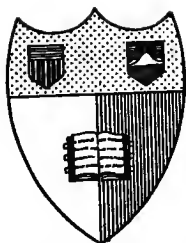


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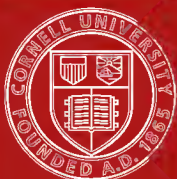
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## The Pedlar



# The Pedlar

And Other Poems

by

Ruth Manning-Sanders



London

Selwyn & Blount

York Buildings, Adelphi, W.C.2

1919

A503505

I wish to thank the Editors of *The Saturday Westminster*, *New Statesman*, and *Poetry Review* for permission to reprint some of these poems.



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## THE PEDLAR

COMING up the path behold  
A pedlar bent and very old,  
With round dark eye,  
A black bag in his small right hand,  
In his left a stout hedge wand ;  
A faded hat, a faded coat,  
And wrapped about his wizened throat  
A ragged tie.

Round his shoulders there is hung  
A scarlet wallet crosswise slung,  
And so he takes his way  
Through country roads and little town,  
Wandering up and wandering down,  
Meeting day by day,  
Labourers, tradesmen, rich men too,  
But those he greets are very few.

So oft his little eyes are bent  
Searching the ground in mild content,  
He'll not heed unless you sue,  
" Pedlar, pedlar, tell me true,  
What it is you sell."  
Then he'll smile as blessing you,  
Open his black bag and show  
Threads and buttons in a row,  
Needles and tapes as well.

Useful things for folk of earth ;  
You may buy your pennyworth  
Or nothing have :  
For a single piece of gold  
All that the black bag can hold  
You may crave—  
There's a blessing in his eye  
You shall have whate'er you buy.

But the scarlet bag shall be  
A close buckled mystery  
No man may undo ;  
Let your eye but careless stray  
Over it, he'll shake his head,  
Smile farewell as blessing you  
Whom he leaves discomforted,  
And briskly go his way.

Not for you and not for me  
Is his secret, but maybe,  
In some little town,  
At the end of one old street,  
He a traveller will meet,  
Whom beholding joyously,  
He will straight set down  
Stick and bag, and open wide  
That scarlet wallet at his side.

The treasure that he will not sell,  
What it is I cannot tell,

But I know  
'Tis for that his round black eye  
Beams with happy mystery,  
'Tis for that his blessings fall,  
Though scarce he heeds a man at all  
As searching he must go,  
Bent and old from town to town,  
Wandering up and wandering down.

## EMOTIONS

SPIRITS to whom my body's little world  
Is but a tree of rest,  
Whence birdlike free, ye rise and soar  
Each on your several quest,  
Above the heavy hills that close around  
My strip of ground :

With songs, with dreams, with visioned ecstasies,  
Ye come, when at my call  
The bright wings beat for home, with gleams  
Of music magical,  
Of shapes and hues more fair than day brings, or  
Night hungers for.

Rapturous your flight, rich your return is, yet  
A spell falls on each song,  
Each holds the word unuttered, breathed  
Where worlds of beauty throng  
Those reaches limitless to me denied,  
Unsatisfied.

Sprites of the Spring,  
Whose light wings rise,  
Whose wild hearts sing  
Shrill melodies,  
The world's a trembling soul, the air  
With joy unknown, with joy most rare  
Stirs everywhere.

Deep and more deep each pluméd breast doth  
    glow,  
Clear and more clear each song doth flow,  
For there,  
Cleaving the light-enshrouded sky,  
Loud with your rhapsody,  
The hope, the truth ye promised me,  
Draws nigh.

Hush, I would listen spirits, voice on voice  
Sweeps past me uttering  
Tense minstrelsy, bird after bird  
Escapes on eager wing ;  
I call, I call, to-night ye will not heed  
Nor stay your speed.

The air is dark with passionate flight,  
Rapid with beating sound,  
And in a wild sweet sea of sense  
My struggling thought is drowned ;  
Spirits, ah spirits, each loud crying soul  
Sweeps to one goal.

Nor shape, nor hue, nor music 'tis ye sing,  
Nor any visioned dream,  
Your gusty orchestration throbs  
The note of one strong theme ;  
Is this the hint ye gave, the bliss  
I yearned for—*this* ?

## THE WORLD

HOBBLING, hobbling, hobbling,  
I am hobbling after you,  
Up the sunny little street  
Where your merry morning feet  
Heed not what others do,  
For a fairy dress of light  
Hangs about your shoulders bright.

Darling, darling, darling,  
Come into my little shop !  
Here the light with dust is dim,  
Here your wingéd thoughts we'll trim  
To crawl and crouch and hop ;  
In my mirror you shall see  
Every soul walks crookedly.

Deary, deary, deary,  
Here's a better cloak for you ;  
You may hide your wants away  
And wrap your heart from beams of day  
In folds of solemn blue,  
And the fairy dress we'll leave  
In the chest of make-believe.

Weary, weary, weary,  
When I bow you out to-night—



Oh the puckered line of care  
Set between your eyebrows there,  
Oh mouth pulled sour and tight!—  
None shall know the little one  
When my wizardry is done.

## THE OUTSIDER

OUT in a night of cold and gloom  
I spied a little firelit room ;  
I heard the flare of flickering flame,  
Through the half-open door there came  
A ruddy glow. " Step in," cried I,  
For here within 'tis warm and dry,  
And why should my unwilling feet  
Go plodding up the splashy street ? "

So bold I went to enter, but  
The door closed softly.

I peeped in at the window-pane  
Bedrizzled o'er with falling rain ;  
Upon the hob the kettle spat,  
The quiet forms of those who sat  
Before the fire stirred not at all,  
Their shadows dancing on the wall,  
With nod and jerk and monstrous leap,  
Made merry in a wild bo-peep.  
" Good friends, pray let me in," I cried,  
For I am comfortless outside,  
Here in the mud and rain ;" but no,  
It was not of their company  
That such as I could ever be.  
Thought I to see their welcome ? Lo,  
The ruddy embers ceased to glow,  
As though my breath had blown them out ;  
The kettle with its hissing spout,

And those that sat and those that played  
Upon the wall alike did fade,  
And into nothingness and night  
Fell swiftly.

So through the darkness on I went,  
Weary and wet and discontent.

