

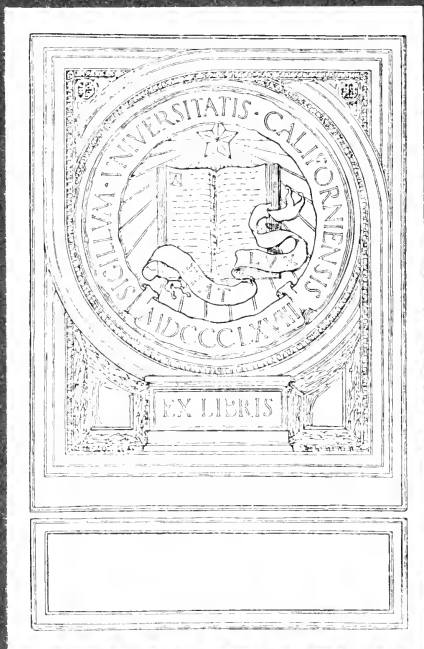
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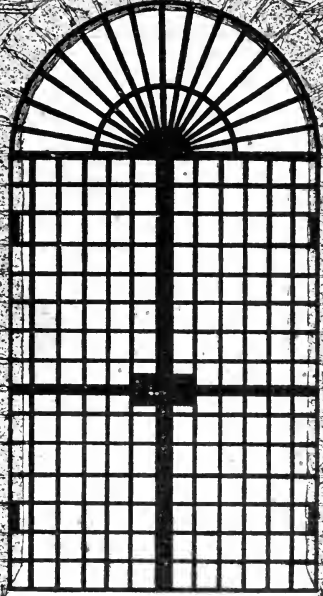
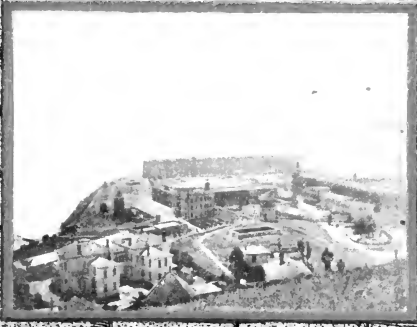
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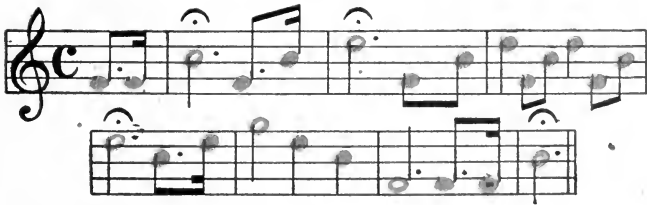
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Drops of Blood

