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Child Lovers
And other Poems
By William H. Davies
Author of "Songs of Joy," etc. etc.

London: A. C. Fifield. 1916. 1s. net.

Edward Bond

June 1916

Child Lovers, and other Poems

By the same Author

Poetry

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The Inexpressible

THINKING of my caged birds indoors,
My books, whose music serves my will ;
Which, when I bid them sing, will sing,
And when I sing myself are still ;

And that my scent is drops of ink,
Which, were my song as great as I,
Would sweeten man till he was dust,
And make the world one Araby ;

Thinking how my hot passions make
Strong floods of shallows that run cold—
Oh how I burn to make my dreams
Lighten and thunder through the world !

This Night

THIS night, as I sit here alone,
And brood on what is dead and gone,
The owl that's in this Highgate Wood,
Has found his fellow in my mood;
To every star, as it doth rise—
Oh-o-o! Oh-o-o! he shivering cries.

And, looking at the Moon this night,
There's that dark shadow in her light.
Ah! Life and Death, my fairest one,
Thy lover is a skeleton!
“And why is that?” I question—“why?”
Oh-o-o! oh-o-o! the owl doth cry.

The Visitor

SHE brings that breath, and music too,
That comes when April's days begin ;
And sweetness Autumn never had
In any bursting skin.

She's big with laughter at the breasts,
Like netted fish they leap :
Oh God, that I were far from here,
Or lying fast asleep !

April's Charms

WHEN April scatters coins of primrose gold
Among the copper leaves in thickets old,
And singing skylarks from the meadows rise,
To twinkle like black stars in sunny skies;

When I can hear the small woodpecker ring
Time on a tree for all the birds that sing;
And hear the pleasant cuckoo, loud and long—
The simple bird that thinks two notes a song;

When I can hear the woodland brook, that could
Not drown a babe, with all his threatening mood;
Upon whose banks the violets make their home,
And let a few small strawberry blossoms come:

When I go forth on such a pleasant day,
One breath outdoors takes all my care away;
It goes like heavy smoke, when flames take hold
Of wood that's green and fill a grate with gold.

Kitty and I

THE gentle wind that waves
The green boughs here and there,
Is showing how my hand
Waved Kitty's finer hair.

The Bee, when all his joints
Are clinging to a Blossom,
Is showing how I clung
To Kitty's softer bosom.

The Rill, when his sweet voice
Is hushed by water-cresses,
Is Kitty's sweeter voice
Subdued by my long kisses.

Those little stars that shine
So happy in the skies,
Are those sweet babes I saw,
Whose heaven was Kitty's eyes.

The Moon, that casts her beam
Upon the hill's dark crest,
Is Kitty's whiter arm
Across my hairy breast.

The hazel nuts, when paired
Unseen beneath the boughs,
Are Kitty and myself,
Whenever Chance allows.

Thou Comest, May

THOU comest, May, with leaves and flowers,
And nights grow short, and days grow long ;
And for thy sake in bush and tree,
The small birds sing, both old and young ;
And only I am dumb and wait
The passing of a fish-like state.

You birds, you old grandfathers now,
That have such power to welcome spring,
I, but a father in my years,
Have nothing in my mind to sing ;
My lips, like gills in deep-sea homes,
Beat time, and still no music comes.

The Hospital Waiting-Room

WE wait our turn, as still as mice,
For medicine free, and free advice :
Two mothers, and their little girls
So small—each one with flaxen curls—
And I myself, the last to come.
Now as I entered that bare room,
I was not seen or heard ; for both
The mothers—one in finest cloth,
With velvet blouse and crocheted lace,
Lips painted red, and powdered face ;
The other ragged, whose face took
Its own dull, white, and wormy look—
Exchanged a hard and bitter stare.
And both the children, sitting there,
Taking example from that sight,
Made ugly faces, full of spite.
This woman said, though not a word
From her red painted lips was heard—
“Why have I come to this, to be
In such a slattern’s company?”
The ragged woman’s look replied—
“If you can dress with so much pride,
Why are you here, so neat, and nice,
For medicine free, and free advice?”
And I, who needed richer food,
Not medicine, to help my blood ;
Who could have swallowed then a horse,
And chased its rider round the course,
Sat looking on, ashamed, perplexed,
Until a welcome voice cried—“Next !”