## CONSCIENCE

THOU Light from out the past, Spirit who dost  
upgather

Dead strivings, old heart bleedings, agonies  
Strewn o'er with dust of the grave,  
Dumb wrestlings and despair, Gethsemanes  
Locked secret in forgotten hearts that drave  
Their bitter bargain 'gainst sweet lustful ease—  
Conscience, whose well-trimmed lamp hath oil of  
these

Ancestral triumphs for burning, thou canst save.

There where the shade of Time's loud highway  
breaks

The sunny meads of childhood, thou dost shed  
Thy waiting lamp for souls on pilgrimage,  
And these to South, and these to North are led :—  
One 'mid the white and merciless waste of snows  
Huddled with starving comrades—that lone tent,  
Perched stiff 'mid soft destruction their one  
armament—

Lifts up his frost-scarred face and sees,  
Through the death dance of whirling atomies,  
Thy pale lamp glimmer coldly—and he goes :  
Creeps from the only comfort that he knows  
Into oblivion, so upon the morn  
His comrades, staggering on their way forlorn,

<sup>1</sup> Captain Oates.

Drag not the useless load of one nigh dead.  
The drift piles silently, and leaves no mark  
Of what vast kingliness in chilly shroud 'tis  
    folding,  
But he on us as heritage  
The burden of his honour throws,  
And with more fervent spark  
Thy quenchless lamp doth burn for our beholding.

One <sup>1</sup> when mists close at sea, and all around  
The wash of waters lifts with mournful sound,  
Rent by the roar of death's red enginry,  
Stands undismayed where corpse on corpse doth  
    heap  
The blood-slimed deck ; for through the fogs that  
    rise  
Before his steadfast dying eyes,  
Thy lantern gleams imperiously,  
Pointing the post that he must keep,  
And gilds his young devotion deathlessly.

For one <sup>2</sup> through cannon's smoke thy light will  
    break,  
And 'mong gashed forms of shell-torn dead  
Faithful he kneels, though round his 'fenceless  
    head  
Shrieks menace ; yea, a bastion he will make  
Of his own body, whilst the long hours take

<sup>1</sup> Jack Cornwall.

<sup>2</sup> An Indian private in Flanders, 1916.

Their toll of thirst and anguish, till the day sinks  
red

With slaughter round him, so he succoureth  
The captain whom he follows unto death.

And there is he hath seen thee pass afar  
Over the faint horizon, and lays down  
His tools, and hastens instant from the town,  
Lured by the flickering beauty of a star  
To scorn the gibbers in the busy street ;  
Though they with mocking fingers point the road,  
Bordered by midnight, loneliness, despair,  
Unherbaged, fruitless, barren everywhere,  
Trode by sad ghosts who reaped not what they  
sowed,

Yet on his dizzy brain thy glories beat,  
So walks he by the ray thou once hast showed  
And sets a path for following feet.

But woe to him who, when the storm bursts  
shrill

On his late flowery way, and the fierce night  
Buffets him like a fury, hails the light  
Of some red-curtained hostelry—  
Whence song and laugh float merrily  
Through glowing wide-flung doors that spill  
Their welcome on the murky atmosphere—  
Hails it and cries, " This is *thy* lamp ; lo, here  
I shelter warm till dawns some kindlier day ! "  
Ah woe, when dim and dim thy light doth sway

Down the dark rain-swept road, and fades from  
sight !

Then must thy mournful flame

Gutter for us in smoky shame ;

Nor fire, nor song, nor laugh shall bring him rest

Whose stifled soul lies shuddering in his breast.

## THE LANE

Out of the clear starlight,  
Into a tunnel of night,  
Muffling close, falling steep,  
Boughs stir above the place,  
Unseen, leaves brush my face,  
Black, remote, and deep,—  
The way leads home.

Feet grip the stony slope,  
The heart is warm with hope,  
Fearing nought, beating gay,—  
But oh, what faltering tread,  
The dark how cold and dread,  
Did this small crooked way  
*Not* lead to home !



## THE SOUL AND THE SPIRIT OF THE RACE

WHEN I went down the gallery,  
A million shapes of clay  
Stood in the selfsame way  
Upon their pedestals of ebony,  
And each one turned his solemn face  
Toward the selfsame place.

When I went into the workshop,  
There did I see—  
Gnarled as an old oak tree  
That crouches on a mountain top—  
The one who made those shapes of clay  
With faces all one way.

Oh then did I, a rebel bold,  
With dreams lit candlewise  
Before my startled eyes,  
Seize the wet clay and think to mould  
Myself that shape of wingéd thought  
Which I in vain had sought.

Lovely it grew beneath my hand,  
Fair as a spirit lit  
'Mong lost souls of the pit ;—  
I laughed to think how it would stand,  
Shaming his clumsy gallery  
Who worked, nor heeded me.

But in an hour I lay at rest,  
Hedged round by dreams,—alack  
He of the crooked back  
Came with his sour old lips compressed,  
His fingers took my lovely clay  
And turned it his own way.

## BLACKBERRY PICKERS

Low in the road under the withering hedge  
They stand, the woman dreary and thin shouldered,  
The three small ragged boys,—and the white  
faces

They lift to the high hedge are blotched with  
cold.

The autumn wind cries thinly, and dead leaves  
Shiver, and the broad highway from the town  
Is white as those white faces looking up.  
Standing a-tiptoe, straining the puny muscles  
Of naked legs, they are beating the withered  
hedge

With sticks, crying upon it to let fall  
Its scanty treasure of high-held bramble-berries.  
Slowly the fruit drops, berry after berry,  
Now red, now black, on to the dusty road,  
And thin hands snatch it all, and the little hoard  
In the basket grows, and the bony arms beat on,  
And the wind cries round them, and the dead  
leaves shiver.

And we who pass by, wonder, for we know  
How at the bend the dull white highway breaks  
Into brown tangled lanes bright-lit with gorse,  
Where over russet bracken the bramble spreads.  
Red trailing leaves, and gives her clustered fruit  
To whomso wills. 'Tis but a little way,

Do they not know? Or are those puny limbs  
Too tired to venture? Or does the withering  
    hedge  
Taunt and defy them with its high-held berries  
To spend their strength for such a poor reward?

## TO A CHILD

ONCE in a golden hour  
Spring brought a sign to you,  
For the dark house door stood open,  
And peeping through,  
Out of the solemn gloom of the hall, you found  
Daisies a-wink in the wind starring the sunflecked  
ground.