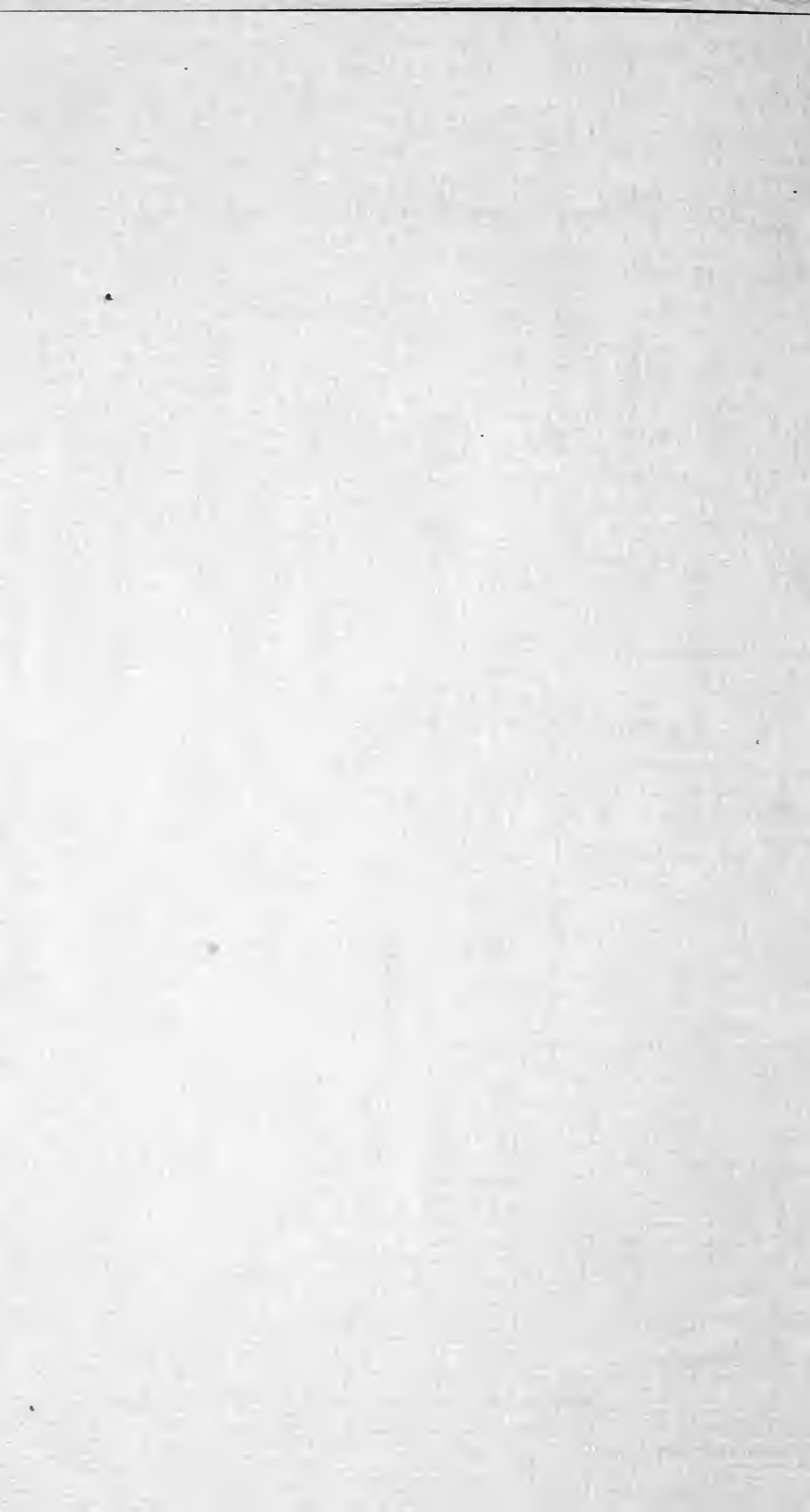


19173

SAN QUENTIN PRISON

Drop of blood





Prison Verse

by

Royall Douglass

No. "19173"

San Quentin

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TO YVONNE
ALTRURIA

Foreword

A STRAIN of music, the scent of a flower, the ripple of running water—how often they sweep a chord, mute but yet attuned, awakening the pent floods of memory. It is thus with this little book of verse, wrung from the silent gloom of unending prison nights—nights we spent together in the semi-darkness of a forgotten world.

Behind the graven figures, "19173," I see you tonight as I saw you then, seated at the tiny deal table in our little eight by four cell, the dim light from the smoky oil lamp falling fitfully upon your face as you wrote in silence, line after line, page after page—and I, lying on the narrow bunk against the wall, wondering what you were wresting from the Universal Source and setting into words amid such sombre surroundings.

To all the art of "setting words prettily together," as Ruskin puts it, you have added that color which can be drawn only from the fountain of hard experience. May the message you are sending out find its way to the heart of the world and there plant the seed of a deeper, larger and kindlier understanding.

In those years of the past we studied the theme of Life together. Today we labor apart, and yet together as before—you in your way and I in mine—to turn the thoughts of men and women toward the needs and the possibilities that exist in the "proscribed," seeking to redeem ourselves, and in so doing, to encourage others.

DONALD LOWRIE.

San Francisco, California,
December 3, 1911.

TO THE
ASSOCIATION

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“Here strides a chap ill luck unlimbered knows,
A singing as he goes!
Think you the Future has no gifts to bring
To one who still can sing—
Who dreams in lock-step, and—when chance obtains—
Makes music with his chains?”

F. M. B.

Stained



HOULD you in youth have stood at bay
When error in your conscience lay,
And seen fair Promise turn away
When you had all but won her,
Do you believe you could retrieve,
Or that the world would e'er believe
In what it terms your honor?
Do you imagine you could climb
Parnassus, and by deeds sublime
Outlive the stain of slander?
Would that one blot upon the page
Obscure your dearest heritage
When scandal came to pander?

Your prayer might fathom every creed—
But would your brother hear, or heed?

O mankind under mortal ban,
O gentle woman, manly man,
O brother since the world began,
And theosophic swain—
O, brutes, that revel in your pen
And masquerade in garbs of men!
What profit may one gain?
Had you concealed that fault of youth,
And tuned the fatal notes of Truth
To Falsehood's subtle strain,
And fed the brutes their husks divine,
And plied them with Circean wine
In tolerant disdain—

You were a prince!—on every breath—
How grand your life! (How damned your death.)

Release



He has not kith nor kin whom he may claim—
The place once home to him is but a name;

And though the world be wide, and highways free,
But one gate stands ajar for such as he.

He warms his chilling limbs at stranger fires—
A stranger bed by night a pittance hires;

And where the city's lights are brightest, there
He finds a deadly surcease from despair.

He has but memories to dwell with him—
The memories of all that might have been;

And now that men have pardoned—made him free—
How will they balance law with memory?

A hundred churches beckon him—to pray;
Sweet charity would welcome him—away;

For by the very act that made him free
He wears the crimson badge of infamy.

