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FORTY NEW POEMS

W. H. DAVIES

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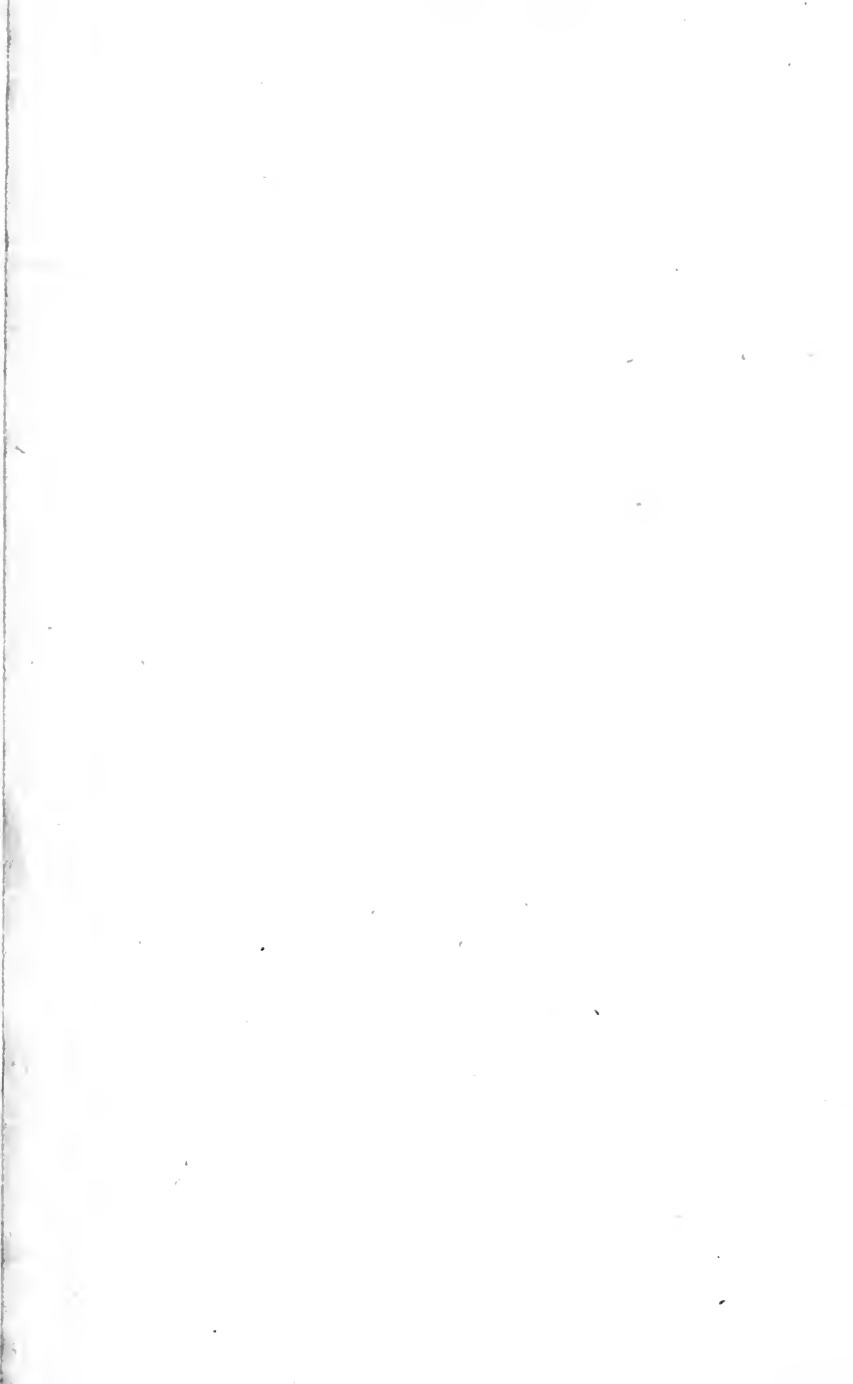
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Forty New Poems

The Works of William H. Davies

Poetry

- The Soul's Destroyer.* 1906. 4th impression. *Fifield.*
New Poems. 1907. 2nd impression. *Mathews.*
Nature Poems. 1908. 3rd impression. *Fifield.*
Farewell to Poesy. 1910. *Fifield.*
Songs of Joy. 1911. *Fifield.*
Foliage. 1913. *Mathews.*
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Forty New Poems. 1918. *Fifield.*

Prose

- The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp. With Preface by Bernard Shaw.* 1907. 4th Impression. *Fifield.*
A Pilgrimage in Wales. 1918. *Melrose.*

Forty New Poems

By

William H. Davies

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Raptures

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

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

The Voice

THE nightingale I had not heard,
Though charmed by many another bird ;
If no one tells me it is her,
How shall I know whose voice is near ?
She sings, I'm told, in some dark wood,
Ten yards of moonlight from the road.

This night, as I go forth alone,
Before the month of June has gone,
What voice is this among the trees,
So startling sweet? The matchless ease,
The passion, power that will not fail—
The nightingale ! The nightingale !