Now has destroying Time  
Shut to the heavy door  
Against you, little one ;  
And the daisied floor,  
And tracery of boughs on morning grass  
Have silent stol'n away where all things lovely  
pass.

Yet each returning Spring  
Opens with magic key  
Time's door, and small within  
You stand and see  
Where still for sign the daisied track appears,  
Spreading its wind-blown white and gold down  
all the years.

## THE OLD HORSE IN AUTUMN

Now for you again—  
Scanty blades and shrivelled clover,  
Dead leaves strewing a sad field over,  
Where you tread pools of rain,  
Trampled mud before your gate,  
A kingdom withering and desolate.

Now we shudder in dread  
Of the creeping mists, the settling night,  
The hush that wakes in a clap of fright  
When the wind groans overhead,  
Rocking branches high and stark  
That hold the stars in a net of dark.

But you with serene power,  
Having found long ago  
The way of life we may not know,  
Take the utmost of the hour,—  
Dream a dream of emerald ease  
Whilst still the sun glints through the trees.

And when through hedge stripped bare  
Thinly screams the freezing wind,  
And the hail storms race behind,  
Shrill as devils in the air,  
You will turn your back and wait  
Calmly the next move of fate.

If each melting bead  
From the tangle of your mane  
Slip, and sunbeams light again  
On your back, you will not heed  
Any thought of coming wrong,—  
Bitter night or winter long.

## BEASTS OF BURDEN

WHEN from the baby's hand they took,  
With a large gentleness,  
The tiptoe-proffered grass, and bent  
Their great dark eyes to express  
How little mind they had to do her wrong,  
These meek that are the strong ;—

Oh, then 'twas clear why the old tale  
Tells that the people's God,  
When pitying he turned from heaven  
And broke his heavy rod,  
Did choose his infant cradle should be set  
Where beasts of burden ate.

'Twas his humility, men say ;  
No, no, it was his pride,  
That none but innocence should stand  
So near the heaven-eyed ;  
And all that's vain and false should find no space  
In his first resting-place.

By such great simpleness shut out  
All save the sweet of breath,—  
No lie, no pitiful foul jest, no taunt,  
No scandal plumed for death,—  
The dim lit stable did more cleanness hold,  
Than palaces of gold.



Ah, not to them, the fretful men  
Running with eager feet  
To fetch the cross and bitter thorns  
That should their Saviour greet,  
But to the gentle ones of earth 'twas given,  
This earliest glimpse of heaven.

## THE LOVER

FOR me, your lover, life is a great room  
Scattered with your belongings, and I see  
Nothing you have not touched, and whoso comes  
Carries your messages, and who departs  
Goes on your errand. When you are away  
I gaze on your possessions and discover  
That all your hands have touched grows animate  
And is my friend, and every corner holds one,  
And the wide floor has precious litter for me.  
There is your workshop yonder ; on the table  
Lies the fine work you have delighted in,  
Beneath it the torn remnants of your failures ;  
Here by the stove your little place of rest,  
Your chair, and the book whose words were  
    written for you ;  
And there above, the loft with its small ladder  
Your feet have worn, for it is there you pray.  
And 'mid these things that I love and that love  
    me  
I sit, whilst the wind of the world goes clamouring  
Through the eaves and from the street below  
Brings stir and many voices, and I listen  
Intent upon one sound, for there is nothing  
To me so sweet as the coming of your steps.  
You come smiling,—how I love this room  
And all its dear belongings ! You come sad,  
And still I love it, and am filled with pity.  
But now you come in anger, and I hate it,

And run toward the door crying, "Escape!"  
Yet though the door is ever on the latch  
I cannot go, so many voices hold me.  
If you should go, I listen for your return.  
And if you should not return? Indeed, I know  
not,  
But I believe,—crouched 'mong my silent friends,  
Scattered as you have left them, for they are  
faithful,—  
I should sit waiting and remembering,  
And hear in all the world only the wind  
That hid the sound of your retreating footsteps.

## MUSIC

Now where the candles like two praying angels,  
Slim, white, and golden aureoled, keep back  
The endless leagues of night,  
She in a luminous ring  
Sits singing.

Her little head set slantwise, and the hair  
In short soft lines falling about her face,  
Her body lightly swaying,  
Her fingers touching the keys  
Very deftly.

The melody from out the ring of light  
Is rising pure and sufficient, and the listeners  
Thrill, crouched in darkness,  
Yet are their hearts within them  
Sad,—oh sad!

For they feel their world to be nought but  
broken pieces,  
Evil or good, 'tis nought but fragments of things ;  
And this strain of music that rises  
Triumphant into the night,  
Puts them to shame.

Not for perfection they long, for that is death ;—  
There is music beyond this strain, and beyond  
for ever,

Yet without harmony none,  
Neither strength nor completeness,  
Nor any rest.

And they who long for harmony, find a world  
Of crazed and baffling discords, and are sad,—  
Sad though the music rises  
Triumphant, sure of itself,  
Into the night.

## CLAMOUR

O BLUSTERING wind whose clamour will not rest,  
Beating against the gateway of my thought,  
O fierce insatiate sea,  
Moaning and plunging, fraught  
With death in each curled crest ;—  
Ye rioters with voices deep and shrill,  
That rudely swarm my mind's fair house to spill,  
And every wistful corner fill  
With your bleak energy :

Now I would flee from you, for now I know—  
Though here is nought but stunted turf,  
Salt with the yellow foam,  
Scum of a roaring surf—  
Inland the trees are all aglow  
With Autumn fires, whose flames, gold, brown,  
and red,  
Sparkle above the lane, and dropping spread  
Bright jewels for the passing tread  
Of feet that speed for home.

And there with dewy meditation wise  
The silent garden broods all day  
Beside a quiet stream ;  
And there against a grey  
Softly folded sky will rise  
The warmth of some late rose ; and falls a note,  
Clear, clear, from one small russet throat,  
As though through dreaming clouds there smote  
A single, sunny beam.

## A DREAM

As we sat in dim firelight,  
You and I, when starless night  
Pressed against the cottage wall,  
And the flames wrought webs of dreaming,  
Flickering silence 'twixt us, gleaming  
Threads of light and shadows small,  
That twisted into fairy ravel  
Things, by day most plain to see,—  
Sitting in this dusky-bright  
We heard a gate click in the night.  
There came no step along the gravel,  
Only soft palms feeling for  
The handle of the outer door,  
A breeze that crept along the floor,  
And standing there 'twixt you and me—  
Where the fire danced flickeringly—  
Straight and slim as any wand  
An elfin man from fairyland.

