab and White Maid ?



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