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A PROPHET OF JOY

A PROPHET OF JOY

BY
GAMALIEL BRADFORD



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TO HER
WHOSE SPIRIT
IS A
FOUNTAIN OF PURE JOY

“ Cette vie, l’ai-je vécue, l’ai-je rêvée ? ”

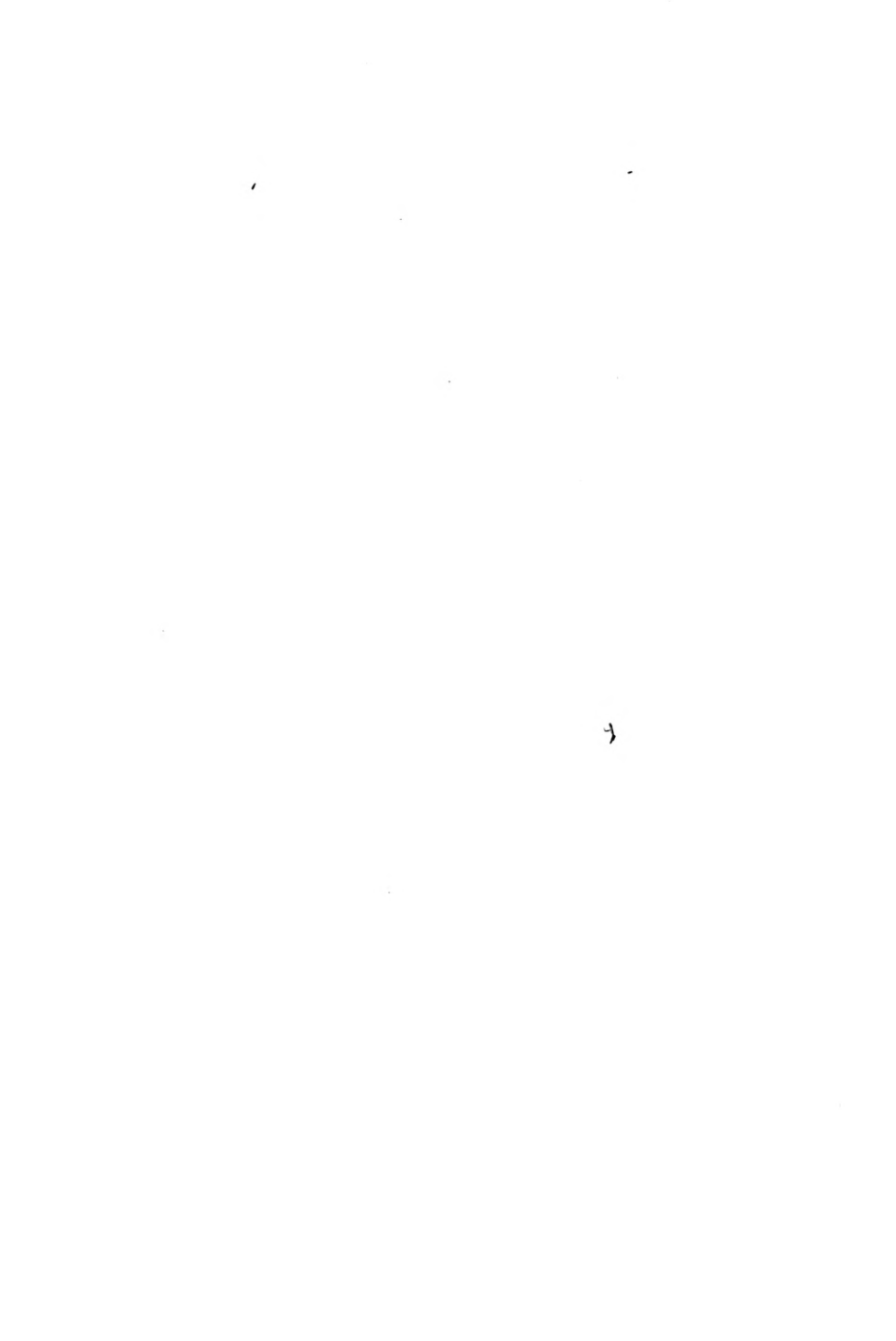
Singer of Yesterday.

“ Si la vie n’est qu’un rêve, il faut la rêver belle. ”

Singer of To-day.

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A PROPHET OF JOY

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BOOK I

THEODORA

I

MISS THEODORA PERKINS was unwed
At thirty-five, yet delicately charming.
An idle and bewitching life she led,
And thought love's snares perhaps somewhat alarming.
In earlier days she had been city-bred,
Then bought a country place, and played at farming,
Had hens and cows, but did not milk, herself,
Nor touch the polished pans upon the shelf.

II

Her mother had been fair, her father wealthy.
She had the grace of one, the other's riches,
Was always merry, being always healthy,
Had maids to take all necessary stitches.
You wonder love, with his approaches stealthy
Had never touched her heart. Perhaps its niches
Were filled with dreams beyond his craft perfidious.
Surely she had the right to be fastidious.

A PROPHET OF JOY

III

At any rate, single she was, and seemed
To the malicious even quite contented.
Her eyes were brown, and still with laughter gleamed,
Her hair was brown, and nothing yet invented
Could keep its curls in order, when they gleamed,
Like brooks in sunshine. Magdalen, repented,
Had not a rounder, more enchanting figure,
Although each year it grew a trifle bigger.

IV

A lady of laughter was she, all alone.
She laughed at pleasant thoughts and sunny fancies,
She laughed from cheerfulness when cause was none,
Also when others laughed. She went to dances
As long as sweet and twenty should have gone,
And after gravity made slow advances,
She danced with others' mirth, made merry by it,
Happy in company, content in quiet.

V

She had a charming house, which matched her heart,
A quaint old house as sunny as her laughter,
Full of rich, pleasant things in every part,
Supremely comfortable from sill to rafter :
Rugs, pictures, books, trifles of grace and art,
Tall clocks that gently ticked of the hereafter —
A sweet abode, and every object wore a
Suggestion of its mistress, Theodora.

THEODORA

VI

The house was set upon a little hill,
And at one side a turfy lawn descended,
Where ancient oaks, disposed with cunning skill,
Made lights and shadows beautifully blended.
Behind were gardens, where you drank your fill
Of seasonable blooms now nearly ended ;
For autumn, with its riotous intrusion,
Began to blight their opulent profusion.

VII

Here, on a balmy morning of September,
Miss Theodora early came to view
The charm of her possessions, to remember
Past Summer's rich luxuriance and renew
Its wealth of joy, ere blasts like bleak November
Brought indoor pleasures. In her arbor new
She found fast sleeping, mid disordered glory
Of golden locks, the hero of our story.

VIII

He seemed a faun, a creature of the wood,
Red-capped, short-coated, with his tie a-streaming,
A chick of twenty, just escaped the brood,
There on Miss Perkins's bench quietly dreaming.
Transfixed with wonder, even as she stood,
At first Miss Theodora felt like screaming ;
But brief reflection soon sufficed to change her
Fear to a smile, as she beheld the stranger.

A PROPHET OF JOY

IX

Some such adventure she had long been wanting,
To spice her happiness in its monotony,
An occupation even more enchanting
Than poetry diversified with botany,
A charm, a grace, a magic fair and haunting.
Now in all nature surely there was not any
More fair, more haunting to be found or given
Than this bright apparition dropped from heaven.

X

Therefore she laughed aloud. On this her guest
Sat up and rubbed his eyes and yawned a bit,
Then gravely looked at her. "You break my rest,"
He said. She laughed again. Then, thinking it
Perhaps not quite polite, she thus addressed
The stranger. "Pray, excuse me. But you sit
As calmly in my arbor as if I,
Not you, had crept into it on the sly."

XI

"Surely," he said, "you cannot be so narrow
As to suppose your premises are n't free?
The sun comes in, with many a shining arrow,
And makes himself at home as I should be.
You would not think of shutting out a sparrow:
Then by what logic can you shut out me?"
Once more she laughed and this time he laughed too,
As affably as any god might do.

THEODORA

XII

“What is your name?” she asked. He answered, “Smith.”

“A god by any other name,” thought she:

“Yet, after all, Smith makes good rhyme to myth,
And names are nothing to a deity.”

He interrupted her reflections with,

“I’m ready for my breakfast now, you see.”

Breakfast! Oh, horrors! Hers was on the table.

But ask a stranger in! She was not able.

XIII

The maids would stare, their looks interrogate,

And the whole town would know within an hour

That she had picked and laid beside her plate

This charming but inexplicable flower.

She sought a moment to deliberate

By asking any question in her power.

“Your other name I should be glad to know.”

“Certainly, Percival,” he answered. “Oh,

XIV

“I know you now. The son of Simon?” “Yes,

Of Simon Peter Smith. I hope your knowing

Inclines you more to pity my distress.”

She laughed as always, in her laughter showing

Small teeth of commendable pearliness,

Then led him to the house, and told him, going,

His mother had been one among her cousins,

Of whom she reckoned up unnumbered dozens.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XV

“You knew my mother? What might be your name?”

She told him. “Never heard of you,” he said.

“That ’s natural. Although your mother came

From near my home, she went away to wed

When I was but a child. Within the same

Year you were born, I think, and she was dead.

But tell me, why, in other folks’ pavilions,

You steal a nap, with all your father’s millions?”

XVI

“My father’s millions? I will tell you later.

Can’t we have breakfast now?” Again she laughed,

Then led him in and did her best to cater

To a surprising appetite. He quaffed

Coffee unlimited, and as gayly ate her

Delicious fruit, biscuit, and eggs, then quaffed

Once more. Her cousin, for an early call,

She told the maids, who wondered at it all.

XVII

And well they might, that such an apparition,

Red-capped and golden-curled, should thus appear

Out of the sky, and give an exhibition

Of appetite to make the timid fear.

A cousin perishing of inanition

Did not go with Miss Perkins, that was clear.

But she explained he’d never had a mother,

A theme for kitchen pity like no other.

THEODORA

XVIII

He satisfied his hunger and his thirst

At length. Said she, "Come, tell me all your story."
Her curiosity, by waiting nursed,

Was eager as his appetite. The glory
Of rich September's sun, now wide dispersed

On leaf, and vine, and beard of corn grown hoary,
Lured them once more into the arbor, where
He told his tale to recompense her care.