Whose hand will grasp his hand—when all is said?
The world still sees his stripes and shaven head.

How would we meet this crisis, thus alone,
With neither love, nor friend, nor hope nor home?

The Open Road



HERE wends the road beyond these walls?
I do not know—I may not see;
But every hour its freedom calls
And leads me, spirit free.

So swift it sweeps in curving gleams,
So clear beneath the sun and moon,
It calls me from my work and dreams,
At midnight and at noon.

A clanging bell! The bolts fly back
As each day brings its task anew;
A purr of wheels—the looms' "click-clack"—
I see—the road, and you.

To know this helpless, hopeless throng—
This bar-bound death in life—the prayer—
The muttered curse of nameless wrong—
The silence of despair!

And yet—a garden blossoms there
That breathes of Omar's rose-blown bower;
And love's blood-rose set in your hair
Perfumes my every hour!

Where wends the road beyond these walls?
I know not whither it doth wend;
But this I know: whate'er befalls,
You're waiting at its end.

A Christmas Sonnet



THROUGHOUT our land, from end to end,
The Christmas spirit reigns today.
Again is sung the sacred lay,
And festal chimes their music lend,
While cheer flows free from friend to friend—
Save in these walls of sombre gray
Where sullen, silent bondmen stay,
The fettered years of life to spend.

No gladness here—no carols sung,
No cherished gift to send or prize;
No wreaths of holly here are hung
To laud the Shepherd of the skies.
Despised—with murmurs on each tongue—
The bondmen, in their turn, despise.



At a Numbered Grave



NOT his the song that came or closed
As each changed mood its impulse lent;
That soaring high anon reposed,
With lower utterance blurred and blent.

Not his the wing that sprang aloft
To settle soon in wearied rest,
Familiar with the skies, but oft
Returning to an earthly nest.

His song poured ceaseless and serene,
Unvexed by dull and dissonant chords,
And all its artless art was seen
In noble acts and thoughts and words.

Sonnets of the Hours

Scene—A Prison



IS nine—by clock and bell and gong;
The long night waits, and desolate.
Full wearily the wards of State—
Whose shadows pace dim walls along
Whence whispers steal, and murmurs throng—
Score grimly from the page of Fate
The mocking finger of a date,
One symbol of an endless wrong.

Sleep—dreams! what dreams may come to me
Who live each hour in vivid dreams?
Methinks that immortality
Is but the cobweb of such themes.
And yet, here on the nether brink,
How bitter are the dregs we drink!

They call again—the hour is ten.
Within the vaulted corridor
The nightwatch steal along the floor
With cat-like tread, from pen to pen
Where captive lie their fellowmen.
A lantern flashes by the door
On sleeping bondmen—score on score—
Who dream of that fair morning when

The law has had its utmost due,
And they again breathe, full and free,
The pure, sweet air of heaven's blue
In one deep draught of liberty.
With each lone hour I vigil keep—
And wonder how the world can sleep!

"ELEVEN"—is the Warder's cry.
Long years ago I was a child,
All innocent and undefiled.
With listening ear and anxious eye,
A mother sensed each troubled sigh,
And every childish fear beguiled—
While father stood beside and smiled
To see the man of by-and-by.

Along the corridor a pace
I hear a murmured prayer—and then,
Above that plea for heaven's grace,
A voice is cursing God and men!
And these were each a mother's child—
A father's pride, and undefiled.

TWELVE strikes—the Watch is changing now.
Dame Pleasure throngs the midnight street
With countless, hurrying, eager feet.
Sleepless, I toss with fevered brow
While vivid fancy pictures how
Two seek a restaurant's retreat,
And make pretense to drink and eat
While Eros bends an arrowed bow.

They whisper of the tragic mime—
I hear the diva's voice sublime,
And, after but a moment's pause,
The rippling ring of wild applause.
But, listen to reality—
A little cricket sings to me!

"ONE—ALL IS WELL." A new-born day
Is ushered in the fold of Time;
In its pulses vice and crime,
Truth and honor, grief grown gray,
All the elements that sway,
Low or noble—base, sublime,
Purest pearls, and vilest slime,
Yours to choose, or cast away—

While the ghosts that haunt this place
Steal into each secret space,
Feed upon the heart's own core,
Consume it, o'er and o'er and o'er.
Is there any recompense
When a soul shall hurry hence?

"ONE—TWO"—Another lagging hour
Has fled into the vanished past.
O, Christ! how long will this night last?
And why should I to conscience cower
Though mocking phantoms frown and glower?
No! All reliance I will cast
Upon the future's promise, vast—
And trust the One Eternal Power.

Somewhere in poet lore 'tis said
That all the world will laugh with you,
But leave you lonely with your dead.
I wonder if the poet knew,
If truth alone be written there,
How futile then is trust and prayer?