“Come,” said he, “I will show you your house.”

But sure the house was all bewitchen,  
Such ages long it took to go  
Adown the passage that you know  
Leads from the parlour to the kitchen ;  
And in the larder by the way  
Was nothing but a wisp of hay  
Set lonely on a silver platter—  
It seemed strange ceremony lent

To such a scrap of nourishment—  
And from the kitchen came a clatter,  
Growing louder, scream and chatter ;  
But when we reached the kitchen door  
It made us weep for mirth to see  
A huge slug sitting heavily  
In the fat servant's place, and there,  
Widdershins about her chair,  
A host of imps whirled, every one  
Shouting of some task undone,  
Brandishing amid the din  
Kettle, spoon, or rolling-pin.

“ Come,” said the fairy, “ I will show you your  
house.”

So small a house, and yet so thronged !  
And nothing wore its stolid face,  
And nothing stood where it belonged ;  
We scarce could find a treading place,  
For from the parlour marched a crowd  
Of footstools, chairs, and cushions proud ;  
And where the rows of books should be  
A host of wingéd creatures tried  
In vain to fly, with flap and bound  
And piteous flutter, each one tied  
Firm by the leg, and on the landing  
Where the old clock should be standing,  
A crazy hen ran round and round,  
Cackling with a note profound.



We found our clothes shrunk very small  
In a wardrobe monster tall ;  
Peeping therein we marvelled why  
These vast important cupboardings  
Were needed for such tiny things.  
We saw the bed whereon we lie  
A glowing rose, but sharp, and high  
The thorns that hedged it ; slumbering near  
Did our little babes appear  
Two cherubs, each within a cage,  
Wrought with curious subtlety,  
With iron stealth and secrecy,  
By people of a bygone age.

“ Come,” said the fairy, and he broke  
The bars, and our sweet babes awoke,  
One like a golden moon, and one  
Ruddy as the rising sun.  
We went down to the littered hall,  
We left the crazy hen to call,  
We left each struggling spirit book,  
We left the kitchen and its riot,  
And stepped out into moony quiet.  
Only in golden brazier took  
Our small hearth fire ; so hand in hand,  
Cherub babes and you and I,  
With the fairy small and spry,  
Whilst the flames danced flickeringly,  
Wandered down a ferny lee  
Into depths of fairyland.

## SHEEP

FROM right to left turning their anxious faces,  
Eyeing with greed each gap and open gateway,  
Crying mildly,  
The little flock runs onward wearily.

Behind them stalks an urchin cursing shrilly ;  
He arms his puny strength with a green branch  
Wherewith he belabours  
The woolly backs of the hindmost runners.

He swaggers in his mastery, yet he knows not  
Why he should drive them on and they be driven ;  
They are all lost,  
And their whole journey is a continual seeking.

Shapes are they moving on a road that circles  
With crusty ring a forgotten Paradise,  
And all they pass,  
Men and trees and houses, are lost as they are.

Now the trees slip away on either hand,  
And over the cobbles, between small white houses,  
Constant as rain  
Comes the quick patter of their tired hoofs.

Still they turn their patient heads and watch  
The alleys that open only to fall behind,

Lest one of these

Should hold the longed-for and mysterious ultimate.

Tongues loll out, and little knees drop heavily ;

Why must they run on a hot road for ever ?

Patience ! surely

In the end are cool winds, dewy herbage, peace.

# OLD STALWART

(AFTER AN ACCIDENT)

Now we in the small stable watched with Death,  
Death that stood hesitant, where rusty gold  
Old Stalwart's flanks gleamed dimly mid a throng  
Of crowding shadows; for the storm-lamp  
burned

Close to the harness door, and patched and barred  
And blotched, the shapes of things spread on the  
wall

And fell across the floor—and not a sound  
Save our low voices in the sleeping world.

Awhile ago was clamour when they found  
Him lying in the snow and brought him in,  
Propping him with their shoulders lest he fall,  
Shouting rough kindness to dizzy ears,  
Rallying him onward when his slipping hoofs  
Made tremulous clatter on the cobble stones,  
And his poor legs shook under him and swayed.  
At last, with roar of loud encouragement  
Crowding the stable door, pushing him in  
To the warm shelter of his little stall;  
Running for buckets, tossing down more straw,  
Telling their tale again and yet again  
To us whose hearts ached, and then, one by one,  
Shaking wise heads and shuffling off to bed.

Hour after hour beneath the lantern light,  
Crouched on our fragrant bed of hay we watched,  
And the old horse stood waiting, and Death paused,  
Half shamed it seemed to drive into the dark  
And bitter cold one who so courteously  
Waited his bidding, still, with head just bowed,  
Proudly submissive, ready. Oh, pale Death!  
Go from him, for the path thou drivest on  
Leads through the dark forever, and no sun  
Makes sweat, no rain makes cool, and eventide  
Brings not sweet rest and food, and friendly hands  
Unyoking, and the friendly tongues that praise  
This steed above all steeds, and the warm bed  
That rustles and smells good. Where thou dost  
drive

The way runs on and on through vaporous fears  
And icy mists; thy going has no sound,  
And never voice is heard along the track.  
Oh turn away and find some other steed,  
And leave to us and him the climbing sun,  
The white unfolding road, the merry bell  
That rings us to adventures new and strange,  
The grass by the roadside, the happy birds  
Rising and singing, whilst the wind blows free,  
And growing light makes silver suns to dance  
Among the trappings, and falls redly gold  
On proud curved neck, on small and shapely ears,  
On shining fetlock and loose flowing mane,  
And glads a heart too tireless and too brave  
For thy mute shapeless world, oh, barren Death!

So pleaded we, crouched on the fragrant hay  
At Death's cold feet, and the old patient horse  
Waited his word nor moved, till bustling cocks  
Crew in the yard, and dawn peered greyly in  
Through the small crooked window, and Death  
turned

And hid him in the corner, penitent.

And the old horse shifted his weight and sighed,  
Then stooped his head and drank ; and we rose up  
And shook the hay out of our clothes and stood  
Gazing each on the other, chilled and white  
And weary-eyed with watching, yet in hope.

