

THE PASSING GOD

SONGS FOR LOVERS

BY

HARRY KEMP



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THE PASSING GOD
SONGS FOR LOVERS

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THE CRY OF YOUTH. *Verses* (KENNERLY)

JUDAS. *A Play* (KENNERLY)

JOHN MERLIN, POET. *Forthcoming Autobiographic Novel* (BONI & LIVERIGHT)

THE PASSING GOD

SONGS FOR LOVERS

BY

HARRY KEMP

AUTHOR OF "THE CRY OF YOUTH," "JUDAS," ETC.

With Introduction by

RICHARD LeGALLIENNE

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THIS BOOK I DEDICATE
TO
MARY PYNE

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LOVE'S DEMOCRACY

*T*HERE is only one thing
That Slave and King
Share, beside Breath
And a Common Death —
Love, that comes
With banners and drums, —
Love, that goes
As the wind blows!

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A COMMENDATORY ADDRESS TO THE GENTLE READER

I CANNOT say whether or not Mr. Kemp has ever held up a train — though I should be very disappointed to learn authoratively that he has not. He has done so many arduous adventurous things of the kind — things that some of us dream of all our lives — that it must be merely an accident if he has not been a train-robber as well. I have met many poets, but never, so far as I know, a train-robber; and I would gladly exchange a baker's dozen of poets for one train-robber. A train-robber and a poet combined would, it seems to me, be something like a complete man. However, as I have said, Mr. Kemp, in his many manly activities, has come so near to my dream, that he quite sufficiently fills the bill.

The adventure by which he first caught the shaggy ear of the public was one of the most satisfying ever recorded of a poet. Several years ago, as his readers will recall, he stowed away on a vessel sailing to England. When, a day or two out at sea, he was brought up before the captain, after true stowaway procedure, he gave the

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unique excuse for his misdemeanor that he was a poet, anxious to visit the shrines of English poets dead and gone, but too poor to pay the passage for such a pilgrimage. The very originality of his plea seems to have won him unaccustomed consideration, and, as he was a stalwart man of his hands there was no difficulty in making him a useful member of the crew. For him to "work his passage" was mere child's-play, just an additional part of the fun. His pluck won sympathy for his plight, and, though, on landing, it was impossible to save him altogether from a week or two in an English jail (to him merely another amusing detail), the spirit of his adventure seems to have appealed to the English magistracy, and he was eventually allowed to go his way, and fulfil his boyhood's dream of visiting Westminster Abbey, Stratford-on-Avon, the Boar's Head in East-Cheap, "The Cheshire Cheese," and other such places sacred to the memory of that robust breed of English singers of the tribe of which he is authentically sealed.

Even had he been less real a poet than he is, that adventure must still have won our hearts. Placed, however, in connection with such strong and beautiful poetry as this volume contains, the

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incident has a complete fitness. It is harmoniously significant of one who is at once a man through and through, and a poet through and through — believe me, a far from usual combination. Mr. Kemp is now generally known, and referred to in the press, as “the tramp poet.” It is a designation of which he may well be proud — whatever meaning may attach to it in the minds of those who have thus labelled him. I dwell a little upon this side of Mr. Kemp’s career, because of the quite astonishing contrast — with which anyone who reads this volume cannot but immediately be surprised — between all that the term “tramp poet” connotes and the character and quality of the poems this volume contains.

Tramp-poetry one might not unnaturally expect to be the unkempt rhymings, probably in *vers libre*, of some half-educated pretender, with far more tramp in it than poetry. But, curiously enough, the exact reverse is the truth; for here is poetry, highly wrought and polished, and, while vital with original human experience, in the direct tradition of the noblest, classic, English song. You will seek in vain for the tramp; but there is not a page on which you will not find the poet.

Yet, as I have already implied, Mr. Kemp has been as sincere in one character as in the other.

COMMENDATORY ADDRESS

He has come as fairly by the honourable title of "tramp," as he has come fairly by the perhaps no less honourable title of "poet." A word or two about his life will be relevant here. Mr. Kemp was born on December 15, 1883, at Youngstown, Ohio, his forbears on his father's side being "Pennsylvania Dutch," and his mother being an Englishwoman. He left school at twelve years of age, and worked for several years in the Arlington celluloid factory. At sixteen, he ran away to sea, shipping as cattleman, on board a German ship, bound for Australia. Soon after he turned up in China, during the Boxer rebellion. Coming back to this country, he took a turn at High School, but soon resumed his chosen profession, his next tramp being through the Genessee Valley, with a copy of Christina Rossetti in his pocket. Three months in a Texas gaol, held over on the subtle charge of burglary, was Mr. Kemp's next experience, but the Grand Jury failed to find a true bill against our poet; so he was set free to drop in for a while at Elbert Hubbard's Roycroft Shop, in East Aurora. Thence he wandered to the Mount Hermon Preparatory School in Massachusetts, afterwards tramping to Lawrence, Kansas, where he stayed some time, taking courses at the State University.

Finally, a trip on a cattle train brought him

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East, where for the most part, he has since remained.

This brief chronicle should also include farm work in various states, and a number of brief terms in gaol—for vagrancy. Mr. Kemp has also worked as porter, a sort of third cook, on the Great Lakes.

Such was the fulness, variety, and originality of Mr. Kemp's training for that "high calling" of poet, which, as Milton has admonished us, no man should strive after, without having first made his life a true poem; a reference which not irrelevantly recalls another noble phrase of Milton's, that in regard to "the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat." Milton was referring to the Christian's race for a heavenly crown, but we may apply his phrase to the race for the immortal garland of the Muses; and affirm that no poet of our time has run for it through so stern and steadfast a course, certainly "not without dust and heat," as Mr. Kemp.

During all these goings to and fro upon the earth, and manful grappling with the human lot in so many grim and dreary, if adventurous, ways, he found time to teach himself Greek, and to become an accomplished Latinist; reading every-

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thing there was to be read, and especially plunging with passionate absorption into the study of the great English poets. These have been his constant masters and influences. But he has read all the lesser ones too. In fact, no poetry ever written anywhere seems to have escaped him. With him, as with Keats, poetry has been the one passion of his life. Poetry . . . and, of course, the beautiful faces of women, as this book supplies plentiful documentary evidence. That goes without saying; for the loving of women — perhaps many women — is, of course, a part of the process of poetry — that part which consists of the continual breaking and mending and breaking again of the poet's heart, in the ordeal of beauty.

It is one of the most heart-breaking of old love-stories that Mr. Kemp chooses to tell again in his opening poem, *Cresseid*, and I think that I shall not be singular among his readers in having felt an instant thrill of gratitude to him for his having gone back to the great school of Chaucer for the manner of its telling. How good to see a modern poet writing "after the mediæval Scotch of Robert Henryson." It seems years since one heard the mention of that sturdy name. And with what strength and skill and dramatic force Mr. Kemp handles the fine old metre, preserving too

COMMENDATORY ADDRESS

all that curious sad sweetness that clings about the strong old "English undefiled" — *ex forte dulcedo*.

By itself, *Cresseid* is enough to give distinction to this volume, and at once to win for Mr. Kemp a high place among modern poets, as a poet who is an artist too; though, properly speaking, one should not make any such distinction, for, except in rare cases — such as Blake — a poet must be an artist to be a poet at all.

But there is a great deal more in this volume than *Cresseid*, and the lyrics and "epigrams" which form its bulk, making a sort of lover's confessional, are no less artistically wrought than they are spontaneously inspired. It is an enviably fortunate title Mr. Kemp gives to them, and significant of his philosophy as "love's pilgrim" — The Passing God: the god that touches our hearts, either to fleeting or enduring joy (it matters not which) and passes on his way. These poems are in many moods and many manners. The marmoreal influence of his Greek and Latin studies is apparent in them all, for they all combine a firm simplicity of contour with a thrill of apparently unsought beauty. Sometimes, too, they recall the seemingly flower-like carelessness of the Restoration lyrists. Through all, too,

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there breathes the fragrance of romance, like that of the hidden arbutus in the spring woods.