XIX

"You want to hear my story? It is plain.

At least, it seems to me so. I'm a prophet."
At which Miss Theodora tried in vain

To check her laughter. "Oh, you need not scoff at
My mission. I'm not trying to restrain

Poor souls from wandering down the way to Tophet.
My calling simply is to make it clear,
Such as we are, we may be happy here.

XX

"The world is full of shadows, well I know :

The toothache, and the heartache, little evils,
Great, if you like and if you make them so.

But man's worst enemies are surely devils
Of his own breed, imaginary woe,

When will, ungoverned, leads fantastic revels.
Now from these ills I aim to set men free."

"How did you get such an idea?" said she.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXI

“ I see you want the whole from the beginning.
My father is the whole, or he and I.
My mother, I have heard, was fair and winning,
As full of sunshine as an April sky,
Thought much mere merriment that he thought sinning.
It was a great mistake for her to die.
But die she did, and left my father me,
As like her, I should judge, as like could be.

XXII

“ As for my father, he is good but serious,
Much more than serious, severe, austere,
Condemning idle mirth as deleterious,
And toiling at his desk the livelong year.
He rules his servants with a will imperious,
Filling the worst and best alike with fear;
His business wealth, religion his distraction,
And neither gives him any satisfaction.

XXIII

“ A thin, tall man, with dark and eager eyes,
Forever fixed on something of to-morrow,
A man of wisdom, if much care makes wise,
A man of gravity akin to sorrow,
A man whom no disaster can surprise,
A man determined not to lend nor borrow,
Not money, not sweet friendship, not delight,
Who lives enshrouded in his own thoughts' night.”

THEODORA ·

XXIV

He spoke all this with animated ease,
His cap pushed back, his golden hair wind-stirred.
The absence of all conscious aim to please
Made pleasant every lightly uttered word.
Beneath the richly laden orchard trees
He seemed to Theodora like some bird,
Singing an autumn song of lovely things
And mixing sunshine in its murmurings.

XXV

“Go on,” she said. “I will go on,” said he.
“It sounds as if I did not love my father.
Nevertheless, I do, and he loves me.
He loved my mother madly, as I gather,
At least she held him by a witchery
His sober thought did not approve, say, rather,
A worldly levity, as he would name it.
Named as you please, he never overcame it.

XXVI

“Before she died, his life was grave, to keep
Her merriment within due moderation.
But she could put his gravity to sleep
With all joy’s exquisite solicitation,
Could sometimes make even his heart o’er-leap
The barriers of his starched denomination.
After her death, he never smiled at all,
Stern as a winter cloud, or churchyard wall.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXVII

“His life was full of God and making money.
Not that he greatly cares for one or the other.
But he must still be doing. Pastimes sunny
And idle fancies chasing one another,
Each richer than the last with pleasure's honey,
Delight him not at all. The passionate smother
Of will and lust and thought he overcomes
By saying endless prayers and doing sums.

XXVIII

“Me he regards as something quite profane,
Half loves me as his child and half abhors.
At first, with all his might, he tried to train
My wayward will to what his soul adores,
Dreamed I would toil, like him, for power by gain,
Or shepherd souls to Christ in countless scores.
But when he found I drank of neither cup,
Even his stern patience sighed and gave it up.

XXIX

“And then he hired tutors who should teach
The common rudiments of grace and virtue.
First came a minister who could not preach,
His voice so harsh it positively hurt you.
His heart was little softer than his speech.
A learned man, in Latin so expert you
Wished he had been a Roman born. I spent
Two years of anguish with him. Then he went.

THEODORA

XXX

“The second was quite different, strong, athletic,
Merry at heart and young. Why he was chosen,
Unless because I hated the ascetic,
I never could make out. My soul, long frozen,
Melted and danced with ardor peripatetic,
Sang dainty songs and catches by the dozen ;
You learned from him as blackbird learns to whistle.
Kissing the chambermaid caused his dismissal.”

XXXI

“Oh!” said Miss Perkins. Percival echoed, “Oh!
She was a charming chambermaid. In fact,
I kissed her several times myself, although
The fancy was more charming than the act.
Under this shower of kisses she had to go.
And after that the house was tightly packed
With tresses gray, wry neck, or twisted shoulder :
The pole itself could hardly have been colder.”

XXXII

“Why weren't you sent to school?” Miss Perkins asked.
“School?” was the answer. “Why, my father dreaded
That all those fancies wild my mother masked
Under the fascinating grace he wedded
Would flash into the light, if I were tasked
Among the worldly and the base, unsteadied
By his directing hand. Quite visionary
My father is.” “Yes,” said Miss Perkins. “Very.”

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXXIII

“He’s gone abroad just now. When he comes back,
He says that he’ll complete my education.
He need n’t. I am twenty and I lack
No sort of necessary information.
I’ve read great poets—have followed in their track—
Read naughty novels on the sex relation.
I understand the modern world quite well.
It’s much more curious than heaven or hell.

XXXIV

“I play sonatas on the violin,
And I have read a good deal of theology,
Know Nietzsche had a great contempt for sin,
And thought that Christians needed an apology.
I quite agree with him. The world has been
Saddened too long by Hebrew teleology,
Enthralled too long by dim, phantasmal fears,
Instead of dancing with the dancing years.”

XXXV

Here he sat up, his round blue eyes aglow,
Like heaven on a sunny day in spring.
Was he, poor Theodora wished to know,
A lunatic or an inspired thing?
“Listen,” he said, “nine-tenths of all our woe
Lies in our will. We make our suffering.
We turn our eyes away from joy’s pure star.
We think we are unhappy and we are.

THEODORA

XXXVI

“Oh, I ’m no Christian Scientist. Disease
And agony and anguish I admit.
But these come seldom. Yes, and even these
May be made less. By disregarding it
Pain may be metamorphosed into ease.”
“Have you had any ?” “No ; but do not sit
There interjecting arguments ad hominem,
Whose sole significance is, ‘I a woman am.’”

XXXVII

“And so your object is to trumpet joy ?”
“It is,” he said. “I ’ve entertained the notion
Some months ; but I knew well it would annoy
My father ; so I let him cross the ocean.
I then determined that I might employ
His absence, and might put my scheme in motion.
Now I ’ve set out, like that old Spanish crank.— Oh
Miss Theodora, won’t you be my Sancho ?”

XXXVIII

“It seems to me you ’re just the very creature.”
She laughed. “Do you call that a compliment ?”
“Of course,” he said, “you have n’t Sancho’s feature.
But you are surely one that heaven sent
To be a merry miracle of nature.
Come, come ! We two will start together, bent
To teach the whole wide world that it might be
Filled full of joy and laughter, even as we.”

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXXIX

She laughed again. "Tell me your tale," she said.
"You've been a prophet for an autumn day.
How have you fared?" The prophet's golden head
Bent forward, rather more perplexed than gay.
"How have I fared? The jolly life I've led
Would make Don Quixote slink with shame away.
I've taught a prayer meeting the path to take
And I have had a ducking in a lake."

XL

"Oh!" said Miss Theodora. "You shall hear.
I left my father's house two days ago."
"Just as you are?" said she. "As I sit here."
"With money?" said she. "Money?" he answered. "No.
What should I do with money? The sky was clear.
The soft, serene south wind began to blow.
I danced along the highway, like a leaf,
Tossed by the breeze, indifferent to grief."

XLI

"I wandered all the pleasant afternoon,
Without a thought of any destination.
For surely nature needs no better boon
Than unpremeditated divagation.
But when at last the full, great harvest moon
Rolled up the azure east, I faced starvation.
Just then I found a cyclist on a bank,
Eating a lunch. With him I ate and drank."

THEODORA

XLII

“He was a curious creature, dark and thin,
Forever arguing. If you argued too,
His jaws shut like a trap, and what had been
Your dearest argument was bitten through.
He seemed a man that would believe in sin.
I tried to demonstrate the obvious view,
That if we simply would, we might be happy.
He answered in words positively snappy.

XLIII

““Young man, go home, and learn your A, B, C.
Do you think what God botched you might have mended?
That chits like you can make a heaven be
Where hell was quite explicitly intended?’
I tried to demonstrate most courteously,
What man began by man might well be ended.
He got upon his cycle and rode off.
The sputtering cycle drowned the sputtering scoff.

XLIV

“I strolled along beneath the moonshine merry,
Now changing laughter with a lightfoot maid,
Now gazing at a wry form fit to bury,
Whose thoughts, I knew, would make the moon afraid.
I stopped to ponder in a cemetery,
Beneath a weeping willow’s pleasant shade,
When from a church arose the choral din.
‘Ah, ha!’ I said. ‘Come, let us wander in.’

A PROPHET OF JOY

XLV

“I wandered in. Oh, sweet Miss Theodora,
You never saw so horrible a place.
Some thirty human wrecks were posed before a
Grim, antiquated ruin of a face;
And not a single countenance but wore a
Look of complete despair, as if the race,
Not only human, but fur, fin, and feather,
Were all irrevocably damned together.

XLVI

“I sat. A chalky nondescript was praying
And maundering on about the great facility
With which the Lord saves wayward sheep from straying.
He must have seen me. The bare possibility
Of being besmirched by such benign inveighing
Was quite too much for my minute humility.
It stung me from my seat. I strode right front
And broke into the prayer after my wont.

XLVII

“‘You fools,’ I said, ‘who mangle and distort
The shreds and scraps of wisdom oriental
Into a recipe to spoil the sport
Of those who find our sorrow accidental
And life an ecstasy, however short.
You fools, whose agency is instrumental
In making this world serve extremely well
As a condensed epitome of hell!’

THEODORA

XLVIII

“I could have gone on. I was in the vein.
But here the tempest of their fury burst.
You should have seen the faces: wrath and pain,
Wide mouths that theologically cursed,
Hands clutched, eyes staring. I could not refrain
From quite discourteous laughter. But the worst
Was a young girl I had not seen before,
Delightful through the horror that she wore.