## HORSES TO MARKET

IN the little town, now  
Is dust and smell and crowd  
Of hot angry people,  
Talking very loud,  
With jostling and swearing,  
And clattering of feet,  
And scarce a breath of air to breathe  
In all the narrow street.

But through the country roads, now  
The horses hurry down,  
Bringing all the farmer folk  
Briskly into town ;—  
Red wheels and yellow wheels,  
High wheels and low,  
Proudly and merrily .  
The scampering horses go.

And every ear is forward pricked,  
And every head held high,  
And nothing either side the road  
Escapes the wary eye  
Of cart-horse with plunging feet,  
And little horse with light,—  
Up hill and down hill,  
Prancing with delight.

Down all the lanes you see them come,  
And on the broad highway,  
Driving in processional,  
At noon on market-day.  
Oh you with your basket  
May go bustling into town,  
But I'll be underneath the hedge,  
Staring like a clown,  
To see the farmers' carts asway,  
And every horse on holiday,  
Scampering into town.



## HEIMDALL

WHEN you, in journeying, shall reach earth's end,  
And climb aloft among the shaggy hills,—  
Those patient giants, seamed and scarred with age,  
That hold the sky in their unwearied arms,—  
You antlike 'mong those huge and silent forms,  
Shall maybe, at an end of climbing, reach  
The tremulous bridge of heaven, the swinging  
    rainbow,  
Whose many-coloured pavement is the road  
Of gods, coming and going amongst men.

There shall you find old Heimdall ; still as stone,  
With eyes that never close, seeing all things,  
He sits, high warden of the bridge, which rears  
Its grey upspringing portals at his back,—  
Wide cloudy gates to shut the bright-hued  
    splendour.

His gaze is steady looking on the world,  
And he nor stirs nor speaks ; his mighty horn,  
That when it sounds, echoes through earth and  
    heaven,

Lies voiceless at his side. This is that horn  
That once or twice upon your journeying  
Has bruited on your ears, long, joyously,  
Its stirring summons ; then has your quick blood  
    leapt

To answer, and your eyes seen visions, wild,  
Lovely, and tangible, and evil seemed

A squint-eyed dream which none need reckon  
with,  
Save the sick, save the fearful, driven away  
By daylight and glad thought. But now 'tis  
silent,  
It lies in coiled sleep by him who watches,  
And Heimdall sits as carven out of stone.

He can hear all things ; the slim emerald grasses,  
Hidden in darkness, may not lift a sod  
And steal into the sunshine, but he knows.  
He hears the loom no man has ever seen,  
Wherewith small secret beings, in their caves,  
Weave from the wool no man has bought or sold,  
A dew-proof jacket for the growing lamb.  
He hears the flower fold its petals down  
Over the treasure of sunbeams in its heart,  
When evening draws the light out of the sky,  
And when a mouse stirs in the night, he knows,—  
Knows all the timid pulse throbs, the keen hunger,  
The pattering haste,—the silent glittering evil  
Waiting and watching for its certain hour.

He can see all things : mortals journeying  
Upon their zigzag course ; sees the sure goal  
Where each man's patchwork wandering, and all  
lanes  
Lead him at last, each coming to his own.  
He sees the throng of parti-coloured thoughts  
That drive him blundering on,—clumsy and loud,

They ever must be goading, though they know  
not

Which way lies heaven and which way bitterness.

He sees the glad gods tread with light swift feet

The lovely tremulous pathway out of heaven ;

He knows them as they pass in their disguise

Down to the plains to labour amongst men.

He likewise sees those shapes, awful and foul,

That in a never-ending steam of darkness

Rise from the shadowy realms of livid Death

And gather on the edges of the world

To plot out mischief. These are they would pass

Like an upsurging storm-cloud black with hate,

Over the lovely tremulous spirit bridge

And smother all the gods ;—but Heimdall watches.

And when you stand beside him, then you too

Shall see, as in a dream, the ways of men

And the strange thoughts that drive them ; and

you too

Shall see, swart gathering in a smoky ring

All round the earth the shadowy forms of death.

Then shall you grip old Heimdall by the sleeve,

And cry in deadly fear : “ Up Heimdall, up !

Blow thy horn, Heimdall, rouse the sleepy gods,

And let the clamouring echoes leap and run

Through all the earth ! See where the sons of

hell,

Dusk, shapeless giants, from the ascending smoke

Rise and alight upon the earth, and black,

In bulk on bulk of terrible array,  
Still they alight, and still the smoke ascends.—  
They crowd, they gather, and round furnaces  
Of glowering wrath they forge their deadly hate  
Into sharp swords of war ; they rank themselves  
In battle order, grim and horrible,—  
And still the smoke ascends ;—up Heimdall, up !  
Blow thy horn, Heimdall, rouse the sleepy gods ! ”

But Heimdall, though he hears and sees you, yet  
Turns not his head, nor speaks, for he has watched  
Since the beginning. Therefore, you perchance  
Will go your way in sorrow, or perchance,  
So great your fear, you will not cease to cry  
And pluck him by the arm, who never heeds,—  
Yet cease you must when Death gets hold on you.

But Heimdall still will watch with steady eyes ;  
Still hear the grasses in their emerald coats  
Steal into life ; still hear the unseen looms  
Weaving a woolly covering for the lamb ;  
Still see the bright feet of the gods, that tread  
The many-coloured pavement out of heaven  
To labour upon earth ; still watch the thoughts,  
Jostling and crowding in the brain of man ;  
And see the evil, lowering shapes that rise  
Like smoke out of the pit to stir up strife,—  
He watches till the ending of the world.

## THE IDIOT GIRL

SHE, with her old witch-face turned upward, stares,  
Frowning intent, her small hands still and folded  
Upon her snow-white pinafore that shields  
The fine red dress,—for this is Sunday evening,  
And all is swept and garnished and demure.  
The cobbled lane is clean, the court behind her  
Austere and grey, save that the lingering sunbeams  
Creep up the crooked roofs, and coax gay colours,  
Russet and blue and yellow from the slates,—  
Higher and higher scattering the bright patchwork,  
Until in ruddy flame of farewell triumph  
They light the chimney-stacks and disappear.