One day, Mr. Kemp and I were talking, among other matters, of the poetry of Mr. William Watson, and, after I had quoted some of the incomparable stanzas of "Wordsworth's Grave," Mr. Kemp made what struck me as being a very illuminative comment: to the effect that in Mr. Watson's poetry, at its best, there was an interesting fusion of the methods of Pope and Keats — eighteenth-century precision, with something of the sensuous glamour "the wizard twilight," that characterised the romanticist revolt of the early nineteenth century. Mr. Kemp held that in that revolt, and its succeeding developments, we had gone too far in the other direction, and that there was a good deal worth saving in the eighteenth-century method. In this I quite agree with him, and his own poetry points his own moral. After all, it is vain to try and get away from Milton's "simple, sensuous, and passionate." Nor has there ever been any need to, nor will there ever be. Because poetry can be too clear, and too precise, is no reason for our going to the other extreme of esoteric incomprehensibility. Poetry may be perfectly clear and comprehensible, and yet glow with that light that never was on

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sea or land. It is always so with the best poetry. Meaning and magic are not necessarily incompatible; and I trust — though I have my fears — that it will not be held against Mr. Kemp that his songs always have a meaning, are always (*horribile dictu!*) “interesting,” in spite of their being suggestive beyond their themes, with those undertones and overtones without which poetry cannot exist. Those who seek vague, mystical, symbolical, mathematical, or “colourful” verbiage must go elsewhere. It is to be had by the ton, for the asking. All Mr. Kemp can bring to the reader is beautiful, simple and passionate singing, the expression and interpretation of his own adventures with love and beauty, the wonder, the heartache, the gaiety, the whimsical cynicism, the wayward philosophies, that in a rich “picaresque” nature belong to such experience. In a sub-title he calls his book “Songs for Lovers.” Lovers will certainly love this book, for there is scarce a mood of loving, a joy, a fear, a bliss, a torture, or a whimsy, which does not here find expression, by one who is not merely a good poet, but an engagingly human being, with a wise, laughing eye on himself, but at the same time an indestructible faith in the folly of loving.

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

CRESSEID

A NARRATIVE POEM INSPIRED BY THE MEDIEVAL
SCOTCH OF ROBERT HENRYSON

*Dedicated to my father-in-law, JOHN PYNE, as a slight return for his
encouragement and appreciation during the writing of this narrative*

PROEM

I

A DOLEFUL season suits a doleful tale,
And so it was when I began to write
This tragedy. From the North showers of hail
Drove downward in grey clouds of sidelong flight,
Bouncing and roaring on my roof at night
And smoking o'er the heather in dim day. . . .
I scarce could drive the bitter cold away.

II

Yet, none the less, within my little room
I stood when the pale sun had dropped from eye
And Venus throbbed all golden in the gloom
Girdled with light and immortality, —
A dying rose still lingered in the sky,
While she, like a young moon, in beauty shone,
And for the moment held the dark alone.

CRESSEID

III

*Her beams poured through the glass so clear and fair
That I might see the wind had purified,
Bleak from the North, the crystal-washing air,
And packed the clouds away on every side;
The white frost crisped and sparkled far and wide;
The blasts in gusts came whistling sharp and chill
And made me draw away against my will.*

IV

*For I held trust that she of love the queen,
To whom I'd rendered true obedience,
Would make my faded heart again sprout green, —
And, thereupon, in humble reverence,
I thought to pray her high magnificence —
But the wide cold put frost to my desire,
And I removed, and shook before my fire;*

V

*I blew it up into a roaring flame
And in its light I turned myself about,
Brewed a hot draught, drew comfort from the same. —
So, having put the sharp-breathed cold to rout,
I fetched my Master Chaucer's volume out
And wore the night till dawn reading the tale
Of Troilus' love for Cresseid, and their bale.*

CRESSEID

VI

*But naught I saw therein of how fate sent
One touch of blackness into Cresseid's life,
Till on another book my gaze I bent,
In which I found how this fair, wanton wife,
After the Greeks had left their ten years' strife,
Was brought low like the dust that strews the street,
That even slaves tread under with their feet. . . .*

VII

*Which I shall make in English as I may
In language oaken-rough, but flowered at times.
I would not pack the Summer in one day;
Let others jingle on in jeweled rhymes
Laid dazzling-thick, — the singer's chief of crimes:
To make Apollo all his trappings wear
In twenty suits at once — he's brighter bare!*

CRESSEID

I

WHEN Diomed had cloyed his appetite
On Cresseid's body, like the wind he blew
Another course. He set his whole delight
Upon another, and no longer knew
Cresseid, though she was fair as flower with
dew. . . .
And desolate she wandered up and down,
And joined, some say, the women of the town.

II

Thrust from the high-arched doorway of his house,
Full oft she went in lack of daily bread
Despite her body small and amorous—
For all the townsmen stood in face-blanced
dread
Of him to whom she once unveiled her head.
Oft then in dreams she turned to Troy again
Where she was royal and had serving men.

CRESSEID

III

And in short space so waste her days became
From lack of friends and comfort, that she went
Out at the city gates, this lovely dame,
Disguised, and to her father, Chalcas, sent
Ahead. And so made speed incontinent
When dusk had cloaked the world and day hung
dim . . .
She fell along the earth and wept by him

IV

Old Chalcas, captive, served at Venus' shrine
And her son Cupid's, and the temple kept.
Each eve he waked the lamps like stars in line. . . .
To Cupid's altar every morning crept
Cresseid, close-cloaked, and loosed her hair, and
wept,
Heart-shaken, ere up marble-vistaed stairs
Came slow-processioned folk in solemn pairs.

V

For she would not that any one might see
Her fall from the high place she held of late. . . .
There, kneeling in close-curtained orat'ry,
From day to day bewailing her sad fate,
She prayed to Him who left her desolate,

CRESSEID

Cupid, whom she had served from that first hour
That her sweet bud of life burst into flower.

VI

Now held of vilest worth on lips of men,
To Troilus lost, by Diomed put by,
Become a tale that old wives tell again
With nodded head and close, lascivious eye,
What was there left for Cresseid but to die?
A darker end — that she should live and be
A rose where death held secret revelry!

VII

A rose, which, leaf by leaf, must fall away
While the worm trailed its blackness to the core;
Gnawed into piecemeal, yellowed by decay,
To gradual pollution given o'er
Till sucked-out emptiness held nothing more,
Till plague spread wing and buzzed and passed
her by,
And Death, strange-pitying, gave her leave to die!

VIII

Such was the fate of Cresseid. In the glass
She glimpsed the grey pits hollowing her face:

CRESSEID

First, hints of ruin like light clouds did pass,
Then slowly each root pushed into its place
Till the foul growth had clutched in its embrace
All that men's roving eyes approve as good
In the prized comeliness of womanhood.

IX

And Cresseid cursed the coming of the flowers
And the soft, infinite falling of the rain.
And Cresseid cursed the heavy-footed hours,
Slow-crawling hosts o'er Time's unending plain. . . .
She cursed all life, all pity, and all pain,
All hope and joy — but over and above
She cursed her death-in-life, the god of love!

X

She sent her little, timid-footed Page
With tangled golden hair and eyes of blue,
Unto her father, laying on his age
A deeper burden than the eye can view. . . .
“Father, I ask but one small boon of you, —
Give me a little brazen gong to beat
With leper folk to get my bread and meat.”

CRESSEID

XI

Her father came, with that, and kneeling low,
He sought to lift her, but away she thrust
His ancient arms, then, bitter-tongued from woe,
“Oh, that I serve a god who is unjust,”
He cried, “For now life holds but little lust. . . .
Thou God of Love, full true they call thee blind,
Only one sightless could be so unkind!”

XII

“Father,” wept Cresseid, “Nothing may be
done;
Let me go forth in darkness and unknown,
Cloaked from men’s eyes and the too-curious
sun. . . .
Give me a beggar’s hat, a beggar’s gown. . . .
I must go forth to live in lepers’ town
For all the joy of life has gone from me!”
“Thou cruel god,” he groaned, “who cannot see!”

XIII

Time must forever onward run, no turn
May eddy backward in his flowing stream;
Tears, falling for old sorrows, cease to burn,
And life itself becomes a passing dream,
So that what things are real and what seem

CRESSEID

Together in a tangled garden grow, —
And ghosts, a-stray, in ghostly realms we go.

XIV

The Past, the Present, and the Future fold
One Thing, and though we call it "life," who knows
What in wise hands Eternity may hold, —
What sweet, immortal balm for mortal woes! . . .
But Time, at last, that ever onward flows,
Will carry us to where we'll know full well —
What none of us will e'er return to tell. . . .

XV

Having wept dry the sources of her tears,
Cresseid arose and bowed her soul to fate,
A broken thing that all the breaking years
Could into nothing worse disintegrate. . . .
She crept forth at a secret postern gate,
Unknown, unseen, and loathing to be seen
Who once had walked abroad as beauty's queen.

XVI

Where whispered sedge by barren waters thinned
And sudden snakes slid rustling out of view,
Near a wide marsh, dry-bitten by the wind,
With tardy piety, as rich men do,
In fear for huge, ill-gotten revenue,

CRESSEID

Or in repentance for his youth's carouse,
A certain man had built the lazar house.

XVII

With ignorant trust to purchase Christ from
God. . . .

Bleak as the grey-washed sea this hospital!
Abhorrence, skirting far, the sky's edge trod.
As in the dark men press a friendly wall. . . .
So there the lepers' wail, the sea-birds' call
And winds and waves were all that silence heard
Save when some sliding snake the sedges stirred.

XVIII

The clouted lepers found last refuge there
As all the Dead at last must seek the grave.
The huge catastrophe of one despair
From which no mortal medicine can save
A common lack of hope unto them gave
From day to day respiring briefer breath
In sad democracy of living death.