XLIX

“Then they laid hands on me, a burly sinner
And the gaunt saint whose prayer I broke in two.
If it had been a little nearer dinner,
I might have given them both enough to do.
But I was hollow and convulsed with inner
Amusement. Therefore they propelled me through
The chapel door, rejoicing in my mind
At all the chaos I had left behind.

L

“Miss Theodora, what a world it is,
Where men augment the little ills they suffer
By vast imaginary miseries,
Making their daily pathway so much rougher,
And blaming then malicious destinies:
Surely the hide of Christians must be tougher
Than ordinary men's to stand the beating
It gets in such a place as that prayer-meeting.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LI

“But I forgot it and I strolled along.

Then I grew sleepy and of course I slept.”

“Oh,” said Miss Theodora, “that was wrong.”

He answered, laughing loud, “Should I have kept
Myself awake by tickling or by song?

I always sleep outdoors. I simply crept
Into the sheltered corner of a fence,
Bed good enough for any man of sense.”

LII

Miss Theodora sighed. Her brain was burning
With this peculiar creature and his fancies.

It almost seemed as if she were returning

To childhood days and things of dream romances.

“Go on,” she begged, “go on.” No way discerning

Her eagerness, the knight of golden chances
Went on recounting in like airy mode
The fates that had befallen his wandering road.

LIII

“I woke at dawn. The stars were disappearing,

And pink, barred clouds flamed in the brightening east.

The hush of heaven gradually clearing

Would rouse devotion even in a priest.

But I confess that daylight’s rapid nearing

Made breakfast seem desirable at least.

I rose and shook myself and looked around

For any sign of hospitable ground.

THEODORA

LIV

“I saw a mansion quite convenient by,
Which seemed well nourished and restorative.
I tried it, but a dog barked horribly.
I came to get a breakfast, not to give;
And therefore I departed speedily.
Why is that race of Cerberus let live
To frighten honest people who mean well
With foretaste of the bellowings of hell?”

LV

“I tried another house, less Cerberized.
A chambermaid like that I kissed, quite pretty,
Opened the door. ‘Breakfast?’ I asked. Surprised,
She looked at me with all a sister’s pity.
‘Try the back door,’ she doubtfully advised.
‘So these,’ I thought, ‘are manners of the city,’
But did as she suggested, back or front,
Was quite indifferent to my breakfast hunt.”

LVI

“At the back door a matron fiery, stout,
All redolent of luscious kitchen savor,
Angrily first gave me the right-about;
But something in my aspect won her favor.
She murmured, ‘Does your mother know you’re out?’
‘My mother’s dead.’ At that reply she gave her
Best titbits and assisted my digestion
With every sort of variegated question.”

A PROPHET OF JOY

LVII

“‘I’m out to renovate mankind,’ said I.

‘Go home,’ said she, ‘and suck your nursing-bottle.’

‘I can’t, I have a work to do,’ said I.

‘Glory!’ said she, as sage as Aristotle,

‘You work!’ And then she fed me custard pie,

Entreated me maternally to throttle

My notions, put a package in my hand which

Contained an egg, an apple, and a sandwich.

LVIII

“I thanked her, took the package, and fared on.

The morning was as merry as the night.

Sorrow or care on earth I had not one,

As joyous as the swallow in its flight.

I reveled in the splendor of the sun,

In every casual human sound or sight.

Oh, fools, I said, how can you make derision

Of life’s unlimited, bewitching vision?

LIX

“I wandered all the bright forenoon, now chatting

With men who heard my talk with curiosity,

Or suave old ladies, much inclined to patting

My head and of an infinite verbosity.

One fellow sang, most hideously flattering.

I kindly set him right. His loud ferocity

Would have disturbed a creature less contented.

I smiled, and he immediately repented.

THEODORA

LX

“ At length I turned into a pleasant field,
Where lay a small pond in a grassy hollow,
By little clumps of birches half-concealed,
The dancing waters whipped by many a swallow.
When I approached the spot, I saw revealed
An ugly sight, with uglier to follow :
A crowd of ruffians busily tormenting
A half-starved dog in fury unrelenting.

LXI

“ A noisy, dirty, riotous lot they were,
Their imprecations cracked the Sabbath peace.
The dog was a forlorn, misshapen cur,
Without the spirit to fight for his release.
They tied a tin can round his neck, to stir
Their quite inhuman mirth, and to increase
It further, when the dog did not respond,
Some one proposed to throw him in the pond.

LXII

“ This hit their mood exactly. A great lout
Seized the poor creature by his four legs. Splash!
He plumped into the water five yards out.
He whined and howled, as if he felt the lash,
And then he quickly turned himself about
And swam for shore again. The dissonant crash
Of their gross laughter echoed wide, and merriment
Distinctly urged repeating the experiment.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXIII

“ They grasped the dog, they swung him. ‘ That’s too much,’
I shouted, rushing straight into the middle.
‘ You brutes!’ I said. ‘ That God created such
To me is an inexplicable riddle.
Let the poor beast alone!’ But who could touch
Hearts stony hard as theirs? ‘ Go, play the fiddle,
Monkey,’ said one. ‘ Be careful what you do,
Or you may likely get a ducking too.’

LXIV

“ When I heard that, I struck the hulking fellow,
Who held the dog, right straight between the eyes.
The beast let out an execrable bellow,
Partly from pain and partly from surprise.
‘ I know you’re nothing but a pack of yellow,
Cowardly rogues,’ I said. This made arise
Curses in such intolerable clamor
As really would have silenced a trip-hammer.

LXV

“ They dropped the dog and four or five seized me.
They hustled me, they swung me in the air.
But, after all, thought I, the dog is free.
They may do whatever they like. I shall not care.
Their oaths, their general language would not be
Fit for a lady’s bower. I should not dare
Repeat them. Then, with one tremendous lunge,
They hurled me out to a colossal plunge.

THEODORA

LXVI

“ I crashed, I splashed, I floundered. When at last
I stood waist-deep in protoplasmic fluid,
I saw my late tormentors fly with vast
Appreciation of the many huéd
Spectacle I presented. While, aghast,
Dejected as a melancholy Druid,
The dog sat sympathetic on the bank.
Even he, I felt, considered me a crank.

LXVII

“ I staggered out, aglow with conscious virtue.
And, after all, a bath could do no harm.
The touch of natural water cannot hurt you,
Especially if taken rather warm.
Also, the superficies of dirt you
Can easily remove without alarm.
I dried, I brushed, I walked on, and found harbor
In Miss Theodora Perkins’s tasteful arbor.”

LXVIII

“ Oh! ” said Miss Theodora. “ Is that all? ”
“ All, ” said the prophet. “ And quite enough perhaps. ”
The lady gasped. A prophet should appall,
And with a list of startling thunderclaps.
But this one told with air so genial
Such tawdry, yet astonishing mishaps,
She really felt that she must look him over,
To see what sort of clue she could discover.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXIX

One thing was evident, he was not lying.
No child could lie with such a pair of eyes,
So blue, so clear, so innocent, supplying
Your heart with inexhaustible surmise.
But if he was sincere in madly trying
To make this sorry world look otherwise,
The course was plain with so divine a dunce:
“Oh, child,” she cried, “you must go home at once.”

LXX

“Go home!” said Percival, laughing loud. “I gather
That you do not approve my large ambition.
I certainly shall not go home. I’d rather
Stay here and visit you, with kind permission.”
“At least I ought to telephone your father.”
“You can’t,” said he. “Consider the position.
My father is beyond the ocean briny,
While you and I here trifle hours sunshiny.

LXXI

“Oh, sweet Miss Theodora, let me stay
And visit you. I’ll make no sort of trouble.
Cousins should be acquainted. Through your day
I’ll flicker like a sun-enchanted bubble.
And when you’ve had enough, I’ll slip away.
I’ll leave your memory full of sweet things, double
What you can reckon up by telling o’er
The humdrum story of what’s gone before.

THEODORA

LXXII

“ I ’ll sing, I ’ll play, I ’ll tell you merry tales
Of idle dreams, tricked out with witty chatter.
And if by chance my stock of laughter fails —
It never does — you ’ll furnish forth new matter.
We ’ll wander in the moonshine. Autumn gales,
Whipping the window with the raindrops’ patter,
Will only set my frolic fancy twitching,
So that you ’ll find it more and more bewitching.

LXXIII

“ It ’s settled then, I stay.” His doubtful cousin
Felt quite unequal to the situation.
“ I ’ll be the fiddle-bow and you the rosin,”
He said, “ oh, exquisite concatenation ! ”
The more she pondered on the dozen dozen
Objections, still the more her hesitation
Dwindled before this tantalizing scheme,
An odd, bewildering, enchanting dream.

LXXIV

Her life was slipping from her. Youth was gone,
And age approached with insolent rapidity.
Just now, at any rate, the joys she ’d known
Appeared of most distressing insipidity.
Of course a visitor of such a tone
Would tease old maids to querulous acidity.
But none could criticize her conduct justly.
The fabric of her fame was built robustly.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXV

This thing of smiles, this shred of dainty laughter,
Should mingle for a moment in her ease,
Should lift her up and indolently waft her
Wherever such a fairy fate should please.
Let gray monotony descend hereafter,
As fog-banks settle over summer seas.
“Why, yes,” she said, “visit, as you suggest.
Perhaps your father, too, would think it best.”

LXXVI

“He would, he would,” said Percival. — Then began,
For her, at least, an era of felicity.
The hours and the days serenely ran,
An undistinguished web of domesticity,
Delight upon delight, with neither plan
Nor any sort of labored periodicity.
They played, they sang, they ate, they drank, they roved
Through every field that Theodora loved.

LXXVII

Her life had never known days so delicious.
It was not love, it was not even romance.
He told her of his reveries ambitious,
Of setting right the wayward hand of chance,
Of curing men of hate and freaks seditious,
And preaching joy's eternal dominance.
She tried at times to intimate some scruple,
But only made his energy quadruple.

THEODORA

LXXVIII

What did she care? She knew he could not be
Joy long for earth, at least joy long for her.
Let him go out and touch reality
Amid the world's intolerable stir.
For a brief while he should believe that he
Had found one solitary worshiper.
To carp, to argue, to discuss, to reason,
Seemed, in her mood, no less than Judas treason.