'TIS THREE—and by the wicket's light
I roll another cigarette,
Inhaling deeply, to forget
Each pictured moment's laggard flight—
To banish visions from my sight;
For while the Spirit I may let
To roam the deep, star-dusted night,
This shell of clay enfolds me yet.

“THREE—All is well.” The world is still—
And velvet-black the bar-bound night;
No sound, save echoes in their flight
That haunt me still, so hollow, chill.
God! “All is well!” Such mockery
As Lucifer alone may glee.

AGAIN they call—the hour is four.
Without the walls a robin's song
Swells joyously and brave and strong,
To greet the welcome light once more;
So jubilant the flood doth pour
I think the bird can know no wrong,
Or, knowing, to it must belong
A knowledge deeper than man's lore—

Else never such a roundelay
To speed the dawn upon its way.
Nay—it would be a sadder lay;
For what does daylight bring to me?
Long hours of silent slavery—
With this one note of melody.

AT LAST!—the strident rising bell,
And loud and shrill the whistle blows;
A minute, full, to waken those
Whom sleep still holds in death-like spell.
Now they will open every cell,
Almost before I don these clothes
In which each listless bondman goes
To round his task, and round it well.

In striped file down dining hall
The lock-step drags its sullen pace—
They eat in silence, face to face—
A turnkey lets a mallet fall—
And then to quarry, shop and loom,
Where JUSTICE turns the wheels of doom.

The Garden of Death



SAFE bound by locking waters
Within the Golden Gate,
A Fortress stands, remote and gray,
A prison of the State.
The flanking walls that round it sweep
A massive portal scars,
Where warders, grim, their vigils keep
With locks and bolts and bars—

And flaunting o'er the battlements
Floats "Freedom's" stripes and stars!

In old San Quentin's garden
The morn is sweet with blooms;
A little square in God's pure air
Amid a thousand tombs;
And in a fountain's mirrored depths,
As you are passing by,
Bare, mocking walls on either hand
Seem reaching to the sky—

And through that glimpse of paradise
A youth was led—to die.

Above San Quentin's garden
The loop-hole grates look down,
Beyond the wall and castled keep
Where shotted cannon frown;
And just within a little gate
Along a steel-bound tier,
In cells of death, men hold their breath
When unseen steps draw near—

For death is in the air they breathe,
And in each sound they hear!

Through old San Quentin's garden
They led him, to his doom,
While rose and lily sighed for him
An exquisite perfume;
And, in the prison-yard beyond,
Men spoke, with bated breath,
Of laws that mock the law of God,
And strangle men to death—

Of men who send God-given life
To godless, brutal death!

O'er old San Quentin's garden
A stately pine-tree sighs,
A lonely captive from the wild
Where Tamalpais lies;
And seated by its rugged trunk
A convict, old and wan,
Was reading from a little book
He held in palsied hand;—

And on the title page I read:
"The Brotherhood of Man."

A Nocturne

(To Poe)



HEN the hush of evening lingers
And the day dims away,
From the touch of Memory's fingers
Steals a lay—olden lay;
While from rose and lilac blooming
In some garden in the glooming
Comes the soft night wind, perfuming
Every breath along the way.

And the vespers from the village
Ringing low, sweet and low,
Tempt my soul thy store to pillage
Ere I go, and bestow
One more flower with the dower
That you gave in love and power
To the spell of twilight hour
Treasured, vanished—long ago.

L'envoi.

Poet,—thy genius hath not stayed me—
'Twas the soul Lenore waylaid me,
And I would thine own to aid me
From its chambered wealth of woe!

Love's Warder



L

AST night in dreams, long after I had died,
My spirit sought the portals of Her heart;
There a sweet silence reigned in every part—
No sign of wreck nor ruin I descried;
And I, who once had dwelt there, stood and sighed,
Thinking, "Since I have slept in the cold clay
Betimes all stains of grief are washed away
That some new tenant soon may here abide."

As thus I mused One entered quietly,
And in his hand the key to every door.
Sadly I turned: "Thy pardon, Sir," said I,
"But once I dwelt here, who dwell here no more."
Humbly he bowed: "Thy servitor am I;
The keys are thine. My name is Memory."

The Death Watch

(Evening)



BEAM of sunlight falls athwart the floor;
In checkered squares the bars that cross my door

And seal this narrow cell, lie shadowed there;
The mote-shot arrow quivers in the air,

A shaft of living light that stabs the gloom,
Revealing each dim recess of this tomb.

Can it be that this same sun shone today
On the old home so near—so far—away?

* * *

Home! wonderword. What reveries you bring—
What memories of love around you cling!

A barefoot boy—the little country school,
The dusty roads and hidden swimming pool—

The orchards and the meadows where long hours
He dreamed among the bees and birds and flowers—

The low-banked river winding slowly by
Whose bosom mirrored all the azure sky—

The home of love, and love's maternal hand,
Her fairy-tales and songs of slumberland.