XIX

As from a tomb, each morn they issued out
To squat in rags against the city gates,

CRESSEID

Exposing ulcered stump and ugly clout
And begging scarce-flung coins, contemptuous
cates,
And bowing in return their scurfy pates
To call God's eyes upon the giver's soul
For meager alms dropped into wooden bowl. . . .

XX

Yet, if the Dead in graves were live, not dead,
Or lay in living death bound side by side,
Then even they would grow accustomed
(As bride to feel the bridegroom at her side)
Unto that sad existence coffin-wide, —
Would learn as commonplace the caverned dark
And live strange death with none but God to mark.

XXI

The lepers lived and bred like other men. . . .
After the strangeness dwindled in their hearts.
From very humanness, they turned again
(If not to common trades and common arts
And tilling fields and chaffering goods in marts)
To pride they turned, and hate, and love, and
lust,
And all that shakes the heart till it be dust. . . .

CRESSEID

XXII

Her cheerless way along the alien sand
Cresseid now stole — Terror and she alone —
But no, — her Memory waved its cursèd wand,
And kings she saw that sat on throne on throne
With queens close by (it made her spirit groan)
And lords and ladies thriving merrily —
And she was lonelier for such company.

XXIII

No noise was needed at the lazar door,
Nor timid knock nor volley loud and bold, —
The harsh bolt is no brother to the Poor
And careful lock securing stolen gold. . . .
But these poor folk had even less to hold,
And so their house lay open like a street
Where only winds crept up on timid feet. . . .

XXIV

Where none but winds and creeping lazars went. . . .
Here Cresseid faltered at the outer post,
And, after God's eternity seemed spent,
She moved like one attended by a ghost
(Perhaps but vanguard to a monstrous host)
Not daring lift her eyes or turn her head —
Into the hostel of the Living Dead. . . .

CRESSEID

XXV

Into the hostel of the Dead she passed
As a sick animal creeps forth to die
That Nature tells which hour must be its last. . . .
But first she raised her wrecked face to the sky
And prayed that her few days might hasten by,
That her shamed soul might go its silent way
And not behold her body's slow decay

XXVI

And now she dared to let her fearful eyes
Glimpse slowly round — as in a dungeon's dark
The dazed culprit's gradual vision spies
With gaze accustomed, every woeful mark
Set in the stones by some imprisoned clerk
Who traced sad verses ere his hand forebore
And the sharp axe set wide his prison door. . . .

XXVII

Scattered like rocks that break a level sea
The lepers gathered semblance in her gaze.
Yon, — Christ have mercy, — quavering merrily,
One sang falsetto of green-shadowed ways
And made a ballad in his lady's praise. —
Sad seemed his gladness, to seem doubly sad
When witless laughter spake a mind run mad.

CRESSEID

XXVIII

Wild came that laughter as a voice in air
That frights a wanderer in a haunted land,
Floating about his ears, now here, now there,
Till, with uplifted staff he makes his stand
But only strikes the void on every hand, —
Then hastens with his cloak about his ears
More fearful since he knows not what he fears.

XXIX

Some played at dice, some chattered, some were
still,
While others wrapped new clouts about old
sores, —
For all held death to be the greater ill,
And so they bided there on rush-strewn floors.
The house of life possesses many doors:
The grave holds only one, so strangely stout
All must go in, but none may wander out.

XXX

All her glad days at last seemed strangely far,
And time was fledged with paradise no more,
And love, that lights the mind up like a star,
To lay assaults against her heart forebore.
She felt content with rushes on the floor . . .

CRESSEID

Then in a trice she woke to life, and cried
Aloud, for Horror squatted at her side.

XXXI

It was a man, It said. . . . It called her "Fair." . . .
"Cresseid," she heard the word endearing come,
As if an echo got birth from the air:
The gaping thing could not be else but dumb, . . .
And now it put a hand that was all thumb
Against her breasts, and cried again aloud —
This naked body ready for its shroud.

XXXII

"Cresseid, I know you well," the creature said, —
"Right welcome are you to our burial ground,
For still love stirs among the Living Dead."
Cresseid for terror could not make a sound
As with that wide-eyed nightmare she sat
bound. . . .
Her voice rushed forth at last, "You loathly jest
Upon mankind — the Dead at least know rest. . . ."

XXXIII

You are so old you have forgot to die!"
"Nay, I am young as you, if you but knew!"
"Then life itself has given you the lie!"
"Yea — the same lie that it has given you!"

CRESSEID

“Your eyes are sockets, and your flesh is blue. . . .”
“Yet I was Phidion . . . a year ago
Cresseid had never thought to use me so. . . .

XXXIV

No longer sunrise widens into day,
Nor from great windows can I watch the dawn,—
Darkness has swept the happy stars away,
And into blackness has the bright world gone —
And yet I guess that beauty has withdrawn
In ebb of loveliness from your drear face
And body that once filled a king's embrace. . . .

XXXV

Since we are equals thus — why not in love? . . .
You knew me comely once, as you were fair.
Why tremble, sweetheart, like a captured dove!
My foot was joyful once upon your stair;
Your eager fingers once went through my hair!”
“Away, foul toad — God, that I could not see!
You fright to life all I thought dead in me.” . . .

XXXVI

“Aye me, aye me!” she wailed, when Phidion
went,
“From its fresh grave arises my distress.
To lazar ways my soul had grown content;

CRESSEID

But now a solitary hut I'd bless
Set amid silence in a wilderness."
An agèd leper crone who crouched nearby
Lifted her ancient voice and croaked reply.

XXXVII

"Give heed to one who would advise you well:
It profits nothing, lady, thus to plain.
Since in this hospital you still must dwell
Till death prove kind, there is no hope to gain. . . .
So take your bowl and clapper, and be fain
To use your shoulders to the galling yoke
And go and beg your bread with leper folk."

XXXVIII

After that Troy had bowed her heights to flame
That those cloud-envied tops forevermore
Might build themselves into eternal fame, —
Some few in scattered bands escaped that shore
Whom blowing winds and flowing waters bore
To other lands. . . . Troilus was one of these —
He shook the islands with wild piracies

XXXIX

And up the inlets rowed and struck the land,
Taking their sleeping strongholds unaware,

CRESSEID

Becoming to the Greeks a blazing brand
And to their chiefs a symbol of despair —
Revenge for fallen Troy his only prayer
Which at the altars of the gods he made —
But aye he thought of Cresseid as he prayed.

XL

And now he paced with his bright-armoured tread
That land to his long-dreamed revenge so dear,
The kingdom of adulterous Diomed. . . .
His heart rejoiced because his foe was near. . . .
His great arm trembled as he took his spear
Longing to drive it through the man he sought
And slaying him a hundred times in thought.

XLI

They were too few embattled siege to keep
Or under day to dare unequal fight,
And so they gave the Watch eternal sleep
And forced the palace gates at deepest night:
And some they slew in half-arisen flight,
And some, in sleep . . . 'mongst whom their
 headless Lord
Sprawled, clutching in his hand his half-sheathed
 sword.

CRESSEID

XLII

Then with closed visors toward their ship they
fled,
Troilus and all his men, ere day made known
To twenty thousand swords their deed of dread —
But night into the morn so swift had grown
That unexpected dawn anon has shown
His peering face with one star at his brow, —
And all the little birds are singing now.

XLIII

The little birds are singing . . . fluting low
In leafy underbrush, concealed from eye,
Among the fruit trees ranged in ordered row,
On trees whose tops seemed tangled with the
sky; —
And, from the meadow grass, sprung up on high,
The lark in golden music disappears
Lost to the eye, but charming mortal ears.

XLIV

The laughter of the sunlight in the leaves
Grew brighter as a wind blew in from dawn, —
And golden-flashing shone the warriors' greaves,
And diamond-woven each habergeon. . . .
They rode a-breast in flowing unison

CRESSEID

As light as swallows gliding on the wing —
For they had stol'n the horses of the king

XLV

And surely they rejoiced to feel again
Those steeds, beneath, responsive to the rein, —
For, from their youth, they'd been good riding
men,
And oft their hearts had rushed through every
vein
With thunder-beating hoofs and flying mane. . . .
Reluctant, they beheld the sea a-far
Like the great body of a shattered star.

XLVI

And now they sped where the wide-elbowed road
Lapsed 'round, and straight ahead the ocean
swept;
Brimming the sky the mighty waters flowed. . . .
For league on league the foamy breakers crept
To show how that their Father never slept,
Deep in his heart, but ever dreamed of storm
As in the Vast he couched his giant form.

XLVII

The lazar house bestirred itself that morn
When the first shaft of day had put to flight

CRESSEID

The last dim star . . . and Cresseid rose forlorn
Knowing she must go forth in beggar's plight. . . .
To see those lepers was a monstrous sight
As o'er the sands they crept like hideous spawn
And nameless live things left by tides withdrawn.

XLVIII

The Trojans saw them moving, small and far,
Like flights of birds that hang against the sky, —
And Troilus cried, "I swear by Venus' Star
And Father Ocean's million progeny,
A moving host I see approaching nigh —
But not a shield they bear to flash the sun
Nor any piece of armour warriors don."