LXXIX

The only trifling shadow in her joy,
Which swelled and darkened, as the days went fleeting,
Was the reflection of how soon must cloy
All pleasure she could offer. The first meeting
A spirit merry as hers might well employ
His fancy a few weeks. But then, completing
The circuit of her limited domain,
He would be mad to travel forth again.

LXXX

With melancholy eye she watched him growing
More restless daily. What was wise to do?
By every method to postpone his going
And bind him with her still a week or two?
Or take him out into the world, thus showing
The hopelessness of making an ado
Such as he dreamed in that vast, helter-skelter,
Mad, motley, human, and inhuman welter.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXXI

After long hesitation she decided

The latter way, though risky, would be best.

Perhaps the human folly he derided

Would overcome him with its wild unrest,

Teach him that life could never be divided

From all its misery by an unfledged jest.

She asked him with a voice fear made unsteady.

She found him, as she feared, alas, too ready.

LXXXII

“We ’ll take the car and spend a day,” she said,

“On city sights.” “Why not a week?” said he.

“Oh, no,” she answered; “I shall be half dead,

And you, too, with a day’s variety.”

He laughed his elfin laugh and shook his head.

“Neither a day nor week would finish me.

Come, come, oh, come. We’ll start with dawn to-morrow.”

She heard and sighed, anticipating sorrow.

LXXXIII

They started. What a furious day it was.

Each moment carried some divine disclosure.

The crowds, the shops, the colors, all gave cause

For fluttering his precarious composure.

No turn but made poor Theodora pause

In dread of some intolerable exposure.

But he was all absorbed with drinking in

New sights, new thoughts, and smothered by the din.

THEODORA

LXXXIV

She even risked the theater, a show,
With dazzling lights, and flashing limbs, and glitter.
How he would take it she really did not know,
Whether the nimble fiddles with their twitter
Would put his blood into a golden glow
And make him break out into actions fitter
For an asylum than an auditorium.
But for the moment he was all sensorium.

LXXXV

On the way home he hardly spoke at all.
He seemed quite drowned in matter for reflection.
His friend, whose hope was pitiably small,
Dared not at first disturb such introspection.
But finally she ventured to recall
Herself to his discourteous recollection.
“You don’t expect to cheer a world so dead?”
“Oh, yes,” he said, and that was all he said.

LXXXVI

Next day he also seemed absorbed, though less.
She roused him with all possible exertion,
Tried every means to cast forgetfulness
On what she now blamed as a mad excursion.
In the extremity of her distress
She taxed her wit for old and new diversion.
And when too quickly night and parting came,
She hoped his merriment was just the same.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXXVII

Next morning she appeared a trifle late,
Not being much used to keeping hours ascetic.
“Where’s Mr. Smith?” she asked, with untouched plate.
The maid replied, her air apologetic,
“Mr. Smith’s gone. — At quarter before eight,”
She added with precision sympathetic.
“Gone?” “Yes.” Then came the further helpful comment:
“I saw him at your desk for half a moment.”

LXXXVIII

Miss Theodora hurried to her desk,
Half hoping — what? And quite as vaguely fearing.
Just possibly this spirit picturesque
Might have explained his sudden disappearing.
To leave her thus were surely too grotesque.
She sent the maid away, lest grief appearing
Should make her seem absurd. She found no letter,
But something even more unexpected met her.

LXXXIX

Her pocketbook was gone, with fifty dollars.
This exquisite visitor had taken money.
Not even the aptest of joy’s merry scholars
Would be prepared for anything so funny.
She had supplied him with shirts, socks, and collars.
He sucked her bounty as a bee sucks honey.
But innocent enough to be a thief —
Our Theodora found it past belief.

THEODORA

XC

Yet there it was, or rather it was not.

The fact was there, but there was not the purse.
As for the money, it was not worth a thought.

She merely gave heaven thanks it was no worse.
But gone! gone! vanished all the joy he brought,
Turning her prose life into gladsome verse!
Making her young with every word he'd spoken!
Gone! Gone! It seemed to her her heart was broken.

XCI

Her inclination was to follow him,

Persuade him, or implore him, to come back.
Eyes even preternaturally dim

Could easily trace out his gaudy track.
But why? His stay with her was but a whim.

Another whim had seized him. Her mere lack
Of his delightful presence would not fret him.—
No, she would suffer in silence and forget him.

XCII

Meanwhile the sum of her divine solicitude

Was eagerly advancing on his way,
His thought preoccupied with fresh vicissitude.

Not that he felt the least desire to stray
Into the region of delights illicit-huèd.

Mere common joy sufficed him. But to stay
Longer with even Miss Perkins was distasteful.
Too many days in one spot would be wasteful.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XCIII

As for the money, oh, that was merely a loan.

It would have been time lost to borrow formally.
You see, the youth was not like those you 've known,

In fact, was constituted quite abnormally.

To smile, to sing, to wander gayly on,

Forgetting, was with him to live but normally.

He dropped his charming hostess from her place

In memory, as if he had never seen her face.

XCIV

The merry breath of liberty enchanted him.

The dancing autumn leaves made him dance too.

No vestiges of care or sorrow haunted him,

No fret of what he had done or might do.

The joyful moments beckoned, as if they wanted him ;

His path was anywhere 'neath heaven's blue.

The common glee of youth in him was tripled,

By neither fear, nor thought, nor memory crippled.

XCV

As he drew near the city, his keen wits

Were sharpened to an exquisite intensity.

It fascinated all his nerves with its

Varied and inexhaustible immensity.

The common horror of the youth who pits

His loneliness against that human density,

The sense of bare flesh beating on a wall,

Did not approach this frolic heart at all.

THEODORA

XCVI

He wandered all day idly through the streets,
Wondering and gazing. Sometimes he would stop
To chatter with the chatterers one meets
At busy corners, or before a shop
Would pause inspecting diamonds or sweets.
The wonderer was wondered at. A crop
Of vague conjecture followed his blond hair,
And ancient dames and gay-frocked girls would stare.

XCVII

He sometimes felt inclined to start his mission ;
But a celestial finger held him back,
Suggesting with a wholesome premonition
That he had better tread the common track
A little longer. Some few days attrition
With all these souls might indicate their lack
More clearly. He perhaps could better dissipate
Errors which for a while he should participate.

XCVIII

And so, about the coming of the dark —
“Does darkness come in cities, though?” he queried —
He passed the gate of an amusement park,
And being by now, for him, a little wearied,
He entered. Everywhere the electric spark
Spread wide abroad its radiance enspheréd ;
Everywhere stirred the buzz and hum and clatter
Of boundless human mirth with little matter.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XCIX

Percival was delighted. He sat down
Upon a shaded bench beneath some trees.
He shut his eyes and let his senses drown
In a vague chaos of delicious ease.
He heard the far-off noises of the town,
Music near by, and the recurrent breeze
Brought murmurs low and now and then a kiss,
From love astray in that feigned wilderness.

C

He lost himself in dreams of rapturous things,
Of exquisite, fantastical futilities,
Of Cupids flitting with translucent wings,
Or other such aerial facilities,
Of blue eyes and blond hair, a voice which sings
With more than our terrestrial abilities. —
Then, when the golden vision had burned out,
He rose and shook himself and looked about.

CI

Something to eat, he thought, would aptly mingle
With matter of ethereal suggestion.
He never yet had felt his fancy tingle
Less delicately after full digestion.
He found the restaurant. Though there no single
Table was empty for him, yet this question
Troubled him not at all. He chose his place
Where he picked out the most attractive face.

THEODORA

CII

The face was young and gay and quick and sprightly,
Blue eyes, not quite like those in Percival's dream.
What blue eyes ever are? A not unsightly
Dark face sat next, also a man's with gleam
Of earthly humor. Percival asked politely
If he might take the empty chair. Supreme
Indifference, which had first possessed the fair fully,
Changed to approval when she eyed him carefully.

CIII

"All right," the man said, nodding. "Thanks, I see
You're drinking beer and eating pretzels. Waiter,
Another order of the same for me."

The brass band here began to play and cater
To the mixed throng's inordinate jollity.

Percival listened with delight. When, later,
The music stopped, he ventured conversation,
And ventured with his usual animation.

CIV

"I like it here, I like the noise and bustle,
Clatter of human foot and human tongue.
The brass band, to be sure, displays more muscle
And sound capacity of healthy lung
Than musical perfection, but the rustle
Of this delicious southern breeze among
The leaves is music enough." His hearers stared,
For high æsthetics clearly not prepared.

A PROPHET OF JOY

CV

He saw them stare. "Who are you, by the way?"

He placidly inquired. "Who are you?"

Asked the young man, in turn. "'T would take a day

To tell my history completely through.

My name is Percival Smith, and I 'm astray

In the wide world, endeavoring to do

Something to make men leave their melancholic

Fashions and live a life of mirth and frolic."

CVI

"Percival Smith! Son of the millionaire?"

The young man asked again. "Oh, don't," said Percival.

"Millions are things for which I do not care.

I know that average people think the worse of all
That much berated class. I cannot bear

To have my father object of the curse of all."

"The millionaire!" murmured the youth. Each maid
Turned pale beneath her hat's protecting shade.

CVII

"You need n't apologize, we don't mind," said one.

"We really don't, a bit," agreed the other.

"No matter what a millionaire had done,

I'm sure that I could love him like a brother."

The young man interrupted, "You 've begun,

I'll finish. One good turn deserves another.

I'm Harry Jarvis, this is Nancy Walker,

This, Jessie Gates; but Nancy is the talker."

THEODORA

CVIII

“I see,” said Percival. “Shall we have more beer?”
“Of course,” cried Jarvis. Foaming beer was brought.
“From what you’ve said,” Jarvis went on, “I fear
That you may find more trouble than you thought
In taking people sharply by the ear
And making them forget the lessons taught
By all the toil and fret and sweat and worry
Of modern life’s intolerable hurry.”

CIX

“How do you manage?” “I don’t,” was the reply.
“I’m quite disposed for now to sit and chatter
With merry girls and let the crowd go by.
If I can get a moment in the clatter
To teach a few to smile instead of sigh,
It’s very well. If not, it does n’t matter.
I mean myself to work a pleasant sample
And spread the joy of living by example.”