* * *

The day is done. The bright sunbeam has fled;
'Twas but the herald of a glory dead.

To all the care-free world one day has passed—
Man has decreed that it shall be my last.

(Midnight)

Just now I heard the tolling of a bell—
And then the answer: "Twelve—and all is well."

The silent watch, with stolid, mask-like face
Pads round and round this dim, death-haunted place;

And yet I know before the day is done
My earthly place shall be a darker one.

The watcher bids me rest—but sleep has fled;
Does not one sleep forever with the dead?

* * *

Last night in dreams I saw a vision there,
The gleaming eyes, the wondrous wind-blown hair
Shone through the gloom, a lambent aureole
To light the darkness of a tortured soul.

The pure, sweet lips my fevered forehead pressed,
A truant tress my burning cheek caressed.

I strove to move—to speak, but iron bands
Seemed rivited on lips and eyes and hands.

With mighty strength the bonds of sleep I broke!
With eager hands I reached—and then awoke.

More than the world she suffers for my crimes;
I die but once—she dies a thousand times!

(Morning)

The pallid dawn steals softly o'er the land;
Strange, ghostly shapes take form on every hand.

Hark! Someone comes. The bars swing slowly back
And on my cot is laid a garb of black.

The warders from the door grim tidings give—
One turns to me: "You have an hour to live."

* * *

An hour—one hour—how strange it seems to be!
Another hour and time shall cease for me.

An hour to write, to speak, to think, to pray—
And I shall be a clod of lifeless clay.

An hour! 'Tis scarcely that since life began.
So infinitesimal this human span.

What reck's it how we live or when we die
In this brief hour of All-Eternity?

How vain each act of good or ill we do,
Since that hour your Brother judges you.

Though all your life be wrong from breath to breath,
Is his the hand to seal another's death?

His stamp of justice brands each warrant red.
When he must meet the legion of the dead

And read the one mute question in those eyes—!
How futile then all pleas man may devise.

A Roman Holiday



WAS a morn in June—and a fair spring day
For the eager crowds and the Roman play.

Over the bay from Frisco town—
Over the country highways, brown—

Hundreds of men, good men and true,
Speeding to witness the law's last due.

I stood by the prison gate that day,
As the throng surged in for the Roman play;

One by one, through the bar-bound door,
Where the man they sought would go out—no more;

In single file, through the narrow way
Where thousands of men pass through, for aye.

Where once a woman, with bated breath,
Had plucked a rose in the Garden of Death,

And breathed in its heart her voiceless grief—
Her deathless love for a common thief—

They passed—and tainted the prison air,
And spat on the flowers blooming there;

They e'en made jest of the death cells near,
To smile when a curse fell on the ear;

For THEY heard, too, those men with one hope—
Just to escape the hangman's rope!

I saw, and followed with helpless eyes,
As they crossed on the fragile "Bridge of Sighs;"

While down in the mill men held their breath!
Waiting to hear the "thud" of death.

I watched them mount, from floor to floor,
Step by step, to the gallows door,

And looking up to the vault of blue,
I wondered if He were watching, too.

* * *

So still is the room you can hear each breath!
For this is the charnel-house of death.

The place is crowded from wall to wall—
All hope is past of a life's recall.

Rigid and gaunt the gallows stands,
The pitiless work of human hands.

Over the trap-door, gaping loose
Dangles the strangling, hempen noose—

Coarse and callous, the Hangman grim
Steps to the task you bring to him;

Hidden and shamed, the three Guards wait
Each with a knife on a strand of Fate

That none may know who the murderer be—
One strand is Death, and the strands are three.

Mutely restless, the throng stands by
Waiting to see a brother die.

Down in the silent, idle mill
A thousand men are breathless and still!

A thousand others, in cell and hall
Wait!—it is time for the trap to fall.

* * *

They led him out as the clock struck ten,
Into the roped-off gallows pen,

Parting a path that opened wide—
His arms strapped fast, and a priest beside;

The mask of death on his graven face
As he mounts the stair with unhalting pace.

A nameless murmur jars on the air—?
The broken words of a man's last prayer.

The black cap fell at the signal hand,
And "JUSTICE" is done—at your demand.

* * *

They hung him high on a Friday morn;
He fell six feet, and his head was shorn,

The trunk lay here, and a Thing lay there—
Clotted with red the graying hair;

And the pulsing gush of the crimson flood
Sprinkled the priest's white robe with blood!

That grim, gray room was a ghastly sight,
As the throng surged out to the air and light,

Sickened and spent, on that fair June day—
All for the sake of a Roman play.

And looking back on the buried years,
On the lives that a prison scars and sears,

How it leaves the soul, man-handled each day
In the grip of its senseless, brutal sway—

I stood there wishing, within the gate,
That I had suffered the dead man's fate!