But she, with old witch-face, still sits intent,  
Nor heeds the sunbeams, for her mind is strained  
To listen, where adown the cobbled lane  
Drifts loud the sound of music, and of voices  
Echoing in song among the huddled houses.  
These are the wondrous voices of her kind,  
And she, shut out, listens with fierce attention,  
Like some small vulture all alert to tear  
The heart from out this bird of melody.  
Mistily, mistily through her brain it flits  
And vanishes, and peers again, and she,  
Fierce in pursuit, utters a low harsh cry,  
Though still she sits with old witch-face turned  
up,  
And the deep frown set knifelike 'tween her brows.

## THE OLD WHEELWRIGHT

ON to the grey and gaping floor, and through  
The broken window in the rough white wall,  
In long beams of moted radiance  
Falls light ; across the piled disordered bench,  
On to the yellow-handled tools, along  
Edges of steel that glitter and turn dull  
As they rise and fall ; on to the wheelwright's face,  
Lighting the folds about his smiling lips,  
Catching the rim of his glasses, making silver  
The wisps of hair about his throat and cheeks ;  
Kissing the old and busy hands, caressing  
The freckles and raised veins and broken nails ;  
Throwing bright patches on his well-worn coat,  
Nestling among curled shavings at his feet,  
Playing its golden games with dust and cobwebs,  
Pots of colour, and litter of wheels and cans,  
And new-sawn wood, and travel-shattered remnants.

Behind the sunlight a huge shadow creeps  
Among the dim-seen rafters, covering  
The further wall in darkness, muffling up  
The dull lines of a broken hearse, that peers  
Like a black monster from a cave of dreams,  
Waiting its hour. Ugly and grim it is  
And full of menace, and the shadow wraps it  
In cold terror ;—but 'neath the cobwebbed panes  
Of his small and broken window, the old man smiles  
To feel the sun warm on his skinny arms,  
And the soft creases of his puckered mouth.

## THE MORAL ROUNDABOUT

WHEN still the world—though every wile was  
tried—

Staggered the upward way, did Satan sit  
In dusky musing by the steep roadside,  
That curled in white defiance of his wit  
For ever heavenward ; and companies  
That late he left astray and desolate,  
Clambered, by rocks and crags and crevices,  
Back, ever back, to that small path and strait,  
And passed him all unheeding,—having found  
A Saviour busy on whatever ground  
They fell in bitterness. Then rose the fiend  
And robed himself in white, and, stern and calm,  
(The Saviour's image), patiently he leaned  
Hard by a signpost, there with wide-flung palm  
To show a stiff and rocky way to hell,  
And many of the good and pious fell.

But lo ! the Saviour laughed, and taking on  
The likeness of the devil, stood upon  
The other side, and into chosen ears  
Poured fruitful blasphemies. So now appears  
A crowd of white ones whom a holy devil  
Holds spellbound with appearances of evil,  
Whilst all the sooted host of saved sweep upward  
cheerily  
And drag the astonished world along to liberty.

## THE LITTLE WOOD

WHEN ye turn homeward sighing  
For the beauty that ye leave,  
'Neath the hushed sentinels that guard  
Your little wood at eve,—  
Those still grey watchers, splashed with gold,  
Facing the sun's last hold ;

Know ye, when darkness draws  
Her curtain of dreams athwart  
Your window, and the cool of sleep  
Floods o'er your tired thought,  
How fares it with the little wood,  
Left in her solitude ?

Peering amid the boughs  
The yellow moon treads low  
Her way to rest, the winds of night  
Whispering before her go ;  
The light-stirred leaves on each tall tree  
Make rustle drowsily.

All peaceful still as ye,  
Dreaming, may image it ?  
Lo, from the moon-flecked branches glide,  
Like giant moths afit,  
Dim forms, whose heavy, flapping flight  
Sounds not upon the night.



Murder ! their round eyes blaze,  
A sickle each fierce beak  
That harvests blood ; they swoop, they call  
With long exultant shriek ;  
And shrill ! shrill ! shrill ! the anguished cry  
Of small soft things that die.

Murder ! in quick lean stealth  
Slim ghostly terrors ply  
Their silent trade from brake to brake  
Where glimmering dewdrops lie ;  
And where they go, blood sullies both  
Fragrance and undergrowth.

Gently the dead leaves stir,  
They are a shield outspread  
For furry morsels ; one false move—  
Behold life forfeited !  
And should the hunter's spirit fail,  
His plucked bones tell the tale.

Oh tragic little wood !  
Beneath the night's calm breath,  
Urgent among your grey old trees,  
Passes the wizard Death,  
And all must in that play contend  
Which has one only end.

## THE MAGNET

NAKED you come, and naked go,  
Nor hold of too great worth  
The riches and the fame  
And the green ways of earth.  
So when night falls, and Life cries out adieu,  
You ask not one hour more,  
But turn from her bright door  
To hail the hooded Death that waits for you!

And thus you conquer? Nay, not so,  
Will Life your host be cheated  
Of her just dues!; though all  
Empty as dust you treated  
The jewels she held, and bore you strong and free;  
Yet hath she found a way  
Your towering pride to slay  
And bring you a weak suppliant to her knee.

Behold, stalwart and true, a friend  
She gives you. Ah, poor heart,  
Sad heart that loves and bleeds,  
Knowing that friends must part!  
In terror now you watch the sullen time  
Creep on to dusk, and cling  
Wildly to Life when ring  
The knells of Death with their insistent chime.

## MEMORY

ENTER, magician,—now the world is thine,  
Robbed of its bitterness. Within this room  
The regal sunlight, sifted from the gloom,  
Heaps up its dazzling radiance. Here the fine,  
The gorgeous, and the tender colours weave,  
Plucked from the drab, a gay magnificence ;  
And here the song is purely eloquence,  
And no false note shall make the hearer grieve.

Oh enter then, the magic gate's ajar,  
The world awaits its king, the place without  
Takes back the starveling in his ragged clout  
To lay him down where all the beggars are ;  
A passing day shall give him burial,  
With hands so nimble and with so quick zest  
That those to follow trample on his rest,  
Crowding the way to thine high festival.

Then let thy fears go howl, thy ghosts go moan,  
Straying amid the tombs of such as die,  
With pallid echo of an ancient cry,—  
'Tis but a thin and failing undertone ;  
Thou hearest not for laughter of the years  
Bright harvested, and stir of coming Spring,  
And wealth of birds whose passion bid them sing,  
And the belovéd voices of thy peers.