The White Cascade

WHAT happy mortal sees that mountain
now,

The white cascade that's shining on its brow;

The white cascade that's both a bird and star,
That has a ten-mile voice and shines as far?

Though I may never leave this land again,
Yet every spring my mind must cross the main

To hear and see that water-bird and star
That on the mountain sings, and shines so far.

The One Singer

DEAD leaves from off the tree
Make whirlpools on the ground ;
Like dogs that chase their tails,
Those leaves go round and round ;
Like birds unfledged and young,
The old bare branches cry ;
Branches that shake and bend
To feel the winds go by.

No other sound is heard,
Save from those boughs so bare—
Hark ! who sings that one song ?
'Tis Robin sings so rare.
How sweet ! like those sad tunes
In homes where grief's not known ;
Or that a blind girl sings
When she is left alone.

The Inquest

I TOOK my oath I would enquire,
Without affection, hate, or wrath,
Into the death of Ada Wright—
So help me God ! I took that oath.

When I went out to see the corpse,
The four months babe that died so young,
I judged it was seven pounds in weight,
And little more than one foot long.

One eye, that had a yellow lid,
Was shut—so was the mouth, that smiled ;
The left eye open, shining bright—
It seemed a knowing little child.

For as I looked at that one eye,
It seemed to laugh, and say with glee :
“What caused my death you’ll never know—
Perhaps my mother murdered me.”

When I went into court again,
To hear the mother’s evidence—
It was a love-child, she explained,
And smiled, for our intelligence.

“Now, Gentlemen of the Jury,” said
The coroner—“this woman’s child
By misadventure met its death.”
“Aye, aye,” said we. The mother smiled.

The Inquest

And I could see that child's one eye
Which seemed to laugh, and say with glee :
“ What caused my death you'll never know—
Perhaps my mother murdered me.”

The Two Children

“**A**H, little boy! I see
You have a wooden spade.
Into this sand you dig
So deep—for what?” I said.
“There’s more rich gold,” said he,
“Down under where I stand,
Than twenty elephants
Could move across the land.”

“Ah, little girl with wool!—
What are you making now?”
“Some stockings for a bird,
To keep his legs from snow.”
And there those children are,
So happy, small, and proud:
The boy that digs his grave,
The girl that knits her shroud.

Come, thou sweet Wonder

COME, thou sweet Wonder, by whose power
We more or less enjoy our years ;
That mak'st a child forget the breast,
And dri'st at once the children's tears,
Till sleep shall bring their minds more rest.

Come to my heavy rain of care,
And make it weigh like dew ; charm me
With Beauty's hair, her eyes or lips ;
With mountain dawn, or sunset sea
That's like a thousand burning ships.

Charms

SHE walks as lightly as the fly
Skates on the water in July.

To hear her moving petticoat,
For me is music's highest note.

Stones are not heard, when her feet pass,
No more than tumps of moss or grass.

When she sits still, she's like the flower
To be a butterfly next hour.

The brook laughs not more sweet, when he
Trips over pebbles suddenly.

My Love, like him, can whisper low—
When he comes where green cresses grow.

She rises like the lark, that hour
He goes halfway to meet a shower.

A fresher drink is in her looks
Than Nature gives me, or old books.

When I in my Love's shadow sit,
I do not miss the sun one bit.

When she is near, my arms can hold
All that's worth having in this world.

And when I know not where she is,
Nothing can come but comes amiss.

Friends

THEY'RE creeping on the stairs outside,
They're whispering soft and low ;
Now up, now down, I hear his friends,
And still they come and go.

The sweat that runs my side, from that
Hot pit beneath my shoulder,
Is not so cold as he will be,
Before the night's much older.

My fire I feed with naked hands,
No sound shall reach their ears ;
I'm moving like the careful cat,
That stalks a rat it fears.

And as his friends still come and go,
A thoughtful head is mine :
Had Life as many friends as Death,
Lord, how this world would shine !

And since I'll have so many friends,
When on my death-bed lying—
I wish my life had more love now,
And less when I am dying.

The Power of Silence

AND will she never hold her tongue,
About that feather in her hat;
Her scarf, when she has done with that,
And then the bangle on her wrist;
And is my silence meant to make
Her talk the more—the more she's kissed?

At last, with silence matching mine,
She feels the passion deep and strong,
That fears to trust a timid tongue.
Say, Love—that draws us close together—
Isn't she the very life of Death?
No more of bangle, scarf or feather.