CX

“And right you are,” said Jessie, “I’ll laugh with you.”
“I at you,” murmured Nancy. “Good for both,”
Said Percival. “The very heart and pith you
Have seized of all my mission. I’ll take oath
That when my teachings turn into a myth, you
Will rank as high apostles in its growth.”
“Oh, oaths, and growths, and myths, apostles, teaching!”
Scoffed Nancy. “You’ll never make men laugh by preaching.”

A PROPHET OF JOY

CXI

“I can, I can,” cried Percival. “I will!
You ’re laughing.” “Just because your eyes are blue,
And your hair curly, and you can’t sit still,
A pleasant thing for any girl to view.”
“If my blue eyes can supplement my skill,
And curly hair can prove my doctrine true,
Why then, let azure eyes and golden curls
Make merry converts of bewitching girls.”

CXII

“See here,” said Jarvis, who had listened keenly,
“Where are you staying?” “I? Oh, anywhere
On the green earth.” “That ’s living rather meanly
For the sole scion of a millionaire.
Why not bunk in with me? My rooms are cleanly,
High up, and richly furnished with fresh air.”
“His father is a millionaire like yours,”
Said Nancy. “No,” said Jarvis, “yours has scores

CXIII

“Of useless millions, mine has one perhaps,
But mighty little ever gets to me.
Come, if you ’ll take my offer, get your traps.”
“My traps?” said Percival. “The traps you see
Are all the traps I have.” “You wealthy chaps,”
Said Nancy, “have small comfort certainly;
But go and join the other millionaire.
You ’ll get on finely, an enchanting pair.”

THEODORA

CXIV

“Your offer is kind,” said Percival, “I accept.
If we agree, we’ll charm the world together.
If not, I soon will make you an adept
At turning tempest into sunny weather.
How often has delight from sadness leapt
By touches soft as tickling of a feather.”
“Say,” chuckled Nancy, “you’re a giddy thing.
I’d like to tie you to my apron-string.”

CXV

“You may,” said Percival. So they chatted long,
And Nancy mocked, but Jessie looked and listened.
She was a creature full of dance and song,
When the whim struck her, gay as e’er was christened.
But when she felt the subtle moods that throng
With more celestial things, her blue eyes glistened.
This fair-haired bit of heaven pleased her fancy.
He only seemed a lunatic to Nancy.

CXVI

But lunatic or angel, he could talk.
He made the dull and common world look new,
And turned dead leaves upon a withered stalk
To blossoms freshened with ethereal dew.
The plodders toiling in life’s dusty walk
Were all at once transfigured to his view.
And frolic joy so blithe from heaven descended
That you would think earth’s drag forever ended.

A PROPHET OF JOY

CXVII

He talked until they had to leave the park,
He talked as they strolled idly through the street.
Each passer-by was subject of remark.
His tongue was quite as tireless as his feet.
And even when they had to end their lark
And he was landed safe in Jarvis's suite,
Nancy insisted he would still talk on.
He did not, but slept quiet as a stone.

BOOK II

MORGAN

I

NOW Jarvis had a journalistic friend,
Named Matthew Morgan, writer-up of scandal,
A prince of scoops. Give him the smallest end
Of any thread, however fine, to handle,
And he would follow till the game was penned.
Diogenes, behind his farthing candle,
Had not a more acute olfactory organ
For tracing evil scents than Matthew Morgan.

II

He could elucidate a trust's deep dealings,
Unravel dark designs of millionaires,
Dance with delight on anybody's feelings,
And make good copy out of orphans' prayers.
Divorces, murders, quaint and marvelous stealings,
All crimes to him were every day affairs.
His rhetoric was apt, his conscience null.
The only sin for him was to be dull.

A PROPHET OF JOY

III

At first sight he appeared a fat, gross beast,
With bulging cheeks, thick lips, and heavy eyes.
His hands were coarse and hairy, his neck creased
With fat, his belly of ungainly size.
Yet, with it all, a humor shrewd at least,
And when you knew it, even profoundly wise,
Lurked in his face and mingled kindly glances
With his most biting and most cruel fancies.

IV

He knew the world and human sin and folly,
And knew the folly greater than the sin.
The knowledge might have made him melancholy ;
But he preferred to drown it with the din
Of noisy jest and revel wild and jolly.
There were few places where he had not been,
Few fights of brawn and brain he had not fought
And not so many thoughts he had not thought.

V

One evening Jarvis met him in the street.
They laughed and chaffed, swapped trivial jokes and stories.
“Oh, but,” said Jarvis, “I must have you meet
My chum, my prince of unimagined glories,
My angel, lunatic, spring lamb whose bleat
Will spin you columns. You know where my door is,
Or better still, come now.” Said Morgan, gaping,
“What sort of freakish phantom are you shaping?”

MORGAN

VI

“No phantom,” answered Jarvis, “just the son
Of Simon Peter Smith, the millionaire,
A boy of twenty and the prince of fun,
Of fun for others. With a solemn air
He preaches that the good old world is done
And his new world a-coming. You would stare,
Yes, even you, Morgan, let him once explain
The curious dreams that riot in his brain.”

VII

“A new world coming,” murmured Morgan slowly,
His eyelids drooped with languid apprehension,
“I’ve bumped against new worlds till I am wholly
A mass of black-and-blueness. Fools’ invention
Can frame new worlds, fantastic or unholy,
Too fast for a reporter even to mention.
This rough old world, if cranks would let it be,
Has sunny corners good enough for me.”

VIII

“I know, but then you ought to hear him talk.”
“Good God!” said Morgan, “I can talk myself.”
“You can,” said Jarvis, “till your hearers balk
At such a sea of drivel. But this elf,
This mad thing, with his dreams to make ghosts walk,
Can lay your old ideas on the shelf
So neatly, I think that even an ancient sinner
Like you, to hear him would forget his dinner.”

A PROPHET OF JOY

IX

“He says the world might be made over new,
If men would banish thought and smile at sorrow,
He says nine tenths of all our grief are due
To living not to-day but in to-morrow,
That all our hours are blackened by a crew
Of cares we either beg or steal or borrow.”
“These theories,” laughed Morgan, “would miscarry
In fighting all the cares you borrow, Harry.”

X

“Never mind me. I know I’m just the same
I always was, a good for nothing fellow.
But this celestial spark can touch with flame
Even a bit of parchment old and yellow
As you are. Why, I’ve seen him smile and tame
A politician in the street, turn mellow
Age, wrinkles, crabbed curs, whate’er comes near him.
Now, Morgan, just look in a while and hear him.”

XI

“Jessie turned mellow too?” asked Morgan, curious.
“Ah, ha!” laughed Jarvis. “Have I touched you there?
Why, Morgan, yes, your Jessie has a furious,
Mad fancy for this bubble of the air.”
“Just like her to adore a prophet spurious,
And when did ever such a prophet spare
So edible, so delicate a duckling?
Come, Jarvis, let us see your babe and suckling.”

MORGAN

XII

Meantime the prophet wandered in the park
And Jessie strolled beside him. Moonshine merry,
Magical moonshine, washed away the dark,
And clad the bare, stiff trees with millinery
Of flashing diamonds. "Lovers on a lark,"
Thought the policeman, as he watched them, very
Decidedly disposed to envy both,
As frolicsome as lambs with half their growth.

XIII

And don't think Percival would always lecture,
Or lay down frosty precepts of delight.
He could weave webs of dainty architecture
Out of the moonshine mystery of night,
Could tangle thought with radiant conjecture,
Make dreams as visible as things of sight.
Yes, even, at his moments, he could listen,
And let the stars uninterrupted glisten.

XIV

Thus, as he walked by Jess, he murmured low:
"Why, Jessie, can't you see the jolly crew
That sweeps about us, swaying to and fro,
With song and jest and laughter ever new,
Embracing, kissing lightly as they go,
Satyr and faun and dryad? Cannot you
Hear their mad revelry, their pipe and tabor,
Each passing on the frolic to his neighbor?"

A PROPHET OF JOY

XV

“I hear them, I behold them. My nerves flutter
With ecstasy at their perambulation.
Come, let us join them. Words can hardly utter
The splendor of their magic invitation.”

“Words,” shivered Jessie. “Percival, when you mutter
Your crazy dreams of all things in creation,
My soul is smothered in your fancy’s foam.”
She clutched his arm. “Oh, come now, let’s go home!”

XVI

“Home!” answered he. “We’re on the edge of seeing
Things never yet beheld by human eye.
Old lovers in their frail, enraptured being
May here transfigure sad mortality.
See Juliet, dim, behind the thicket fleeing,
And Cleopatra kissing Antony,
And Dido trying vainly to win over
The Roman fates of her obdurate lover.

XVII

“There’s Mary Stuart wooed by Rizzio,
Forgetful of the torch, the axe, the block,
And laughing ladies, who divinely blow
Their fairy kisses with a quip or mock.
Jess, don’t you see them?” “Percival, I know
Your fancies always give my nerves a shock.
Come down to earth. One single common kiss
Is worth queens dancing in a wilderness.

MORGAN

XVIII

“The trouble is with you that, always thinking
Men may be happy, you forget men are.
You spend your days and nights devoutly blinking
At some remote, extraordinary star,
When, if you 'd shut your eyes, you might be drinking
Long, pleasant draughts from fountains not so far.
What is the use of preaching at your leisure,
When other men go out and pluck their pleasure?”

XIX

“Why, Jess,” laughed Percival, “what flowers of speech!”
“Tag-ends,” she murmured, “from your dictionary.”
“Different delights for different men. To preach,”
He said, “is mine, with large vocabulary.
Wide words, bright thoughts give me joy; not to reach
For passions that are merely momentary.
Oh, Jess, those dancing queens to me are better
Than common kisses which can only fetter.”