XLIX

"Lass, follow me, and do what things I bid,"
The aged leper crone to Cresseid spake.
"Keep not your face in shameful mantle hid —
Thus you may sooner people's pity wake. . . .
And you must seem in every limb to quake. . . .
Behold, there winds around yon Western hill
Folk who will put to test your learner's skill."

CRESSEID

L

The knights drew near. . . . their dancing scab-
bards clanked
Against their thighs . . . a faltering land wind
bore
Their laughter and their voices. . . . triple-ranked
They gained the waste that spread its level floor
From distant hills to distant sea . . . and more
Cresseid nor saw nor heard: they used the tongue
Of Troy — her being with its music rung,

LI

And tears ran down her agèd-seeming face. . . .
Yet, lest she should be known, she bided mute, —
Or made some sounds in Greek in that wide place,
Which, though it be to all the world a lute,
To her seemed better fitted for the brute
Beside the perfect speech she knew in Troy
Where every Hour was born a child of joy.

LII

She lifted up her bowl and cried, “Good sirs! . . .
Have pity!” Then her voice no more could
tell —
A motion comes upon her which bestirs
Her sleeping nature to its inmost cell —

CRESSEID

A shadowy dread athwart her sunlight fell
As of an obscure ill she knew before
Or lived, or dreamed, on some forgotten shore.

LIII

Life was so strange it might be all a dream. . . .
She hardly knew if she were live or dead.
What things had really been, and what did
 seem? . . .
As Troilus passed he moved disquieted
And unnamed sorrows through his being sped. . . .
Why should this hag quicken dead worlds in him
Making his hands shake and his eye grow dim?

LIV

Cresseid! . . . Ah God, and where was Cresseid
 now?
He wore her ring upon his finger yet.
Why should this creature with her roughened
 brow
Bring to his memory one he should forget,
The still-belov'd, who shamed his love, and set
His fame on high to be perpetual scorn
So that he loathed the day that he was born?

CRESSEID

LV

Before he guessed it, his great hand had clasped
His bag of spoil; he reined his horse in flight,
Checking the foaming bridle golden-hasped,
And showered, in a cataract of light,
Jewel on jewel, pillaged that same night
From the wide-plundered palace of the king —
And, at the last, he cast thereto his ring:

LVI

He would forget that he had ever known
Falseness so fair, and love so full of hate;
Not even to the memory that had grown
Within him, would he be compassionate:
He would be stronger, if he must, than fate. . . .
Where was his warrior heart, his warrior pride?
Why should he longer keep a ghost to bride?

LVII

He laughed out like a sick man who grows glad
Before he dies, mistaking death for life:
His fellow raiders thought their chief gone mad:
They gathered almost into open strife —
One laid his hand along his ready knife
At seeing riches garnered with such pain
Dropped into beggar's lap like careless rain.

CRESSEID

LVIII

But "Onward!" Troilus spake — and they
obeyed,
Though murmuring thunder half-aroused to
storm. . . .

His eyes like lightning through his morion played,
And a god seemed to swell within his form. . . .
His warriors feared, though suckled on alarm
Before they left their mothers' breasts . . . they
bent

Seaward again, with his strong will content.

LIX

"Ah!" cried the lepers, gathering fast around,
As flies about a flagon overturned,
"Good hap, a pretty gentleman you've found
Whom in the olden days your beauty spurned
Till like a windy torch desire burned
Within him for your tender body's touch! . . .
He loved you well, for he has given much! —

LX

More than we lepers ever got or will. . . .
Now we'll be rich for many days of ease:
We'll fill our casks with wine and eat our fill."
Cresseid half-rose upon her gnarlèd knees.

CRESSEID

Her soul at last was sick with death's disease.

“Go . . . run . . . go . . . see . . . if it be he!”
she said,

“Go . . . I will give you all . . . when I am
dead.”

LXI

One who was whole but for a lion's face,
Except he squeaked whereas a lion roared,
Leaped, gossip-eager, from his squatting-place,
And set off running, shrilling loud, “Great Lord,
Grant us, we beg of you, one passing word. . . .
Whoe'er you are, pray tell us — we would know
His mighty name who loves poor lepers so!”

LXII

Then cried a lad who galloped in the rear,
“Go back and tell them, Troilus is his name,
One who has never seen the front of fear,
One who will sit upon the head of fame
Till the world tumbles headlong whence it came
And chaos sprawl athwart the sky in peace, . . .
Troilus, who lives to pluck the beard of Greece!”

LXIII

“Troilus, that mighty man!” the old wife cried —
“His tale has been a proverb many a year. . . .

CRESSEID

'The Story Of The Trojan and His Bride'
Has gone abroad that every man may hear. . . .
So it is false . . . and YOU have been his
 dear? . . .
The ballad has it that he still keeps true. . . .
I knew he'd do the same that all men do,

LXIV

For troth has never yet been kept by man!"
But Cresseid heard no word the lepers spake.
Once more through diamond-scattered dew she
 ran,
A girl, while dawn shed flake on golden flake
Of glory over waves that rose to take
The morning to them . . . and, afar, she heard
The God of Love himself, cry out One Word.

LXV

"Love, wait for me," she called, "I come to thee,"
And she grew into Woman as she ran:
And still Love cried from blue immensity. . . .
Seeking to gain a god, she got a man,
Troilus . . . and then a-new the quest began:
Love calling, calling ever from the void,
Ever ahead, and never yet enjoyed!

CRESSEID

LXVI

Then Diomed caught her up and cast her by,
And Phidion with lute and garland strove
To prove himself the sought divinity. . . .
And others mocked her in the name of Love,
One after one, — a wine-flushed, singing drove! . . .
A wand was waved . . . they turned to fleeing
swine. . . .
She closed her eyes: still called that Voice Divine!

LXVII

“Ah, Love, where art thou . . . bide for me,
I pray!”
Her feet went swift on clouds that flowed and
flowed. . . .
“Love, I have sought thee now for many a
day;
I have gone down full many a beckoning road;
My eyes have scattered stars, my breasts have
glowed,
Thinking that thou wert close . . . but thou
wert gone. . . .
Make day for me with thy immortal dawn! . . .

CRESSEID

LXVIII

Phidion!" she shrieked . . . she saw his loath-
some face

Changed from the comeliness it once had been. . . .

And then another presence took its place, —

A Presence that she felt, that stayed unseen. . . .

The absence of all shadow dropped between. . . .

She covered eyes, and, waiting, stayed her breath.

She need not look — she knew that it was Death.

LXIX

Then, like the sound of many melodies

From many lutes, each word soared forth, a star:

"Rise, Sweetheart, rise! nor bruise those dimpled
knees,

Which should be only pressed against a flower,

On the harsh earth forevermore! There are

Dreams within dreams — and life of these is
one!"

And glory dawned about her like the sun. . . .

LXX

"Death — thou?" "Yea, I!" "Fore'er wilt thou
be true

And strong enough to hold me evermore?"

"Yea, — for as infinite as heaven's blue,

CRESSEID

And like a sea that never had a shore,
I will embrace thee!" "I have suffered sore,
Sweet Death . . . how beautiful and great
 thou art!
Be good to me . . . for I am thine . . . sweet-
 heart!"

LXXI

The lepers wrangled long above the gems
While the strange-speaking woman now lay cold—
Pearls that were kingdoms set in diadems,
And precious stones that shone in baser gold . . .
Then, when a just division had been told,
They took up Cresseid and they laid her low, —
Burying her where none may ever know.

HELEN IN HADES

ALL that I sought was peace and happiness,
But there was something fatal in my eyes
And maddening in my mouth; Men grew unwise
And crazed, beholding me, and Law was less
Than their desire; one vagrant, windy tress,
Or my unguarded bosom's rich surprise
Filled each man's heart with visions and vain
cries
And his arms rose in dreams for my caress.

Yea, I saw neither happiness nor peace
But hungry faces bright as swords and spears;
I was the White, Unwilling Storm of Greece;
Tumult tossed round me, rising with the years . . .
What was that pale boy's name the gossips set
By mine? . . . we dead so easily forget!

CLEOPATRA, DEAD

DEATH, hast thou felt the thrill of her soft
hand
And let in love to thy forbidden land?
Ah, if thou hast, the Queen has conquered thee
And tipped thy darts with immortality!

ZENOBIA

LO, Caesar's legioned army, victor-led,
A sight to glad and pride the Roman eye:
Wrinkled and monster elephants sweep by
Making the earth to quake beneath their tread;
Caesar himself, with laurel on his head,
Rides next, and all his banners flaunt the sky.

But now the eager concourse gapes and hums,
For She who makes the triumph-march complete,
Zenobia, naked and imperial, comes,
With gold chains chiming from her hands and
feet —
Her kingdoms overthrown, herself a prize,
Yet no capitulation in her eyes.

RESURRECTION

I HOPE there is a resurrection day
For bodies, as the grey-beard prophets say,
When Helen's naked limbs again will gleam
Regathered from the dust of death's long dream,
And all the olden beauties, being fair,
Will take the watching angels unaware
And make God's heavenly meadows doubly sweet
With rosy vagrancy of little feet.