I ask no man what bird is this,
The singer of such pain and bliss ;
All other birds sing from their throats,
But from her heart come this bird's notes :
To them I give my common cheers,
But you, my love, I thank with tears.

Confession

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

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

Easter

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

My Love could Walk

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

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

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

My Old Acquaintance

WORKING her toothless gums till her sharp
chin

Could almost reach and touch her sharper nose,
These are the words my old acquaintance said :
“I have four children, all alive and well ;
My eldest girl was seventy years in March,
And though when she was born her body was
Covered all over with black hair, and long,
Which when I saw at first made me cry out,
‘Take it away, it is a monkey—ugh !’
Yet she’s as smooth and fair as any, now.
And I, who sit for hours in this green space
That has seven currents of good air, and pray
At night to Jesus and His Mother, live
In hopes to reach my ninetieth year in June.
But ere it pleases God to take my soul,
I’ll sell my fine false teeth, which cost five pounds,
Preserved in water now for twenty years,
For well I know those girls will fight for them
As soon as I am near my death ; before
My skin’s too cold to feel the feet of flies.
God bless you and good day—I wish you well.
For me, I cannot relish food, or sleep,
Till God sees fit to hold the Kaiser fast,
Stabbed, shot, or hanged—and his black soul
Sent into hell, to bubble, burn and squeal ;
Think of the price of fish—and look at bacon !”

A Winter's Night

IT is a winter's night and cold,
The wind is blowing half a gale ;
I, with a red-hot poker, stir
To take the chill off my old ale.

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

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

Birds

WHEN our two souls have left this mortal
clay,

And, seeking mine, you think that mine is
lost—

Look for me first in that Elysian glade

Where Lesbia is, for whom the birds sing most.

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

For in that month of May when leaves are
young,

Birds dream of song, and in their sleep they
sing.

And when the spring has gone and they are
dumb,

Is it not fine to watch them at their play :

Is it not fine to see a bird that tries

To stand upon the end of every spray ?

See how they tilt their pretty heads aside :

When women make that move they always
please.

What cosy homes birds make in leafy walls

That Nature's love has ruined—and the trees.

Birds

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

Jove Warns Us

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

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

The Excuse

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

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

In the Snow

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

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

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

Molly

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

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

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

Killed in Action

(Edward Thomas)

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

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

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

Lovely Dames

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

The Shameless One

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

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

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

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

Cowslips and Larks

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

We Arm to Fight

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

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

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

Forgiveness

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

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

That Day She Seized

THAT day she seized me like a bee,
To make me her weak blossom,
I felt her arms so strong that I
Lay helpless on her bosom.
But cunning I, by artful moves,
Soon had her in my power :
“ Ah, Molly, who’s the strong bee now—
And who’s the poor weak flower ? ”

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

The Bell

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

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

A Strange Meeting

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

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

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

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

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

When yon Full Moon

WHEN yon full moon's with her white fleet
of stars,

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

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

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

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

Till I Went Out

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

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

The Soul's Companions

THOUGH floods shall fail, and empty holes
Gape for the great bright eyes of seas,
And fires devour stone walls and trees—
Thou, soul of mine, dost think to live
Safe in thy light, and laugh at these ?

Thy bravery outwears all heat
And cold, all steel, all brass and stone ;
When Time has mixed my flesh and bone
With rocks and roots of common plants—
Thy shining life will not be done.

Thou hast two children : one called Hope,
The other Doubt, who will not play,
And drives that brighter child away :
How sweet this life, if Hope alone
Would walk with me from day to day !

To my Thoughts

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

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

The Holly on the Wall

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

How Late

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

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

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

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

Brothers

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

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

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

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

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

Brothers

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

Exalted Flower

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

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

What Thoughts are Mine

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

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

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

Angel and Mystery

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

They're Taxing Ale again

ALE'S no false liar ; though his mind
Has thoughts that are not clear,
His honest heart speaks boldly out,
Without reserve or fear.
Though shaky as that bird the bat,
In its first flight at night,
Yet still old Ale will stand his ground
For either wrong or right.

Though Ale is poor, he's no man's slave,
He'll neither fawn nor lick ;
He'd clap proud monarchs on the back,
And call them Ned or Dick.
They're taxing Ale again, I hear,
A penny more the can :
They're taxing poor old Ale again,
The only honest man.

The Girl is Mad

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

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

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

In Time of War

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

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

England

WE have no grass locked up in ice so fast
That cattle cut their faces and at last,
When it is reached, must lie them down and
starve,

With bleeding mouths that freeze too hard to
move.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No woman here shall wake from her night's
rest,

To find a snake is sucking at her breast.

Though I have travelled many and many a mile,

England

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

Come, let us Find

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

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

The Birds of Steel

THIS apple-tree, that once was green,
Is now a thousand flowers in one!
And, with their bags strapped to their thighs,
There's many a bee that comes for sweets,
To stretch each bag to its full size.

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

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

Rags and Bones

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

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

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

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

The Dancer

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

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

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

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

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

On hearing Mrs. Woodhouse play the Harpsichord

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

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

Passion's Greed

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

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

Late Singers

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

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

THE END

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