XX

But then he changed his tone and wooed her gently,
Though still with words, scarce a caressing touch;
With phrases breathing love as indolently
As warm south winds and ravishing as such,
Low, sweet, entrancing love-words, murmured quaintly,
Or silence that entranced almost as much.
In long, soft dreams her spirit seemed to roam,
And shuddered when it found itself at home.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXI

At home at last, with Morgan, Jarvis, Nance;
And when she stepped among that godless crew,
Poor Jessie felt her visions of romance
Vanish, as bright airs chase the morning dew.
But, Percival, after one careless glance,
Was quite content to key his thoughts anew.
"Jarvis," he said, "and Nancy, and a visitor.
Pray tell me who's your friend. I'm great inquisitor."

XXII

"This," Jarvis said, "is Matthew Morgan, first
Of journalists in this forsaken city,
Infernally alive to smear the worst
Of tragedies with reportorial pity.
A ruffian, as you see. Yet, though accurs
By calling, he can sing a simple ditty,
Adapted to infatuate a maid
By purling brooks beneath a summer shade."

XXIII

"And this," cried Nancy, catching up the ball,
"Is, Morgan, a perambulating prophet,
Who has a mission, or what you would call
A mare's nest, and unlimitedly scoff at.
The slight affair of getting rid of all
Earth's woes is his and he thinks nothing of it.
That's my description of your tricks, you goose.
Now give the gentleman your own. Cut loose."

MORGAN

XXIV

Percival laughed, like everybody else.

“ Poor Nancy, how she does resist the light,
Whose beams fall round her, as the thick rain pelts !
She almost learns the lesson, but not quite ;
And when her heart with sweet compunction melts,
She barbs her tongue more keenly out of spite.
The mission, Mr. Morgan, I ’m about
Is really not so bad as she makes out.

XXV

“ I ’m not a teacher, preacher, or reformer,
Who frets men for his own peculiar glory,
No ranting and theatrical barn-stormer,
Who thunders that this world is transitory
And warns poor souls of coming regions warmer.
I look, I touch, I wonder, simply sorry
That men should be so wretched, when they may
See life in just a little brighter way.”

XXVI

“ Oh,” Morgan growled, “ a little brighter way.
Just come with me, and I will show you hell.
But being a millionaire, no doubt you pay
Men to look bright. It answers just as well.”
“ Millions are nothing,” said Percival. “ Human clay
Cannot be gilt by millions. All the spell
I practice is with quiet words to win
Mankind from hell without to joy within.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXVII

“It’s there, you know : vast mines of pleasant thought
And sunny laughter, turning hell to rose.

Do you believe that men must needs be bought
To recognize the ecstasy in those ?”

Morgan looked curious. “I should say you ought
To live in a better world. Some day — who knows ?
Meantime, I’ll show you just a thing or two,
To make you see men clearer than you do.

XXVIII

“To-morrow there’s a meeting in the park.
Red anarchists hold forth on blood and slaughter.
Queer creatures they as ever left the ark,
With dreams to make yours seem like milk and water.
Come with me, will you ?” “Morgan, please remark,
He’ll talk himself,” said Nancy. “Well, my daughter,
I’ll set the youth much higher in my list
Of wonders, if he out-talks an anarchist.

XXIX

“Say, will you come ?” “Of course,” was the reply.

“Anarchist or idealist, a meeting
Suits me, where human beings multiply
And set their busy thoughts and fancies fleeting.
As for my own talk, don’t suppose that I
Can’t give the dreams of others proper greeting,
Or that I hope to move the world alone,
Though I’ve a few ideas of my own.”

MORGAN

XXX

“Why,” Nancy said, “you’d really think him humble,
A modest, mild accommodating creature,
Until you heard his crazy notions tumble
Out of his mouth, too mad for even a preacher,
A wild, disordered, pointless, jointless jumble.
Morgan, some day he’ll furnish you a feature.
Meantime, I’m tired of such a madcap midge.
Come, Morgan, Jarvis, Jessie, let’s play bridge.”

XXXI

They played their bridge, with merriment and mocking,
And Jarvis laughed, and Nancy laughed, and Jess.
And Morgan laughed to set the rafters rocking,
An incarnation of fat earthliness.
Also they drank. Now do not think it shocking.
The world still drank. But these not to excess,
At least not that night. Percival drank but little,
Being mainly temperate in drink and victual.

XXXII

Meantime he watched their bridge and heard their chatter.
He knew the game from Theodora’s days.
But he preferred more spiritual matter
Than cards, at any rate to Morgan’s ways.
And soon he turned aside from all the clatter
To the piano. I shan’t stop to praise
His playing or his singing. But his soul
Gleamed through, transfigured, and transformed the whole.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXXIII

He interwove light airs with graver measures,
Sang songs as dainty as the starlight's gleam,
From unknown depths drew unsuspected treasures,
And made a jewel of a common theme,
Till even Morgan left his baser pleasures,
Laid down his cards and listened in a dream.
"More, more," he murmured. Percival sang on,
Till the new day enjoined them to be gone.

XXXIV

So Morgan, when he thought the matter over,
Found this young wayward creature worth his study,
Though hitherto he had not been a lover
Of freaks or cranks, who recommended bloody
Or rosy means to make the world recover
From all its ills. Mistrusting everybody,
He yet felt curious to follow through
This thing of dreams and see what he would do.

XXXV

Therefore next day they started forth together
Parkward, and chatted idly as they went.
But even chatting idly on the weather,
Morgan could gauge his young friend's sentiment,
And Percival was moved to wonder whether
This animal being was so wholly bent,
As might have seemed at first, on sleep and liquor.
For gleams of thought and love began to flicker

MORGAN

XXXVI

And make the gross mass something more than clay.

They were a singular pair, one all ethereal,
Drinking bright draughts from some diviner day,

The other quite essentially material,
Yet realizing in a certain way

Just what the prophet preached of dreams aerial.

Morgan himself proclaimed the fact with joy:

"I'm just your doctrine in the flesh, my boy.

XXXVII

"You think that men should turn all life to comic

Appreciation of the joy of things.

I do. My joys are sometimes gastronomic,

But then at other times my soul takes wings
And flutters airy as a mote atomic.

It laughs gross laughter, but it also sings.

Just look me over, prophet, am not I

The creature of your reveries? If not, why?"

XXXVIII

But Percival could not be nonplussed so.

"You may be. In the realm of joy are many
Strange shapes, and you may be among them, though

It would enlarge the singular miscellany."

By this time they had reached the motley show

They came to see. "If there were ever any

Creatures adapted to your lofty sphere,"

Said Morgan, "I should think you'd find them here."

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXXIX

A wayward rout it was to listen and speak.

The hearers were a shifting, mingled crew,
Some idly anxious to observe a freak,

Some madly earnest for ideas new,
Some poor, starved, ragged, wretched, mad to wreak

Their wrath upon the comfortable few.
The orators were various as the flock,
Expert to rage or reason, howl or mock.

XL

One was long-haired, cadaverous, and lean,
One was a trim, well-barbered politician,
Too spicy for the regular machine.

Also there was a spectacled patrician,
Editor or professor. And between,

Two women screamed tirades about their mission.
They all had different forms of wasting breath,
But all agreed in wanting blood and death.

XLI

Long-haired and short in this were quite unanimous,

And stern and gentle sex and every creed
United in the same benignant animus:

Whate'er befell, the capitalist must bleed.
If working men were not so pusillanimous,

The world would be a better world indeed.

"You hear," said Morgan. "These are all your fellows,
All blowing at the same ideal bellows."

MORGAN

XLII

Percival heard, heard long and with attention,
Heard all the hatred, bitterness, and gall,
Vituperation with but scant invention,
In which the wrath was great and wit but small.
Then, much too quick for Morgan's apprehension,
He stepped upon the stand before them all,
A lithe, bright face and figure, quite celestial,
Fronting that throned half ludicrous, half bestial.

XLIII

He spoke to them of dreams and things remote,
Yet less remote than all their frenzy cruel,
Made sweet contentment in a vision float
Across wrath's lurid sky, like some starred jewel,
Dwelt amply on the splendors that denote
A soul fed full with joy's ecstatic fuel.
And what he said wrought less with those who heard
Than just the glory of each golden word.

XLIV

Some listened with delight, some with confusion,
Some with amazement, some with vague regret,
Some murmured at his insolent intrusion,
Some pressed to hear him closer, closer yet.
The agitators gathered in collusion
To frown or drown him out. But ere they met
With any scheme that could be aptly tried,
He ceased, and slipped away at Morgan's side.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XLV

“Good God,” said Morgan, “what a gift of gab!
There’s money in your talk, if you but knew it.”
“Money?” said Percival. “Money. You would grab,
Like any one else, if you were driven to it.
By the way, what do you live on? I’ll not blab,
If there’s a secret. Does your father do it?
But Jarvis said, I think, you’d run away,
To prophesy your coming, glorious day.”

XLVI

“Money? My father?” was the vague reply.
“Oh, Jarvis lends me money. He’ll be paid.”
“H’m,” murmured Morgan. “The security
Is rather insubstantial, I’m afraid.
See here, young man, you take advice from me.
Go home. Enjoy your millions. You were made
To honey out your butterfly existence
With all the facts of life at dreaming distance.”

XLVII

But Percival laughed, a soft, compelling laugh,
Took Morgan’s arm with sweet familiarity,
Murmured insinuating phrases, half
Mad earnest, which atoned for lack of clarity,
And the remainder a delicious chaff,
Which more appealed to Morgan by its rarity.
“Be my disciple, preach my doctrine, come.”
Morgan returned intoxicated home.

MORGAN

XLVIII

He thought of it, he dreamed of it all night,
In intervals of stabbing reputations.
Next evening he strolled round to Jessie's, quite
Athirst for more prophetic fascinations.
There he found Jessie alone at first. The sight
Revived some intimate associations.
He took a chair beside her and began
The love-speech which must be as old as man.

XLIX

For all his gross, fat figure, he could be
Agreeable, delightful, if he chose,
Could breathe a wooing murmur daintily,
And flush a warm cheek with a shade of rose,
As if he were a lad of twenty-three.
He tried it now. But Jessie quickly froze
His ardor and his amorous words withstood.
"Stop it," she said. "I am not in the mood."