THE EMPEROR TO HIS LOVE

I'VE a green garden with a grey wall 'round
Where even the wind's footfall makes no sound;
There let us go and from ambition flee,
Accepting love's brief immortality.
Let other rulers hugely labour still
Beneath the burden of ambition's ill
Like caryatids heaving up the strain
Of mammoth chambers, till they stoop again. . .
Your face has changed my days to splendid
dreams
And baubled trumpets, traffics, and triremes:
One swift touch of your passion-parted lips
Is worth five armies and ten seas of ships.

A MEMORY OF A FORMER LIFE

ON a raft of reeds
Where Nineveh's walls looked down
I lived with a fisher-girl
Whose teeth were white as pearl
Whose body was berry-brown.

But how many children we had
That's what I do not know —
I've died so many times
And written so many rhymes
And that was so long ago!

THE SONG OF RENSI, PHARAOH'S
LUTE-PLAYER

KING PHRA had twenty dancing girls
And I, his slave, had none:
I used to watch their shining limbs
That glimmered in the sun.

King Phra had twenty dancing girls
That glided to my lute,
And every way they moved their limbs
I made a sound to suit.

King Phra had twenty dancing girls
Whose feet were wandering stars
Whose blossomed breasts were circled round
With bright vermilion bars.

King Phra had twenty dancing girls:
His wisdom oft I sung . . .
But I was wiser than the king
Because I held my tongue.

King Phra had twenty dancing girls —
And he was old and grey, —
And age and power are made a jest
When youth sings down the way!

VILLON SINGS

WANDERING along the king's highway,
The ladies all to me were kind;
'T is word enough to say that I
Was neither halt, nor maim, nor blind.

The little birds they sang for me,
The budding hedgerow flowers were seen
In red and white and purple mists,
And there were herds in fields of green.

The world was mine and life was mine,
My heart sang like bird-filled tree,
So myriad-full of love, the King,
Who rode by, looked, and envied me.

INVOCATION

BRING me my slender reeds to blow upon,
A lay I'll make, of perfect songs the king,
Which white-armed girls with soft, warm
throats will sing
To ease their hearts with, when I'm dead and gone.

LOVE IN HELL

IN the storms which beat on the shores of hell
Great devil-bats go flapping by,
And boulderlike hailstones hiss through the air
And tear the naked sky.

'Round black promontories the loud winds flare,
On which, like a stream of living leaves,
Phantom lovers rustle and sigh
Innumerably.

THERE ARE TWO POWERS

THERE are two powers that hold me with a
vow,

There are two spirits that compel my knee
To bend before their sought divinity:
One is to me the blossom on the bough
Of an else barren life; one, even now,
Is the last recompense of God to me,—
And both are as two ships hailed far at sea
By wreck-cast men with hands strained hard at
brow.

So, hour by holy hour, and day by day,
And all night long I kneel before the shrine
Of each divinity, and, kneeling, pray;
And, though I die, — immortal, they are mine:
Beauty, bewildering me with many flowers,
And Love, that makes eternal, life's few hours!

THE FEW

THERE are few who dare to climb
The mountain-tops
Where the great, blue sky begins
And all space stops,

Where the winds of Being blow
And wings lift free
Against audacious stars
That kiss infinitely.

THE WISE MAN SAID

LOVE is a plague that brings no rest
To maddened brain and fevered breast, —
Rather than love I would be dead,
'Twere peace, at least," the Wise Man said. . . .

"Is love, then, the worst ill that Man
Can suffer under fate's harsh plan?"
I asked, "Ah, no, — a greater ill
Exists, to which this evil still
Seems happiness — 'TIS NOT TO BE
IN LOVE!" the Wise Man answered me.

AT LAST I KNOW

AT last I know a woman's mind!
There is no power, here or above,
Can make her see — if she be blind,
Or make her hate — if she but love.

And if she will — why then she will,
And if she will not, what can bind?
Much like a man I find her still. . . .
At last I know a woman's mind!

THE PASSING GOD

HE who has loved for one immortal hour
Nor asked the god what lay beyond his power,
Has won a thing past all computed gain —
A mood that casts up pearls as thick as rain;
He has soared forth beyond his fellow men
And been some other bright star's citizen . . .
For Love moves not with ledgers in his mind;
The little god is naked, mad, and blind;
He is no smiting whip, no breaking rod —
He's a brief-granted, flower-glimpse of God!

THE WAY

TO get Love, one must come on it unsought, —
The ripe fruit falls when mellow, not before:
For it cannot be stolen, begged, or bought
Without some taste of greenness at the core.

THE RED ROSE CRIED

O COME to me, my Love," the red rose cried;
"I fear your thorns," the nightingale replied. . . .

"My thorns are only deadly for my foes
To keep myself for you," replied the rose.

THE PASSING FLOWER

IN Baalbec there were lovers
Who plucked the passing flower;
In Sidon and Palmyra
Each flushed, immortal hour

Was gathered in the passing;
In Greece and Rome they knew
That from the living Present
The whitest blossoms grew.

The countless generations
Like Autumn leaves go by:
Love only is eternal,
Love only does not die. . . .

I hear the dying nations
Go by on phantom feet —
But still the rose is fragrant,
And still a kiss is sweet!

EROS SINGS

THOUGH death still rages
 (Still, as of old),
I have scattered his pages
 With dust of gold.

Though the great, dark wing of him
 Shadow Man's bliss,
I have drawn the sting of him
 With a kiss.

INNUMERABILITY

ONE kiss! . . . one kiss is not enough:
Suppose the sea should say
Unto the shore — “I’ve sent one wave, —
That’s all you’ll get to-day!”

OLD-FASHIONED FLOWER-SONG

FOR dawn, a waiting hush of skies,
For trees, a wind that blows,
For clouds, the color-making sun, —
And for my Love, a rose!

For him who dreams, a quiet nook
Wherein a fire glows,
For him who rides, an open way, —
And for my Love, a rose!

A hand-clasp for a world chance-met,
And hate for hate, for foes,
An easy pipe and glass for friends, —
And for my Love, a rose!

MAD-MEN

DEAR, it is good that lovers should go mad,—
The world swings else to so well-ordered law
That God must find some way to strike with awe
Its multitudes. The West, in sunsets clad,
The East, in morning, — once a power these had
Over the souls of men . . . but now they draw
Their vestitures in vain . . . once men's eyes
saw
The naked moon, and beauty made them glad.

But now how few there are whom starlight moves:
So, mid the gold-struck peoples, it behooves
Life's purpose well that mad-men here and there
Should rise among them, testifying this:
That solid things are bubbles hung in air
When Love can capture heaven with a kiss.

PURITY

BE pure, sweetheart, but not like snow
Which soon its whiteness must forego —
Be fierce and pure as fire may be
Which burns away impurity.

YOUNG MAN'S SONG

O TIME has lightning in its wing,
And pleasure is a fragile thing
That breaks in clutching; beauty's face
Carries a skull behind its grace:
Then where's a better reason why
I should love beauty ere it die,
Lift brighter torches in the night
And seize on joy in time's despite?

WHEN SILENT IS THE SINGER

WHEN silent is the singer
And broken is the lute
Say not the song was nothing
And vain the far pursuit;

When love's brief rose has faded
Say never "it was naught!" —
Say rather that each moment
Was worth the joy it brought!

A CRUEL THING

LOVE is a cruel thing
And jesting is his trade:
My sweetheart loves another man,
And he, another maid. . . .

And yet there is a way
To thwart his wanton will —
'Tis not to be in love at all:
And that is crueller still.

WHY SHOULD I LISTEN?

WHY should I listen to the Wise
Though every word they say is true? . . .
I grant that Love is king of lies,
And that his greatest lie is — you!

The old men lift their warning hands,
They move their mouths and tell of shame —
Yet there's not one but understands
If he were young he'd do the same.

In vain the generations learn,
In vain men mete each sober rule, —
Ah, who would not grave counsels spurn
When 'tis so sweet to be a fool!

GREEK VINTAGE SONG

BLUSHING maiden, laughing boy,
Tread the ripened grapes of joy
Till unto your naked thighs
Spurting jets of purple rise —
Was it not for this the grape
Gathered its voluptuous shape?

ADMONITION

O MOURN not if her face be a brief flower,
O, mourn not if her beauty drop away, —
Who would forego the rose's perfect hour
Because she does not hold her pomp for aye?

The gods pass with their fading altar-fires,
They fear their dark descent in their bright
prime . . .
Unleash the white, swift hounds of soft desires
And when life's hour strikes "LOVE" think
not of time.

THE REASON

AFTER A SAPPHIC FRAGMENT

YOU were to me so quaint and small
I never thought of you at all
Save as a child . . . but Life, that wakes
The white, sweet blossoming of brakes,
The windy flower on the wall, —
Made you grow white and fair and tall.