Shadows



CARDER, rover, spinner and loom,
Bondmen weaving the threads of doom!
Hour by hour—at Fate's decree—
Weaving the web of Destiny.

* * *

A man stands ready beside his task,
A man! Of the Master-Workman's mask;
He threads the shuttle and starts the loom,
Weaving the fabric of his doom.

Fold by fold, in calm and strife,
The web is wound from the warp of life;
While the weaver dreams of the Fates that be—
And of Faith and Hope, and sweet Charity.

Hour by hour the shuttle's song—
Month by month—and the years are long!
For the inner life is a barren womb
Where hope is dead, and the soul a tomb.

Whose the fault when the shuttle flashed,
Leaving the fragile fabric slashed?
Fair was the task, as task may be—
Strange are the ways of Destiny!

A man steps down from beside life's task,
A man in dishonor's fatal mask;
While a novice stands by the waiting loom,
Ready to start the wheels of doom.

* * *

Carder, rover, spinner and loom,
Bondmen weaving the threads of doom!
Hour by hour—at Fate's decree—
Weaving the web of Destiny.

Sunset



SAW the royal robes of twilight's train
Sweep through the crimson portals of the West;
And in the gleaming wake I glimpsed again
The ship of Asteroth, in splendor drest,
Drift up the deeps of evening, calm, unriven,
As 't bore the radiant soul of Him to heaven.

Perchance the Potter of the twirling sky,
The Moulder of the molten, lava seas,
The Builder of the argosies on high,
The Painter of the flowers and the trees
Took cloud and fire, pearl and purple gem,
And in your heart, beloved, blended them.

Absence



Now you are gone—
How changed and strange all seems to look upon!
The deep, cool shadows of the redwood grove,
Dim, haunted aisles, blue canopied above,
The path that leads to one wild, hidden shrine
O'ergrown with grasses, flowers and columbine,
The rippling shallows of the mountain stream,
The quiet pools, where mirrored fancies dream
No tribute pay to Pan's enchanting song—
Now you are gone.

Now you are gone—
How keen the measure of that word—alone;
For while your presence lingers everywhere
One may not touch your hand or smooth your hair.
About a vase of roses in the room
Still clings a haunting, exquisite perfume;
And when I brush them, with a soft caress,
Each crimson petal breathes a tenderness
That leads me, as the sun-led mists are drawn,
Where you are gone.

Where you are gone—
Tell me the beauties of the morning dawn!
Are they as bright in yon far alien skies
As those that lit love's wondrous paradise?
Do summer moons gleam golden through the trees
That sigh with every fragrant, vagrant breeze?
Within the borders of your new domain
Do knights of courtly valor press your train?
Ah, tell me! is your heart still mine alone
Where you are gone?

Rose of Seville



DREAMED last night of Spain, love,
Where storied castles are;
A troubadour again, love,
I touched a light guitar.
Within the walls of old Seville
Beneath thy moonlit lattice grille,
I sang to thee, when all was still,
A lay of love and war.

You lingered by the grille, dear,
A picture in the bars—
The rose of old Seville, dear,
I vowed by all the stars—
And when a gage I asked of you
To me a dainty glove you threw,
And bade me up to dare and do
With lance and shield of Mars!

You danced with me tonight, love,
A stately old quadrille;
Your eyes were softly bright, love,
My sweet rose of Seville!
Two dainty hands you held to me,
The one was masked, the other free—
The truant glove I had from thee
Last night in old Seville!

You glanced at me askance, dear—
The music wove a spell—
And thus in Cupid's trance, dear,
A prophecy befell:
Last night you said, in dream's domain
A Cavalier of olden Spain
Beneath your lattice sang a strain—
And won a heart as well.

The Land o' Dreams



TONIGHT, to see a summer moon hung low adown the
west,

And watch the goblin starlight gleam along the river's breast;
To scent the twilight fragrance of that Garden of my
Youth,

To feel once more the heart of things, their simpleness
and truth!

In dreams there is a rustic seat, a swing beneath the trees—
The lowing cattle by the bars, and cow-bells on the breeze—
O, many exiles wander in far lands across the seas!

The mystic wonders of the East, its jewels and delights,
The crimson dawns of tropic bloom, the poppy-laden nights
I'd give,—to scent the heliotrope in mists of sunlit rain,
To linger with the violets, and you, adown the lane.

In waking hours, and restlessly, in every haunt of man's
I seek that fabled land o' dreams that I may clasp your
hands.

O, many are the wanderers in nearby distant lands!

The Call



THE snowy pine-clad mountains, and the rushing icy streams
Are calling, calling ever 'mid the city's toil and heat:

"Return to us, O world-worn one, and dream the olden
dreams,

Refresh thy dimming memory with happiness complete
Beside the nipping shallows where the Speckled Beauty
gleams,

Or glance in the shadows where the pool and willows
meet."