For all delight of all its anguish shorn,  
Thou, the magician, gave immortal breath

And pinions to outrace dull-pluméd Death,  
Clutching his shards and phantoms. Here is  
borne  
Each passing gleam that lit to alchemise  
The earth's brown face, each lovely dream that  
trod  
The greyness out of life, each friend, each god,  
And in thy magic kingdom nothing dies.

## THE YELLOWHAMMER

His little slender head  
Shone like a yellow daffodil,  
When the sun peered red  
Through the tangle on the hill,  
Illuming to misty haze  
The blossoming blackthorn maze,  
Setting the spikes of gorse ablaze,  
Then with such ardent passion he,  
From his perch above  
On the elder tree,  
Sang his little song of love  
Till his body shook with the shrill refrain,  
Over and over and over again.

Ever repeated clear,  
In rapid trill ever the same ;  
For this year as last year  
Comes Spring the eternal flame ;  
Comes the thorn a shimmer of white ;  
Comes the little wind that light  
Scatters the froth of petals bright ;  
Comes the golden-scented fire ;  
Comes the need,  
The quick desire,  
That makes of his soul a burning reed,  
Where bloweth Love his sharp refrain,  
Over and over and over again.

Then the sun died,  
And the place turned old and grim,  
And the wind rose and cried,  
Rattling in angry whim  
The dark stiff branches of thorn ;  
And up from the valley was borne  
Dust and sand drifting forlorn.  
But hiding his daffodil head  
The cold night long,  
Till the storm was sped,  
He dreamed of his love and his little song,  
How he would sing it, piercing and plain,  
Over and over and over again.

# WITCH

To C.R.

Now everything was wrong, and all our souls  
Shrivelled to tired old dwarfs, whose sunken gaze  
No torch of hope could light to kindly blaze :  
So sat they mute and helpless, though live coals  
Of anger burnt the sentences of scorn  
That leaped upon our lips, and fanned our drawn  
Quick sighs. The evening sun was in the room,  
And through wide windows wavered a small  
    breeze,  
Telling of brine and tempest-tumbled seas  
That moaned themselves to sleep. "The world's  
    a tomb,  
Stagnant and evil-smelling ; we are dead,  
And feed the worms of lust and sloth," you said.  
Then, as the chorus of our voices rose  
Scolding competitive,—for each one vied  
Some fostered grievance of his own to expose,—  
Our dreary souls sat grey and piteous eyed,  
Imploring one another ; till one fled  
And left the tongue a pendulum of lead  
Tick-tacking in a senseless monotone ;  
And one grew vicious, and with huddled leer  
Poisoned the wells of fancy, drew a jeer,  
And pricked the rest to frenzy of despair.  
And still you railed against the world and sent  
Excuse and hope and lofty argument,  
Scattering like frightened birds who feel the air

A-tremble with death's bullets ; thus elate  
You rallied us to clamour out our woe,  
Till we had torn mankind to shreds, and so  
Over the ruin paused disconsolate.

And then you played ;—oh from what stagnant  
tomb

E'er rose such vaporous sweetness, what dead  
hand

Drew forth such melodies as through the room  
Poured deep continuous power and bid expand  
Each puny one, and bid the lies be still

That flickered yet, and pierced to heaven's core  
Straight through the husk of every sullen ill,

And found the present grace as heretofore  
Moulding the world in beauty ? Oh strange witch,

Raised you such discord to compel the truth  
Our souls were famished for, and was it ruth

Or pride that rolled us in the miry ditch,  
Only to draw us forth and lend us wings ?

So were we born again with heraldings

Of music, and the evening sunlight bade

Each face be glad, and light the small breeze  
stepped,

With sound of seas that after tumult slept,  
Into the hush that fell when you had played.



## PITY

SHE is a spirit who has set her arms  
Around the world, and every hunted ill  
Draws to herself for comforting, whilst still  
She shuts the way to Hell's avenging harms.

There is no path beyond that sanctuary ;  
And though men plant thick forests of mistrust  
From end to end of the earth, and live encrust  
With the black poison of their secrecy :

And though when Truth looks down they scream  
and crowd,  
Striking at whomso stops to shade his face,  
And peer between chinked fingers at the grace  
Dazzling his rheumy eyes ; till murder's loud,

And war spreads out his iron-spitted net  
Amid the awful darkness, and they find  
Truth has withdrawn from them who willed her  
blind,  
And not a star can shine to help them,—yet,

Fleeing and crying to the world's far rim,  
Down whatso ways of ugliness they've passed,  
There's never one but falling finds at last  
The quiet arms of Pity folding him.

## INSPIRATIONS

WE mortal spirits, in great darkness set,  
Have yet our lamps of comforting, our small  
And beamy homes, whose little shinings fret  
The gloom that hems us in with heavy pall,  
And light us from our ventures in the dark  
And drive our fears away with cheery spark.

And some place many tapers here and there,  
To twinkle eyes of welcome ; and if one  
Go out, they bravely to another fare,  
Nor sit them down and weep till all be done ;  
And some have but a single taper's light,  
One fiery bud springing in wastes of night.

But unto all the Gatherer comes in turn,  
Plucking the lights up like to yellow flowers,  
Until his very raiment seems to burn,  
And from his laden arms fall flaming showers  
That splash in pools of brightness round his feet,  
Whilst the grim night before him doth retreat.

Ah! much we mourn, and yet I think he brings  
His glowing burden to a secret field,  
And there into a giant heap he flings  
The lights whose separate shining did but yield  
A hole in the dark, nor burned that dark away  
Which in full time this growing fire shall slay.

## SECRET

COME, then, this mighty secret you are clasping  
Tight to your breast encased in leaden woe—  
Who bid you take your journey laden so ?  
Who fastened down the lock there's no unhasping ?

What not yourself can peep within the cover  
For terror of the ugliness below ?  
Only with ashen cheeks for ever go  
Lonely, lest curious eyes the thing discover ?

Set down the box, here where your comrades play,  
Wrench the old key round in its bed of rust ;  
Open the lid,—and lo a little dust  
Which a light breath of laughter blows away.

## A SONG OF EARTH

THAT thin denuded ghost, the winter sun,  
Wrapped in pale melancholy as a shroud,  
Crept low through skies of dun,  
Till mist-befogged he sank in a red shame ;  
Whilst 'neath him bowed  
The stricken earth, mute-suffering, the game  
Of shouting winds and rattling storm  
That battered her still form.  
In black boughs sat the huddled birds,  
And over yellow fields the gaunt and shaggy herds  
Cropped with cold lips, the while their breath  
Hung frosted into death.