You were to me so quaint and small
I never thought of you at all . . .
In the full blossom of your day
It is not strange you turned away
Nor heard my heart's awakened call
When you were white and fair and tall.

TO THINK THAT SOMEWHERE

TO think that somewhere now you wait for me,
This very month, this week, this day, this hour, —
That slowly you come into perfect flower,
As perfect as a woman's growth may be,
Dreaming, in unaccompanied ecstasy,
How some day you will yield that richest dower,
Yourself, to love's supreme and utmost power, —
This, in its very joy, is agony!

And yet — to fear that your white, alien feet
Might go down some unknown, diverging way
Straying a little further, day by day,
From the appointed place where we should meet —
This is too deep a hell . . . it were not best
To think that God could wreak so sad a jest!

AND IS IT TRUE?

AND is it true you smoothed your hair
And never thought of me,
Or walked abroad when noon was white
Nor knew what yet must be? . . .

I look on every day as lost
Before my knowledge grew
That, on the common earth there walked
The Vision that is you!

A QUEEN DIED LONG AGO

A QUEEN died long ago
As fair as you are fair,
Of kindred white her brow,
And gold, like yours, her hair.

Her face is but a dream,
Her little mouth is dust. . . .
O, let us kiss and kiss
Since death is so unjust.

HERMITAGE

O, FOR a country place I know
Where elms stand in a windy row,
Where larches frame the crimson sun
And maples turn vermillion
And branchy oaks stand wide and still
Each like a green, inverted hill:
There, when I'd dreamed a day or two,
I'd have a room made neat for you —
For trees they are such lonely things
With all their leaves and whisperings.

TO MYRRHA

YOU are my ceaseless litany
That I will sing before all men, —
And, dear, if you believe in God,
I'll be your Christian then;

And I will kneel by you, my Love, —
Will pray, contrite and hushed, by you. . . .
If not, a pagan I will be
And heaven will fail by two!

TO —

I WAS the servant of a dream
Until you brought to me
The splendid vision of your face —
Then dawned Reality;

Not She whose empty shrines of Fact
The world's blind fools adore, —
Reality so high, so true
That dreams avail no more.

LITTLE THINGS

SPACE is but a little thing
That God takes like a ball
To toss up for a moment's flight
And laugh to see it fall.

Love is but a little thing,
It is a tossed-up ball, —
Yet it embraces life and hope,
The world, and God, and ALL!

THE LIFE OF LOVE

THE life of love is the life of a flower
That lifts to the touch of the sun and the
moon.
The life of love is the joy of an hour,
The strain of a flute or a viol's sweet tune:

The flower dies at the dawn's red heart,
And sorrow kisses fair joy to death;
The viol-sound's drowned in the roar of the mart;
The flute-voice dies with the player's breath.

NO QUALMS

I HAVE no qualms for any gift love bring,
Whether he make me wail, or rage, or sing.
I would not merely seek the Docile out . . .
There is, I think, some merit in the shout
That tears the ear, some music in the pain
That roars on the soul's windows with its rain.

YOU LOVE ME AND I AM AFRAID

YOU love me, and I am afraid
To take your mouth and rouse your soul
Though it be lifted up to me
As those who drink wine lift a bowl.

You love me, and I am afraid:
Though you protest it's nothing more
Than friendship, — I have heard a-far
The opening of an unseen door;

You love me, and I am afraid
Of love's disaster treading near —
If you were not so beautiful,
So young, and blind, — you too would fear!

NIGHTMARE

“SHE bade him wait, while other men
Who did not care, had all their will;
He was as patient as a corpse
Whose face shows white and still;

His passion was a fatal thing;
For, blinded, still he followed her, —
Each whim of hers, a holy Cause,
And he, its minister.

Her little mouth, her small, white hands
Were holier to him than shrines
Where, in each dim and hallowed niche
A sacred taper shines. . . .

Her little mouth — she gave to all!
Her little hands — as free as air! . . .
To him as inaccessible
As God is to a prayer!” . . .

O, you are perfect, you are pure;
I think that you are strong and true,—
And yet, last night I dreamed these things
And was afraid of you.

WHY HAVE YOU COME TO ME?

WHY have you come to me, you lovely
thing,

Making my heart leap and my pulses sing?

Why have you come to me to bid me say

“My life is now as nothing till to-day”?

All that I’ve ever dreamed or hoped or done

Is like a night that yearns toward the sun;

All that I’ve ever thought or felt or known

Is aimless thistledown o’er waters blown.

Why did I never know, not ever see

That, on this day of days, you waited me?

By storms and tumults of your beauty torn,

Now I shall wish that I was never born,

Then, in the same breath, thank what gods there
be

That, at this great hour, you were given me!

THE MOTH'S COMPLAINT

THE butterfly is slain, they say,
By the first breath of cold —
But, O, for his one perfect day
On wings of braided gold!

OLD SONG

WHEN the worm has banqueted
Where will be your beauty then,
All that lovely white and red
Held so high in praise of men?

That which you think lasting now
Will no more with magic bind:
Sweet-curved lips, and eyes, and brow
Gone like music on the wind.

TO PASSION

YOU beautiful, consuming thing,
You are a power, you are a wing
Uplifting me, —
I've never held you vile or base
Because you stayed in no one place,
But footed free!

CONSUMMATION

WAVES of unutterable ecstasy
Shake through my yielded body, as a sea,
Moonlight, sweeps in against an island bar,
Its every atom trembling with a star, —
Or as a singing, leaping shower of rain,
Misted with iris like a peacock's train,
Comes softly on the dry trees sick with heat
And all the long, white stretches of the street.

POSSESSION

LOVE me or love me not, for I no longer care:
You have been, ever will be, mine;
There is no dream of mine but you must share;
Love breaks all bounds; he is divine.

Nay, when I had you, dear, I know I held you
not, —
But, having passed beyond my sight,
Your spirit, merging with my inmost thought,
Opened to me the Infinite.

You are the sky, the clouds, you are the singing
birds,
The hills, the trees, the plain,
My hopes, my aspirations passing words, —
Our love was not in vain!

O, TELL ME NOT

O TELL me not, dear, to forget:
Let me remember still
The hands that parted as they met,
The sweet and froward will.

Give me your memory in trust
While we still move with men —
When you are dust and I am dust,
It will not matter then.

A DREAM OF INCONSTANCY

I HAD a dream you were unfaithful to me
With some rare lover of a godlike mien,
That there were stars and wonder, youth and
moonlight
As once with us had been;

I woke from bitter visions in the darkness,
From visions bitter, and yet sweet, to me:
I watched your sleeping face, if I could find there
Some hushed inconstancy!

WHEN THAT WHICH COULD NOT BE

WHEN that which could not be has come
to pass

And you look frightened in the usual glass
To find a different man or woman there, —
Then, from your soul, you'll offer God a prayer
(You, whose heart sang with music yesterday)
To help you walk, alone, life's bitter way,
In vain repentant for the slow, unkind
Insistence that forced sight on love that's blind.

ON THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

NAY, I might still be prisoned
Upon my ancient rack,
Till, quenched unto its very roots,
The fires of Hell went black!

RETALIATION

LADY, I have loved overmuch
I think, in ever loving you,
Responded to the lightest touch
Of all your whims, been far too true.
Now it shall be your turn to rue
The looks that burn, the wiles that slay —
For love's a game that two can play.

Since begging has not got my will,
Since following your wayward feet
Has only led me further still
From consummations men hold meet,
I will no longer now entreat, —
I'll torture you the selfsame way —
Since love's a game that two can play.

Now YOU shall know whole nights awake,
Great, barren dawns that surge and roll
Like huge, recurrent waves that take
A ship, nor leave one plank that's whole,—
Just nigh the harbour's sheltered goal . . .
And *I* shall laugh and *you* shall pray —
Since love's a game that two can play!

VARIETY

IF there were not some bitterness in love,
If it were like white honey wholly sweet,
If there fell not across its shining fields
Some shadow of the sinking sun's retreat, —

Its long continuance of light would pall,
Its honey-heavy kiss ache through with sorrow,
And so I love you better, dear, today,
Because I know not what may be tomorrow.

FANTASIA

WHEN hosts of alien suns
Their shining lamps up-thrust
And the solar system breaks
Into drifts of silver dust

In the gaze of other worlds
To burst forth and expire
And stain the sable night
With trailing ghosts of fire, —

Where will be this heart, then,
This mad, impassioned brain
That flared high like a windy dawn
After a night's black rain? . . .

And will I then look upward,
In strange, sweet flesh re-born
While ten undreamed-of senses
Put this poor Five to scorn,

As that far world I lived in
Comes leaping from the night
And bursts, a tiny blossom,
Into a moment's sight?

YOU

IF I tapped blind among the Blind
And you swept like a shadow by
Nor glanced at me —
That would put seeing in my eye.

If I were turned to bones and dust,
O, breaker of the hearts of men,
And you drew nigh —
I'd gather into life again!