L

"Not in the mood," laughed Morgan, drawing back,
With youth's disgust and age's comprehension.
"I understand it all. Though what I lack
In soul I balance amply in dimension,
My weight cannot soar up a prophet's track,
And what you want is heavenly ascension.
Oh, Jess, you loved me once; but now my joy
Is all devoured by this celestial boy.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LI

“And the worst is, he ’ll never care for you.”

“I know it, oh, I know it,” Jessie wailed.

“Morgan, I ’m in despair. What shall I do?”

I ’ve tried my best to win him, but I ’ve failed.
He loves me — and ten thousand others too.

In his own world he wanders, unassailed
By love or hate. Oh, Morgan, is n’t he splendid?”

“Well, yes,” said Morgan. Then at once attended

LII

To more immediate matters. “Jess, forget him.

Such spirit wraiths as he are not for use.

You ’ll only sorrow that you ever met him,

A creature with no drop of human juice.”

So Morgan comforted, and Jessie let him

Even caress. Perhaps she grew obtuse
Under woe’s weight. Howe’er this may have been,
The others stormed in on a tender scene.

LIII

Nancy and Jarvis were convulsed with glee.

But Percival showed unlimited disgust.

“Jessie,” he said, “I ’d taken you to be

A thing of air and dreams that I could trust
With all my highest hopes. But now I see

That confidence in man is built on dust,
And confidence in woman built on — nay,
You make me blush, I should not dare to say.”

MORGAN

LIV

“You blush!” cried Nancy, “and not dare to say!”
She laughed the more, and Morgan’s bellow joined her.
“Oh, prophet, are you touched the usual way,
When jilted, quick at jealousy’s rejoinder?
Ready to throw a pretty girl away,
Yet angry if another man purloined her?
Come, prophet, life’s too full of queer abysses
For any one to grudge a few snatched kisses.

LV

“Practice the joy you preach.” And Percival did.
They all grew merrier with the evening’s glory.
Victrola first. But Percival soon hid
The bulk of its monotonous repertory.
Then Jessie sang and Jarvis. Morgan outdid
Their vocal magic with his wildest story,
Till Percival at last sat down and played
Things beyond human thought, as Morgan said.

LVI

The things were not so wondrous in themselves;
But something in his touch or manner made them
Bewitching as the dance of forest elves.
And bits of verse went with them, as he played them,
Which pulled down tangled memories from shelves
Where you believed you had forever laid them,
Memories that set your deepest pulses throbbing
Alternately with laughter and with sobbing.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LVII

They listened, all of them, in ecstasy,
Till he stopped short and cried, "Now let 's play cards."
"Cards," murmured Morgan. "Child of revery,
Cold moonshine, or intoxicated bards,
What do you know of cards?" "Gross parody
Of human joy, whose corpulence retards
The coming kingdom of delight on earth,
I'll show you what I know, for all my birth."

LVIII

"Get out the pack." They got it. "Get drinks too."
They got them, and they drank them. Percival held
A hand with Jess. But what he dared to do
Made Jess afraid, till finally she rebelled.
"As gambler I'm not in the class with you."
And certainly his style of play dispelled
All thought of him as a timid, airy creature.
Or, for the time, he had forgot his nature.

LIX

He took wild chances, made enormous bets,
Seemed to delight in pushing Morgan hard.
The anxious Jarvis said, "You know your debts?"
"Debts?" shouted Percival. "Who would dare regard
A few poor dollars as worth a man's regrets?
I'll pay all." Morgan, who observed each card,
Believed he would, and played his game so keenly,
By two o'clock he'd plucked the prophet cleanly.

MORGAN

LX

Then Percival rose and left them, all at once,
Not drunk, not mad, but surely not quite normal.
“Come back, old man,” cried Jarvis. “Don’t be a dunce,”
Laughed Nancy, frolic in her ways, not formal.
“Let him go find the airy game he hunts;
For me he’s just a little too abnormal,”
Said Morgan. “But,” moaned Jarvis, “I’m stone broke.”
“The father’ll pay.” So Morgan blandly spoke.

LXI

Meantime the prophet cooled his frantic fever
Out in the park alone. The night was soft.
Forgetfully he watched the bright moon weave her
Exquisite tracery in the elms aloft,
Once asked himself if Jessie could deceive her
Frail heart with such gross diet very oft;
Then to a quiet bench quietly crept,
Yawned, shut his eyes, composed himself, and slept.

LXII

When he awoke, he felt the morning chill,
But merely as a bath to rouse his spirits.
His splendid, healthy, joyous, vigorous will
Knew not the damp the broken-nerved inherits.
If any thought of last night’s riot still
Hung round him, it was lost in life’s fresh merits.
He shook himself and started for a stroll,
With breakfast as a tantalizing goal.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXIII

He had just money to supply his needs,
Small change the gambling fever did not touch.
He ate, and felt the comfort eating breeds.
Meanwhile the future did not haunt him much.
His was the vagrant truancy which leads
Aerial souls, too often misleads such.
After his breakfast, a long walk seemed pleasant.
He would not go near Jarvis for the present.

LXIV

He wandered idly through the busy city,
Gazed at the shops, and found them fascinating
As when he saw them first. Things new and pretty
Tickled his fancy, as at man's creating,
With a large wonder. Corresponding pity
He felt for brows darkened by greed or hating.
Life should be merry, he thought, and gay as he,
With inexhaustible felicity.

LXV

So gazing, and so thinking, and so strolling,
When he had paused a moment or two before a
Rich rainbow dream of silk, slowly unrolling,
He turned and ran into Miss Theodora.
Beside her walked the stern, austere, controlling
Figure of father Smith, whose visage wore a
Delightful mixture of reproof and joy,
When he beheld his long-lost, vagrant boy.

MORGAN

LXVI

“Oh, cousin,” cried Miss Perkins, “found at last.”
“Well, yes,” said Percival. “How are you, father?”
They shook hands calmly. “Come, don’t stand aghast,
Miss Theodora,” cried the prophet. “Rather
Imitate him, and let the past be past.

Later we ’ll tell long tales to one another
Over the winter fire. Now you ’ve come,
I feel a sudden longing to go home.”

LXVII

So home they went. What Percival’s father said
This history is not called upon to show.
There was some mention of his mother dead,
Which Percival received with moderate woe,
Some grave suggestion of where folly led,
And where the unregenerate ought to go.
But Theodora kept these hints in measure.
She was enchanted to have found her treasure.

LXVIII

She went home with them and for quite a while
Percival was exceedingly amused.
He showed her all his old haunts, made her smile
At tricks and quaint devices he had used.
She faintly hoped his wanderings might beguile
His heart back to the comfort he refused.
But casual hints of Jarvis, Morgan, Jess,
By no means added to her cheerfulness.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXIX

On one or two occasions father Smith
Attempted some brief comment or reproof.
For all he gained, he might have argued with
The wind, or held entirely aloof.
But Theodora undermined the pith
Of his resentment, said the natal roof
Was much too narrow for the boy's salvation,
And begged him not to smother inspiration.

LXX

"Oh, his salvation," mocked the millionaire,
And turned again to piling up his credit,
With intermittent agonies of prayer —
A pleasant life to those who have not led it.
But Theodora lured away the heir
Once more to visit her. "Do come," she said, "it
At least can do your soul no harm to spend
One Christmas with your cousin and your friend."

LXXI

He laughed and went. She did her very best
To make such Christmas sojourn entertaining,
Hoped she might teach his eager spirit rest,
Even perhaps, her former charm regaining,
Might make his mission seem a vanished jest.
She gathered friends around her, all sustaining
Her ardent labors by discreet variety,
The grace, without the tedium of society

MORGAN

LXXII

Such were her hopes, and Percival at first
Responded with apparent satisfaction.
Indeed, he seemed entirely immersed
In her successive efforts of attraction.
He sang, he jested, now and then dispersed
A few bright words of missionary action.
Still, with the flying days, she planned to capture
Once more his wayward soul, and planned with rapture.

LXXIII

Alas, in vain. The ancient restlessness
She knew so well declared itself too soon,
And many a symptom forced her to confess,
She better could enthral the wandering moon.
In fact, she grew quite clear that neither stress
Parental, plea of duty, nor of boon,
Could make that child of quaint, ethereal mixture
A common, everyday, commercial fixture.

LXXIV

Indeed, as she beheld the subtle twist
Of his high thought, its lofty inspiration,
She felt almost unable to resist
Herself belief in his divine vocation.
He lived in such a glorious, golden mist,
Poetic, or prophetic fascination,
It sometimes seemed as if he had a mission,
And would irradiate man's debased condition.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXV

And she was over thirty and had sense!
But thus it was. So next she set to work,
Not to irradiate father Smith — the fence
Of thorny habit hedged what love might lurk
In him too closely — but to wring some pence,
And otherwise prevail on him to shirk
That stern repression of all joy and beauty
Which he regarded as parental duty.

LXXVI

To her surprise she found he did not bite her
When she came near him, but instead concurred,
Although his language might have been politer.
“Your notion, Theodora, is absurd.
The boy is lost. But, poet or prize-fighter,
I shall not give his fate another word.
Money? Oh, yes. But, got with such facility,
The spending will be your responsibility.”

LXXVII

And so they parted. Father gave to son
Hardly a farewell handshake, did not ask
What plans he had, no doubt presuming none,
Which was correct. “Yet, underneath the mask,
Said Theodora, “I think hardly one
Can love his offspring better.” “Yours the task,”
Said Percival, “with keen eyes to discover
Beneath that face the features of a lover.”

MORGAN

LXXVIII

But Theodora's farewell was more tender.

“Oh, child,” she cried, “why will you face the world,
The world, that lavish and most wanton spender
Of graces in youth's bud divinely furled?
Why seek, with substance pitifully slender,
To stay the tide, which has so often whirled,
In its vast foam and hideous, yeasty frothing
The best of hope and love and fame to nothing?”

LXXIX

Percival laughed. “Now, why are you so tragic?”

My motive, after all, is curiosity,
And monsters, both terrestrial and pelagic,
Do not affect me with such animosity
That I at once assail them with the magic
Of what you think my otiose verbosity.
Good cousin Theodora, be content.”
He kissed her cousinly, and then he went.