But one day, lightly wandering,  
Came a herald, scattering  
Fragrant hope ; he softly bent,  
Whispered to the earth and went.

Then came the shining armies of the Spring ;  
With tossing banners of green flecked o'er with  
light,  
Singing they came, and in a pell-mell flight  
The savage winds fled roaring, and the white  
Sad hosts of Winter's marshalling  
Swept northward without sound ;  
For o'er the desolate ground  
The radiant victors marched like flame outspread,  
And the world sprang alight with the fire of their  
passionate tread,

And the great sun burned,  
And the earth's heart yearned,  
And the old despair in a blaze of longing broke,  
And the dead awoke  
To blossom in flowers, and shed  
Their fragrance to the wind that went,  
Humming of this new wonderment,  
From field to field, gathering warm scent.

Sing, sing, sing !  
The irons are riven apart  
That clamped cold silence like a spell on every  
heart ;  
And now each budding tree  
Becomes a green and music-haunted nursery ;  
Now honied petals cling,  
Blown from their blossoming,  
About the wandering feet of lamb and ewe,  
That stray through orchard greens and glooms,  
Their warm fleece misted o'er with dew.

Now sighs of deep content  
Come from sweet mouths that crop the daisied  
mead  
Where sleek and shining herds do feed,  
And through a flower-bright world, the horse  
moves like a king ;  
With rippling muscles, and full silken throat,  
Sunshine on his glossy coat,

He goes in majesty, as though he ne'er had been  
The shaggy hollow thing  
That scraped the crusted snow for scraps of green.  
As these cold flakes by fires quick melted be,  
So from the heart of bird and beast  
Falls, heedlessly,  
Their cloak of wintry care and narrow penury.  
And Earth, in her rich motherhood, does glow  
and thrill,  
Feeding her little ones, who now may take their  
fill.

Alack, what cry  
Breaks the bright air with bitter lamentation ?  
Winter is gone, then why should want now stand  
Holding up skinny palms with wail of despera-  
tion ?  
Earth hearkens as she bends in happy dreaming  
Over her nurslings clustered in green rest,  
Where flowers, lamp-like, 'mid the grass are  
gleaming,  
Each little spirit clad in sunny vest ;  
Yea, bleak upon her joy, man's miseries  
She hears, and slowly turns, and sternly cries :

“ Again, again ! glad Spring on Spring returns,  
And still your clamour rends me as a curse  
With senseless cry for food—is it not here ?  
Have ye not hands to take ? Oh, ye perverse,

I bless you not, nor you whose cruel ease  
Battens on brother lives in ulcerous disease,  
Nor you dull slaves who minister to these,  
Who with gnarled limbs toil famished for the bread  
Ye may not touch, whose souls lie dead  
That these may surfeit having fed.

Oh terrible starved faces !  
Oh little children fallen from your sweet graces  
To blear-eyed frowsy want and pallor thin !  
Are these meet weeds to deck your bodies in,  
These sweat-stained rags, when other creatures  
shine  
In festal robes of glory and pride that honour life  
divine ?

Lo, I weep ;—  
Oh man that I nursed in ecstasy,  
Dreaming that born of thee  
A god should walk my pleasant ways,  
How bitter 'tis to sleep,  
Wrapped in the light of hope's fair prophecy,  
And waking cry for the departed rays !  
My dream is but as empty foam,  
Drifted by aimless winds from the o'erburdened  
sea  
Across a barren shore,  
Where whirls the salted sand, and brown weed  
dries,  
And life can spring no more.

Cease, cease to anger me  
With thine insensate, vexed perversity,  
Scorning the good that thou may'st see,  
Like some spoilt child that will but fret and pout ;  
Lest,—for my arms are strong,—  
I lift thee from the throng, '  
And gently from thy green home cast thee out :  
So shall the divine one be  
Born of some simpler creature, not of thee.



## WORDS

LITTLE ones, guileless ones,  
So fair and dainty,  
All the guests are gathered here,  
Come and acquaint ye.

Put on your pretty coats,  
And step ye featly ;  
Trip in a merry band,  
Welcome them sweetly.

Dance for them, play for them  
With winsome faces ;  
Sing and display for them  
All your best graces.

Smile as ye gave to them  
My heart's confiding,—  
But whisper not, breathe not  
The thought it is hiding.

## WINTER SONG

GOOD-NIGHT, good-night, the log burns low,  
The nodding shadows nod more slow,  
Lift, and fall, and die ;  
The night hangs drear,  
And the stars in fear  
Are huddled behind the sky ;  
The frail moon struggles nigh,  
Black cloud-monsters round her cling ;  
The wind's a scourge, and the waves leap bellow-  
ing.

Their falling shakes the earth,—away !  
Comfort is none. Till shivering day  
Uncurtain the cold east,  
And sleety rain descend again  
On man and labouring beast,  
This joy be ours at least :  
Through the dark night to dream of Spring,  
Whilst the sea roars, and the wind runs whinnying.

## THE ROAD

WHEN the long road ahead is dark with careering  
Shapes of evil, and a fiend walks at the side  
Of the jingling team to goad them, mad and wide  
Plunging and rearing,

Then does the soul, clutching the reins with the  
blank  
And sullen face of despair, mutter 'mid spattering  
foam  
And turmoil of hoofs and jar and rattle and clank :  
“ Home, home ! ”

Oh thou inscrutable gipsy who rememberest  
Only wandering, in the night-time when thy team  
Placidly stray through dim-lying meadows of rest,  
Dost thou dream ?

Then dost thou find the walls of thy caravan  
Open, thy lumbering house that clatters a-down  
the years  
To the jolt of the steeds their driver in secret  
fears,  
Enlarge its span ;

And set thee at last where thou hast never been,  
Oh soul ;—in the familiar place where every stone  
And bird and flower are as thy children grown ,  
And thou serene,

Beneath thy porch bid'st Change to sit him down,  
Time to take off his frayed-out sandals and forget  
The trampled roads whose quiet bourn was set  
In this fair town ?

**The  
Pedlar  
& Other  
Poems**

By Ruth  
Manning  
Sanders

—  
Selwyn  
&  
Blount