A Mother to her Sick Child

THOU canst not understand my words,
No love for me was meant :
The smile that lately crossed thy face
Was but an accident.

The music's thine, but mine the tears
That make thy lullaby ;
To-day I'll rock thee into sleep,
To-morrow thou must die.

And when our babies sleep their last,
Like agèd dames or men,
They need nor mother's lullaby,
Nor any rocking then.

The White Monster

LAST night I saw the monster near ; the big
White monster that was like a lazy slug,
That hovered in the air, not far away,
As quiet as the black hawk seen by day.
I saw it turn its body round about,
And look my way ; I saw its big, fat snout
Turn straight towards my face, till I was one
In coldness with that statue made of stone,
The one-armed sailor seen upon my right—
With no more power than he to offer fight ;
The great white monster slug that, even then,
Killed women, children, and defenceless men.
But soon its venom was discharged, and it,
Knowing it had no more the power to spit
Death on the most defenceless English folk,
Let out a large, thick cloud of its own smoke ;
And when the smoke had cleared away from there,
I saw no sign of any monster near ;
And nothing but the stars to give alarm—
That never did the earth a moment's harm.
Oh, it was strange to see a thing like jelly,
An ugly, boneless thing all back and belly,
Among the peaceful stars—that should have been
A mile deep in the sea, and never seen :
A big, fat, lazy slug that, even then,
Killed women, children, and defenceless men.

Child Lovers

SIX summers old was she, and when she came
Her head was in an everlasting flame ;
The golden fire it licked her neck and face,
But left no mark of soot in any place.

When this young thing had seen her lover boy,
She threw her arms around his neck for joy ;
Then, paired like hazel nuts, those two were seen
To make their way towards the meadows green.

Now, to a field they came at last, which was
So full of buttercups they hid the grass ;
'Twas fit for kings to meet, and councils hold—
You never saw so fine a cloth of gold.

Then in a while they to a green park came,
A captain owned it, and they knew his name ;
And what think you those happy children saw ?
The big, black horse that once was in a war.

Now soon she tied her lover with some string,
And laughed, and danced around him in a ring ;
He, like a flower that gossamer has tied,
Stood standing quiet there, and full of pride.

Lord, how she laughed ! Her golden ringlets shook
As fast as lambs' tails, when those youngsters suck ;
Sweeter than that enchantress laughed, when she
Shut Merlin fast forever in a tree.

Child Lovers

As they went home, that little boy began :
“Love me and, when I’m a big sailor-man,
I’ll bring you home more coral, silk, and gold,
Than twenty-five four-funnelled ships could hold.

“And fifty coffins carried to their grave,
Will not have half the lilies you shall have :
Now say at once that you will be my love—
And have a pearl ten stallions could not move.”

My Lady Comes

PEACE, mournful Bee, with that
Man's deep voice from the grave :
My Lady comes, and Flowers
 Make all their colours wave ;
And joyful shivers seize
The hedges, grass and trees.

My Lady comes, and leaves
 Above her head clap hands ;
The Cow stares o'er the field,
 Up straight the Horse now stands ;
Under her loving eyes
Flowers change to butterflies.

The grass comes running up
 To kiss her coming feet ;
Then cease your grumble, Bee,
 When I my Lady meet ;
And Arch, let not your stones
Turn our soft sighs to groans.

Body and Spirit

WHO stands before me on the stairs :
Ah, is it you, my love ?
My candle-light burns through your arm,
And still thou dost not move ;
Thy body's dead, this is not you—
It is thy ghost my light burns through.

Thy spirit this : I leap the stairs,
To reach thy body's place ;
I kiss and kiss, and still there comes
No colour to thy face ;
I hug thee for one little breath—
For this is sleep, it is not death !

* * * * *

The first night she was in her grave,
And I looked in the glass,
I saw her sit upright in bed—
Without a sound it was ;
I saw her hand feel in the cloth,
To fetch a box of powder forth.

She sat and watched me all the while,
For fear I looked her way ;
I saw her powder cheek and chin,
Her fast corrupting clay ;
Then down my lady lay, and smiled—
She thought her beauty saved, poor child.

Body and Spirit

Now down the stairs I leap half-mad,
And up the street I start;
I still can see her hand at work,
And Oh, it breaks my heart:
All night behind my back I see
Her powdering, with her eyes on me.

THE END

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