LOVE ME

LOVE me a day, a week, a month, a year, —
If you but love me, that is all I care.
I seek no irrecoverable oath
Such as Immortals swear;

For if you kiss me once, and then depart,
Or hold me but a day,
It will be more than duty chained for life
By what the world might say.

Love me a day, a week, a month, a year, —
Then, ere we know it, time will cease to be,
And we will laugh like children in the sun,
Thieves of eternity!

THE WIND'S DEATH

THE Wind died yesterday
And it will blow no more
The heaping little silver waves
Against the shining shore.

The Wind died yesterday:
It will no longer run
Along the purple-shadowed grass
And chase the laughing sun.

The Wind died yesterday
That piled the sky with light
And sent the silver-bodied clouds
Like solemn swans in flight.

The Wind died yesterday
And stark the forests sleep,
Their blowing summits surge no more
With tumults golden-deep . . .

O, Wind, arise again
And brighten all the air:
Strike silver motions through the trees,
Wake colors everywhere:

Purple and Green and Gold
Wait your creative breath! . . .
O, Wind of Love, strike through my soul —
Without you, all is death!

LOVE-FAITH

NOW that you would leave me
And another woo,
Was it you that told me once
Lovers should be true?

Was it you that told me
Lovers should be true? —
Dear, I still believe in Love,
But no more — in you!

DEFEAT

LET us shut out the dark a little while,
Let us shut out a while the blaring day
That has come down upon us . . . you, you smile
A pitiless smile — there is no more to say.

I've fought and fought for you — and fought in
vain,
And all night long I've knocked at your heart's
door
Begging you take a moment's thought again,
Asking for that which you could give no more.

The other one — what has he that I lack?
No! . . . I begin again! . . . I must be still:
And yet, if I could win one least kiss back,
I would forever serve your littlest will!

ALIENATION

GO, I will shut the windows
And draw the blinds for gloom.
Go, for the flower has fallen
That filled two lives with bloom.

For me wait other women,
For you wait other men . . .
But the ghosts of our old madness
Will rise and walk again.

I THOUGHT THAT IT WOULD
NEVER CEASE

I THOUGHT that it would never cease to be,
The love I held for you, you held for me, —
But, as the body's unperceived decay
Slips grave-ward, so our young love passed away
Till that which came, born bright with Summer
hours,
Went out, an infant hearse, all white with
flowers . . .
“Whose child is that?” I asked . . . and you
replied
“It is our child — our poor, weak Love that
died!”

THE RETURN

SHE whom I loved is coming back to me!
Once more her cloudy head of hair will be
Poured on my shoulder, and my life's long drouth
Made satiate of the soft wine of her mouth.

Full many are the bitter nights I've lain
Longing for her white, little hands in vain,
Until I fell asleep, and dreams, more kind
Than waking, brought her back to my glad mind,
And I was happy with her till the grey
And languid disillusionment of day.
Yet, now that she is coming back to me,
I dread the Dark of fresh calamity:
Shall I not fear the mixing of a kiss
With that same mouth that gave Another bliss?
Will not another's face crowd in between
My face and hers, — another's arms, unseen,
Go round her, thwarting mine unpitifully. . . .
When she whom I have loved comes back to me?

WHY SHOULD WE STRIVE

WHY should we strive to raise again
The ghost that time has laid,
Going like people in the dark
Of every sound afraid,

With here an old, familiar kiss,
Long buried in the night,
And there a grey, revived caress
Estranged from all delight? . . .

I once knew one who waked a love
No longer glad and gay
And it was dreadful as a ghost
That walked abroad in day.

THE IRONY

THOUGH you are everything that truth
holds base,
Because of your insuperable face
Men have tossed life-long honor into air
And youth has saddened to grey-voiced despair,
And slunk forth, hollow-eyed, to pine and die,
Proclaiming love to be life's vilest lie.

You have accepted all that's high and good,
Then turned it to the Dark's similitude,
Making a doubtful jest, like sour, spilt wine,
Of all that broken hearts once held divine.

And yet, because I must be proud and brave,
I shall go singing of you to my grave,
Love-sick, with rhymed, immortal lies of you:
And fools shall read, and shall believe them true!

TO ATTHIS

AFTER A SAPPHIC FRAGMENT

I LOVED you, Atthis, long ago:
If men had told me time would be
When we would love not, I had said
Rather shall death not cleave to me.
Aye, lies were true; mine eyes did see
Eternal love (if days were so) . . .
I loved you, Atthis, long ago.

I loved you, Atthis, long ago . . .
In vast confusion of retreat
My songs and dreams forsook me, then,
And day and night the breaking, sweet
Music of madness set my feet
To measures paced in chains of woe . . .
I loved you, Atthis, long ago.

I loved you, Atthis, long ago;
Alas, that so strong love were vain . . .
Those violet-woven days are gone
Like last year's roses, last year's rain . . .
Gone, too, the sorrow and the pain
That broke me like a Cretan bow . . .
I loved you, Atthis, long ago!

THE RAINBOW

WHEN I beheld the rainbow
Flung brightly through the sky
I saw in it a promise
That love can never die.

I told my hope to Flora,
Then, one next summer's day
I pointed up to heaven
And said the same to May.

Since then I've changed my fancy
Of times an honest score:
Yet nothing that could happen
Could change my first-learned lore. . . .

I've kissed, I've laughed, I've suffered . . .
And none knows more than I
The rainbow keeps his promise
That LOVE can never die.

THE PUZZLE

THE woman that I have I do not want,
The woman that I have not wears me gaunt.
And so we foolish poets are undone
Like crying children reaching for the sun.

THE LESSON

I WISH that love were but the joy
That careless poets say,
That sips the honey from the heart,
Then lightly wings away.

I never knew a thing that gave
Such pleasure kin to pain —
If ever I get free of him
I'll never love again.

I PROMISED IN MY PASSION

I PROMISED in my passion
That I'd be true to May;
I vowed the same to Alice,
I think, but yesterday. . . .

O, I've begun a ballad
That all the world shall sing —
“If love kept all his pledges
He's be a beggared king.”

FOLLY

I LOVE the folly of women,
I love the folly of men,
That never heeded precept,
But played the fool again.

I love the folly of women
That will not pause to think,
And the light foot that covets
The precipice's brink.

O, when I'm lying silent
Upon my still, black bier,
Don't tell them of my learning,
As you hold heaven dear,

Don't say that I was perfect
Nor lie of ordered days,
When good wine was my glory
And madness led my ways.

If you dare lie about me
May God requite you so.
Just say that I was human —
Then fold my hands, and go.

SUN AND RAIN

THE rain that blows in grey gusts over the
world,
It never makes me sad.
I know it wakens every bud up-curved
Whose flower will make me glad.

But when the sun clothes earth and air with gold
Then chiefly am I sad,
Dreaming of days the Past's great Dark doth hold
And perished love I had.

HEART-BREAK

FIE! For shame — to curse all women
Just because one broke your heart.
Would you go and drop to nothing?
Still there's life, and work, and art.

Pluck up courage, give up grieving,
Come and join the world of men.
Somewhere, there's another waiting —
She will break your heart again!

DELUDED

HOW have I been deluded
And broken in my pride
By eyes that falsely looked the truth,
By wanton lips that lied.

How have I been deluded
By kisses in the night, —
How many a full-blown rose I've lost
By blossom-plucked delight . . .

By women, by women
How have I been betrayed! . . .
And how I fear God's lightnings yet
For the lies I, too, have made!

ADJURATION

DON'T shut close in a coffin,
In the old, grewsome fashion,
This death-grey body that once thrilled
With life's sweet gift of passion.
Don't let them lay me shallow-deep
Where all the ordered good folk sleep.

But bury me in roses
In some wrecked garden-close,
The home of booming beetle
And bedraggled, wind-swept rose.

THE GUESTLESS ROOM

IT cannot be again,
I have loved too much, too long;
I have banished love, today,
Forever, from my song.

He shall no more have place
Within my heart or brain:
Let him arise and go
To one who is more fain

Of his cries and tears and lies,
Of the Mocking in his face —
I have swept my heart of him,
No more his dwelling place . . .

Nay, now he's gone, I fear
That soon, through my life's door,
He'll enter Scripture-wise,
With twenty devils more.

IN LOVE AGAIN

OUT of my heart there lifts that flower
Whose blossom is belief in men,
Whose very stalk I thought was dead —
'Faith, I must be in love again.

DIALOGUE

T HE moon brings pallid gifts of sleep
And dreams of wan desire —
Nay, you malign her, she, who is
Love's everlasting fire.

I swear the moon's a silver world
Whose only life is light —
Nay, she is an eternal lamp
For lovers' raptured sight.

She whom I loved has left my arms,
And life's a broken tune —
I thought as much, and now I know
Why you maligned the moon!

WITHOUT INCONSTANCY

WHERE do you sail, O friend of mine? —
I sail where love is all.
And do you think to find such place upon this
whirling ball?
— I know not. I but trust in Him, he takes the
helm and steers.
Love is a thing of days, my friend, but life's a
thing of years. . . .
On many a ship of dreams I've sailed to many an
alien strand,
And I've grown grey with pilgrimage, yet know
I not that land
Where love holds sway beyond the day — Nay,
I would still be bold!