The mountains call and echo, and the echoes linger still:

"O, man of mart and money—hast forgotten all of these,
The murmur of the forest and the music of each mill—

The scent of pine and laurel and the hum of honey-bees?
But hark! a quail is calling from the coppice on the hill,

And yonder ruddy gleaming is our camp-fire in the trees."

Blind Eros



D

OU stooped and took my passive hand,
And lowly at my feet you knelt;
You whispered of a wonderland
Where Cupid once with Psyche dwelt;
And all the while you held my hand—
Il ne pense pas qui je comprends!

You told of rose and lilac blooms
That round about love's garden cling;
You whispered low of scented glooms
Where nightingales their heart's love sing;
And all the while you held my hand—
Il ne pense pas qui je comprends!

Think you I thought of fragrant blooms
That in fair Psyche's garden float,
Or of the scented, starlit glooms
And nightingales of liquid note?
I only knew you held my hand—
Il ne pense pas qui je comprends!

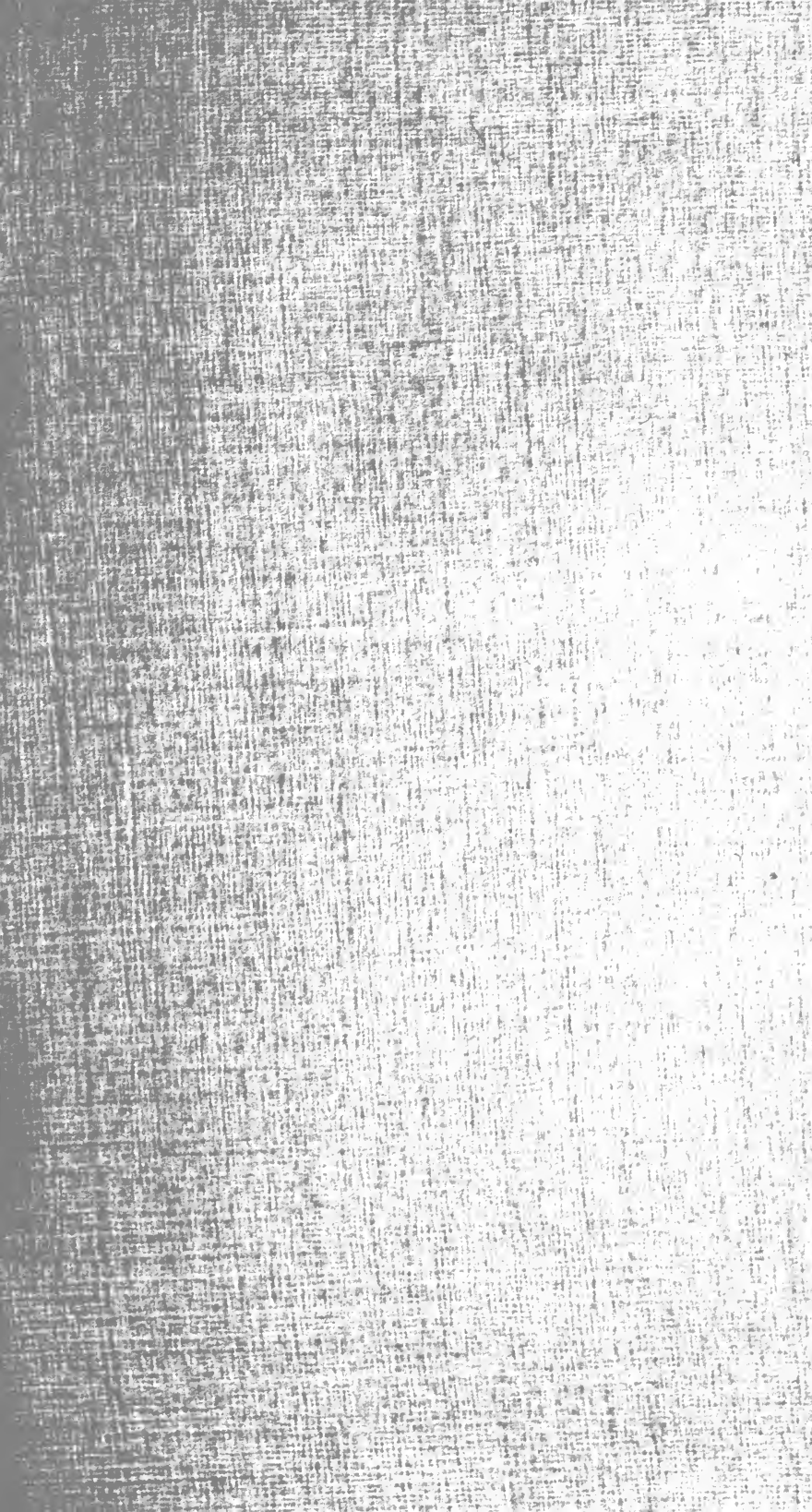
Sepulture



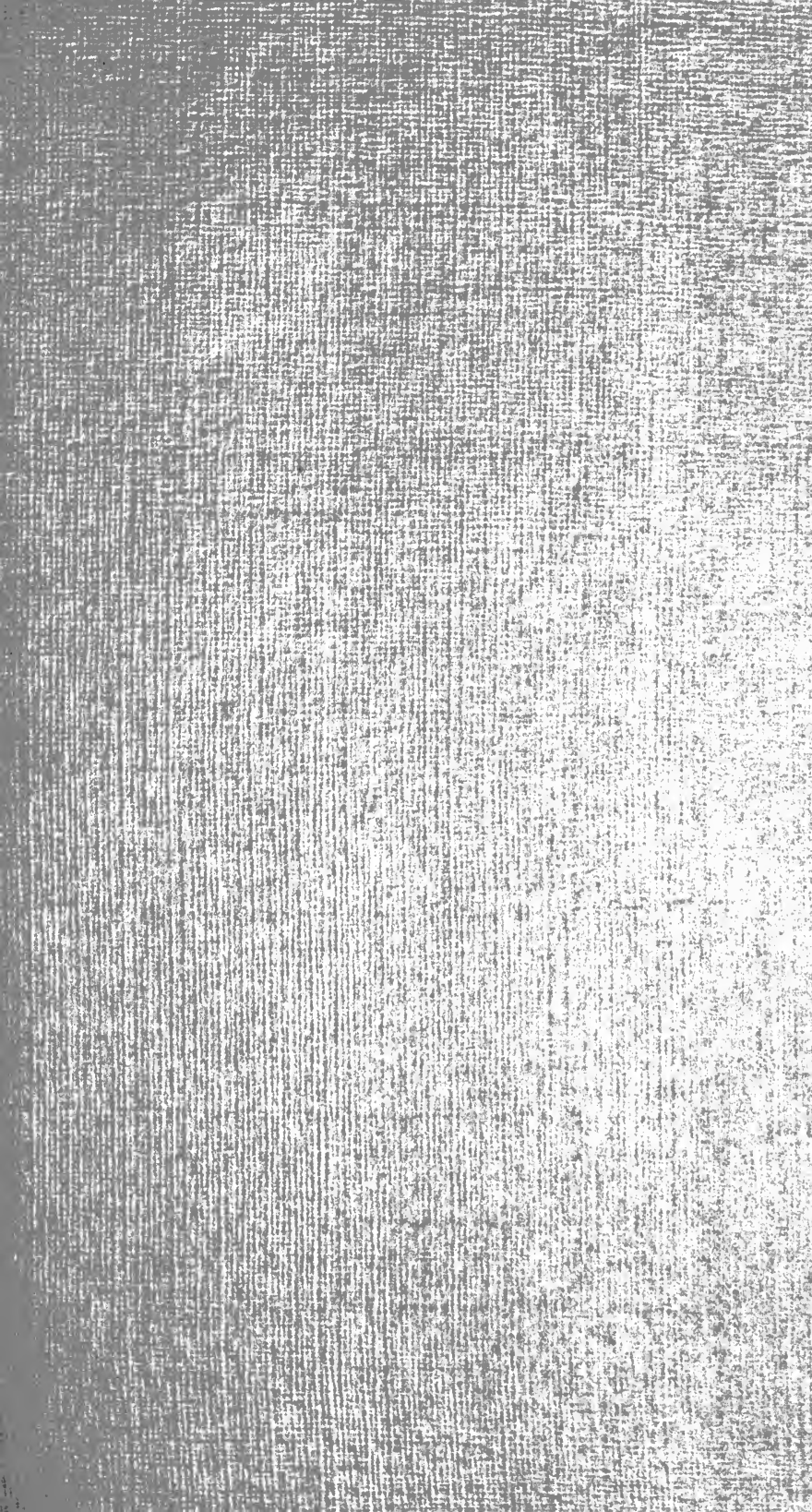
IN the gloom of a cell corner hidden,
Where shadows grow dim on the wall,
Where no sound save of echoes unbidden
Comes ever, the world to recall,
Where no light from the grating can fall,
Not even the gleam of a star,
Alone, and unheeded by all,
Is a shadow of what we all are.

In the dusk of the day that is dying,
When memories come at our call,
And the crickets, their challenges crying,
Chant softly from crevices small,
While the dim wraiths of spirits in thrall
Come thronging, nor heed wall or bar,
There, dying in twilight's dim pall,
Is the shadow of what we all are.

Where now are the ones who are sighing—
Who waited through all the long years
For the lad who would brook no denying
While laughing away all their fears?
His last letter?—here,—and it sears!
How futile this vain mortal span
Since all that is left us are tears—
And the shell of a thing once a man.



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