And so my friend puts bravely forth with mast
of beaten gold,
With hull of hollow pearl and sail of silk-stuff's
woven fine,
Where the reef flashes colors mid a sea of troubled
wine,
Where storms their darkened brows impend, —
for he must learn, as we,
That Love indeed were less than love without
inconstancy.

I HELD LOVE USUAL

I HELD love usual as the sun
And lightly scanned his lore, —
And yesterday he left my heart,
Left, to return no more.

Like all things life holds commonplace
He seemed of little worth:
The world cast out the God of Gods
When He was on the earth.

THE PROTEAN HEART

I LOATHE the beauty of the rose,
I love not any flower that blows.
Let the sun set, — I will not stay
To watch the going of the day
Like a great ship that pirates burn. . . .
I love, and am not loved in turn.

I would not miss the budding rose
Nor any common flower that blows:
The sun has set? Then I will stay
To view the vast re-birth of day;
In me what dawns of beauty burn, —
I love, and I am loved in turn.

LOVE PAYS

LOVE pays for all his singing fire,
His gold and trinkets gay,
With burnt-out ashes of desire
And broken feet of clay.

Love pays for all his singing fire
With day on listless day —
Yet only those without desire
Are those who fear to play.

THE WHEEL

COME out into the hilltops,
Whom life has tossed and torn,
The stars' supreme derision
Will laugh your love to scorn;

You'll feel the earth roll under
As it goes down through space;
The moon, a world that perished,
Will shine against your face —

Where men, like you, grown bitter
From love's unending woe,
Walked sadly in the starlight
Ten million years ago.

IGNORANCE

HOW ignorant was I
Of love's most simple lore,
Who, when a day had passed,
Thought light would be no more, —

For, when the sun went down,
And night came on apace,
A hundred thousand stars
Revealed unending space.

WHAT ELSE TO DO?

ROMANCE knocks at the heart so many times,
And, after one has written rhymes on rhymes,
 One wearies of it all,
Knowing that after love's first, sweet surprise
There wait the stratagems, deceits, and lies
 That soon turn sweet to gall.

There is one worse thing only, still to hold
One's hands out toward a fire that's black and
 cold,
 To dead love falsely true. . . .
Then let them say their say, — what else remains,
After one has drunk old love to the drains,
 But to seek out a new?

THE MISTAKE

LEST love should give immortal life
The gods sent woe, then hate, then strife,
Suspicion, falsehood, jealousy —
Poor lad, they blame them all on thee!

THE GHOST

SHE'D left a note . . . forever gone . . .
The drear monotony of the rain
Crowded, with its incessant blur,
The drumming, dripping window pane . . .
Each echo was a thought of her.

The house was full of little sounds.
The red fire dwindled, spark by spark,
As daylight, stricken gray at birth,
Was gathered back into the Dark
And ancient night reclaimed the earth.

Still all the room was full of her
So sweet and solemn and serene;
There was her footstool . . . here, her chair . . .
A book with hasty mark between . . .
A fugitive pin dropped from her hair. . . .

Was that her hand against the door
Or the wind grappling with the rain?
Was that her face that glimmered white
A moment, at the rattling pane,
And then drew back into the night?

HAUNTED

YOU'LL hear my footsteps in the rain,
And when the wind shakes at the door
You'll think that it's my eager hand;
And when the fire grows bright at dusk

You'll feel me sitting in the chair
Just as I used to do, of old . . .
And you'll not dare to turn your head
For fear you'll see me sitting there. . . .

And you will start up in the night
Dreaming that you have heard my voice.

ADAM, TO EVE

I WAS a fool who did not know
God's pathways were of pearl, —
Why did you fill me with conceit
Of stolen apples, girl?

YOUR ABSENCE

I TOSS about in bed and cannot sleep;
I feel as if my hands were gloved with fire;
My heavy pulses roar along my veins . . .
I cannot sleep because of my desire.

The clock strikes on and on . . . I stare awake;
Your lovely name a thousand times I say:
Then comes a grey ghost to the window pane. . . .
I think it is the thing that men call "day."

YOUR HANDKERCHIEF

YOU left your handkerchief behind.
The perfume of your favorite flower
Was on it, — as a sudden wind
Carries the soft scents of a bower

A league away — it brought to me
The incense of your skin, your kind
Young eyes that smiled so trustfully . . .
You left your handkerchief behind.

THE TRYST

AND have you found another lover?
And shall I kiss those lips no more
That were as sweet as dripping honey
From the hive's golden core?

And shall I wait for you no longer
Beneath the white, cloud-drifting moon
And feel an hour too late, without you, —
Arrived an hour too soon?

Not yet! Not yet! . . . we are discovered! . . .
I swear by all the night above
I'll never love another woman
If you have failed me, love!

You come! . . . Life's miracle has happened
Again! . . . O, girl so white and pure
Why is it love is most uncertain
When it is most secure?

DREAMS

SOME say that dreams they come of God,
I know that this is true,
Because the good God sends a dream
Each night, of you.

I meet you in a far, green place
Whenas I fall asleep, —
We linger all night in a bower
Where leaves are deep,

And, till the blushing of the dawn,
I am complete in you. . . .
Some say that dreams they come of God:
I know that it is true.

THE LOVER'S LIE

I'M sick of your white folly
And all your wanton ways;
You've filled my nights with madness,
My life, with empty days;

I'm leaving you forever,
I'm — *what, you didn't hear?* . . .
Yes, I was only saying
How much I love you, dear!

STRANGE

'T IS strange that we whose tumults roll
Hot like lava from soul to soul,
Must some day into silence go
And lie as calm as moonlit snow,
With no more beating of the heart,
In a narrow grave, . . . apart!

THE LEAFLESS BOUGH

SINCE you have gone away from me
My very life has grown
Bare as a leafless bough from which
A singing bird has flown, —

A leafless bough in a windy sky
Without one hint of green:
But through the barren twigs of it
The clouds themselves are seen.

DISSIPATION

I CLIMBED and climbed the windy stair.
A yellow light slanted in the gloom.
The curtains, dark about the room,
Shivered alive in the rushing air.
A tall, white woman waited me there.
Our four lips burst forth into bloom
Of flowering kisses . . . when I came down
Feeling feeble of step and grey,
A flight of birds hovered in air
And my eyes ached against the day,
For it was daylight everywhere.

THE FOUNTAIN

IN a green garden of delight
A hidden fountain played all night,
A grey and moving ghost of sound
That floated over phantom ground,
Now near, now far, as the wind blew.
The fountain was my love for you;
The wind, your moods as light as air;
The black night was my love's despair.

WHEN I AM DEAD

THE wind will blow above when I am dead,
The sun take dusk, and the great dawn flare red;
The trees will sway above when I am dead,
And Time's mad chariot whirl, forever sped;

While I drop back to that from which I came
Men will be seared with the brief whip and flame
Of pitiless life — but, let two lovers pass
And I'll forget, and sing beneath the grass.

A CHANT OF DEAD LOVERS

NOW silence and mysterious death are ours
And over us perennial growths of flowers
Come and depart, hear what we lovers say
Who are dead and perished, having loved our day
Death has not made the memory of one kiss
Diminish its least heritage of bliss;
Decay, with all its strength, has not withdrawn
The memory of our first love's shy, sweet dawn,
The soft reluctant hand that still would stay,
The poignant, perfect loves of yesterday.
As for the Bitter Ones who lie here stark,
Loveless in life, now wrapped in loveless Dark, —
We pity them who were dead, alive — and, dead,
Are by no least love's memory comforted.

NO REFUGE

O, FOR a refuge
In some remote quiet,
Love is a madness,
Dear I a-by it . . .

But, in remote quiet,
I'd hear my blood beating
In pitiful riot
Like armies retreating.

THE MIRRORED VENUS

VENUS lived of old in Cyprus
With soft roses in her hair, —
All her house was full of mirrors
Everywhere,
Mirrors with a thousand motions
When she went her rosy ways. . . .
Full of motions all her dawns and
Shadowy days.
Venus lived in every mirror
Every way she turned her head:
Duplicate innumerably
Her bright tread,
Duplicate innumerably
Hands and arms and hair, —
Venus saw her beauty only
Everywhere. . . .
O, the vain and barren beauty, —
Every worshipper that came
Multiplied into a thousand,
Each the same;
And the little moon that lingered
On its back across a cloud
Duplicated silver crescents
In a crowd. . . .

THE MIRRORED VENUS

Broken are the many mirrors,
Gone forever are the days,
Dark the altar that was many
With one blaze,

Gone the bright, reflected laughter
That was Music's self a stir, —
Yet are memories immortal
Left of Her,

And in every woman walking
Loveward, does each lover meet
Droop of low, immortal eyelids,
Flow of feet

Echoing on eternal errands
Drawn by love's compulsive will —
And The Venus Of the Mirrors
Thralls him still!

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