LXXX

Just where he went or why, he did not know,
Nor care. The subject was not worth his pondering.
The world was an exhaustless, glittering show,
So rich in charm you could not waste by squandering.
But after vague meanders to and fro,
He found his feet, in customary wandering,
Somehow or other on the mat before
The old, frequented sill of Jarvis's door.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXXI

There he was greeted with a cry ecstatic.

In fifteen minutes all his debts were paid
And he was settled in his ancient attic.

All friendly, due inquiries were made.
Nancy, if possible, was less lymphatic

Than ever. Jess had mourned him to a shade.
Morgan, if Percival was inclined to list him
Among his friends, Morgan had really missed him.

LXXXII

So the old life began anew : some riot,
Immense diversion with that laughing lot ;
Yet Percival, content with simpler diet,
Oft lingered where the rioters were not,
And interwove his pleasant thoughts in quiet.
Then plunged again in dissipation hot.
But when the throng was hottest, he was cool,
And reveled as a dreamer, not a fool.

LXXXIII

He mocked with Nancy, he romanced with Jess ;
Yet neither his romancing nor his mocking
Was carried to disorderly excess.
Not that he really found such conduct shocking,
But he preferred a certain seemliness,
Even in thoughts that set the wide world rocking.
The joy he preached required natural health,
And could not be purloined by sordid stealth.

MORGAN

LXXXIV

But nobody considered him a preacher,
Or spoil-sport, or wet-blanket, or cold cynic.
Far otherwise. To all he seemed a teacher
Of new delights. Some subtle ray actinic,
As Theodora felt, made every creature
Light-hearted through his presence. In what clinic
Do they dissect this art of making glad?
At any rate, such art our hero had.

LXXXV

But the most curious spectacle of all
Was Morgan and his singular devotion.
He never missed the slightest chance to call
Attention to each wild, fantastic notion.
He mocked the prophet and foretold his fall
Without a shadow of the world's commotion.
And yet it needed little skill to see,
None was infatuated more than he.

LXXXVI

A long experience of human folly
Made him at once alive to the absurd.
As much in church as in a crowded trolley
The sacred was to him an unknown word.
High thoughts might sometimes make him melancholy,
But usually a laugh was all they stirred.
Yet now he found a novel fascination
In Percival and his lofty aspiration.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXXVII

It was not certainly the dream or hope
Of anything divine about his mission.
To Morgan men were ever doomed to grope
In their old, pitiful, forlorn condition.
But something in the splendid, soaring scope
Of Percival's immense, if vague, ambition,
Or, no, just contact with that starry soul,
Gave Morgan thrills he could not quite control.

LXXXVIII

I cannot tell. He could not tell. He felt
The same strange magic Theodora knew,
Found all his deepest prejudices melt
In a delight that gradually grew.
The ugly, common things in which he dealt
So much by trade, the horrors, false and true,
That fed his thought, took on a dreamy grace,
When mirrored in that spiritual face.

LXXXIX

And so he sought his youthful friend's society
By day, by night, and followed when he could,
Or even came to lead, having variety
Of entertainment in his gift, some good,
Some violating all precise propriety.
But good and bad alike were dainty food
For the immense digestion of the prophet,
Who touched the worst and thought but little of it.

MORGAN

XC

They visited the theaters, before,
Likewise behind, the mystery of the curtain,
Reveled in lovely visions that all wore
The garb of fact, or faced facts too, too certain.
Some nights they had of fairy fancy, more
Enchanting than the Arabian (see Burton).
And through it all Percival watched the dim
Shade of his treasured hope. Morgan watched him.

XC I

In the police court, or the public ball,
Or auction, now and then the prophet tried
A word or two of preaching. Through it all
He thought men left real joy too much aside
For crude delights whose benefits were small.
But Morgan checked him gently, did not chide,
Diverted his attention to some other
Strange feature of the motley human smother.

XC II

Also, he cautioned: "Teach them by example.
Amuse yourself while youth and pleasure tempt.
Provide them with a gayly-tinted sample
Of joy, from fret and thought and care exempt.
Leave preaching to philosophers who trample
On pleasantness, unfed, unwashed, unkempt."
Percival listened, just the one to find
This sunshine system greatly to his mind.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XCIII

One day it happened they strolled in among
A group of actors staging for a reel.
The climax of their story had been wrung
Out of a masquerade, a giddy wheel
Of strange, diverting figures, old and young,
In mixed costumes of riotous appeal
To wayward fancy, skirt and sword and wig
Involved in an inextricable jig.

XCIV

A clown coquetted with a nun demure.
A solemn judge, inveigled by the ballet,
Displayed an unjudicial temperature.
A pirate, wandering from his lofty galley,
Grim thoughts forgot, danced idly with a pure,
White lass who kept sheep in a shady valley.
"The world," said Morgan. "You would fain improve it.
For me, I only laugh at it and love it."

XCV

And all this tempest of disordered mirth
Was simply to work up a furious scene,
In which the heroine, wandering o'er the earth
To find her lover, who, alas, has been
A lady-killer from his flippant birth,
Tears through the riot, like a tragic queen,
And makes the situation clear as crystal
By killing the forlorn swain with a pistol.

MORGAN

XCVI

Somehow or other the police ensued,
With more costume and more suggestion gory,
And tumults such as usually intrude
In well-constructed plots. That 's not my story.
Among this aggregation, bright and rude,
Of things ephemeral and transitory
I merely pick the heroine. Or, not I,
But Percival, and I will tell you why.

XCVII

In fact, at first sight few but would have picked her
Out of that curious and motley throng.
And fewer would have envied him who tricked her,
Or wished to be the man that did her wrong.
She had the royal carriage of a victor,
Wore her queen's garb as if it might belong
To her by right. Not Juno was more stately,
When she had left Jove's company but lately.

XCVIII

Indeed, she is my heroine as well
As that of a forgotten, passing show,
Or one of them, since I can hardly tell
The number of that fascinating row ;
But she is first and best, and bears the bell.
If I could only make the wide world know
The earnest beauty of her lofty spirit !
But my imperfect words cannot come near it.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XCIX

If I could but portray her as I first
Beheld her, in her days of youthful splendor :
The deep, dark eyes that in their gaze dispersed
A radiance as passionate as tender ;
The mobile mouth that always seemed athirst
For love, yet equally alert to send her
Quick, soaring thoughts abroad ; the vivid gesture
That merely gave the soul the body's vesture ;

C

The movement of her agile, supple form,
Tall, serpentine, and yet with grace commanding
In vigor that o'ercame you like a storm.
But most of all I see those eyes, expanding
In eager joy, or stern and cold, or warm
With passionate delight. — The eyes, as standing
In deep thought lost, she saw the crowd, unseeing,
Thrilled Percival through his whole prophetic being.

CI

He forgot Morgan, he forgot the show,
Forgot the common usage of propriety,
Walked right up to the lady and said, " Oh,
Why are you lost in this profane society ?
This noisy crew ? Such eyes as yours, I know,
Rove widely seeking for all life's variety.
Yet, I believe, to you this din is shocking,
To me mere mirth, to you a casual mocking."

MORGAN

CII

And she was large enough to catch his tone,
To apprehend his nature in a second.

She had lived all her inward life alone,

Had left response of other souls unreckoned,
Secluded on an intellectual throne.

But something in this stranger's accent beckoned,
Teased, tantalized her with perplexing question,
Some hidden, indefinable suggestion.

CIII

She answered him as if they had been friends

From their remote conception in eternity,
With shadows of that softness that transcends

The call of sex in an immense maternity.
Right then and there he hinted at his ends

In life, and she, all throbbing with modernity,
Found her own deepest impulses unfurled,
When she perceived he would reform the world.

CIV

For she too had her aspirations vast

And vague desires for making all things new.
She had but little knowledge of the past,

But a dim comprehension of the true,
Slow, growth of innovations that may last;

Yet through her open, fiery heart there blew
Strange winds of hope that man some day might be,
As she would wish, strong, beautiful, and free.

A PROPHET OF JOY

CV

Nursing such thoughts, she went about her work
With daily ardor; as, in all she did,
An overwhelming passion seemed to lurk
Beneath the opulently shadowed lid,
And drove each gesture homeward like a dirk.
Yet, still, for all her zeal, she moved amid
That dancing throug the phantom of a dream,
Known only for the thing she chose to seem.

CVI

But Percival pierced seeming. "What 's your name?"
"My name?" she laughed. "Aurelia McGoggin.
It 's not romantic. The truth is, I came
From the backwoods, the upper Androscoggin,
Illiterate, my father was the same.
He earned a humble livelihood by loggin'.
And all the strange adventures I 've been through
Would make a million movie reels. But you?"

CVII

Percival told her what he was and told
The ample current of his wandering mission,
Told her —. In short, before the moon was old,
They had compared the height of their ambition.
Long hours they passed together, hours of gold,
In which they changed to gold the base condition
Of sordid men about them. And so zealous
Was their new friendship, Morgan grew quite jealous.

MORGAN

CVIII

Friendship, I say. I should not dare say, love,
Though many did. They both disclaimed the feeling.
Their intimacy soared too far above
The lower links of earth. "Humph! On the ceiling
You walk," said Morgan. "I on floors. The dove
Of your white thoughts may finish by revealing
Just common flesh and blood like mine, no more."
So Morgan said, and jabbed his pen, and swore.

CIX

Meantime, through all their high dreams' harmony
They felt, themselves, a palpable divergence,
Such as, we must admit, will always be -
Among the world's most radical insurgents.
Aurelia built a cloudy mystery
With her divine and overwhelming urgency.
How these wild hopes might come to be made good
She could not say, but she knew some that could.

CX

In all, however, she was deadly serious,
No single ray of laughter touched her soul.
Percival lectured her with words imperious.
"Hate, wrath, and violence cannot hit the goal,"
He said. "Love, laughter, with their touch mysterious
Must softly, gently permeate the whole
Wide world, if you would come to see mankind
Transmuted to the vision you've in mind."

A PROPHET OF JOY

CXI

“Laughter!” she raged. It almost bred a quarrel.

Yet still she loved her prophet more and more,
And would have gladly crowned his brow with laurel,
But thought much braver youth’s bright crown he wore.
He also was exalted by the moral

Of her high rapture higher than before;
So that he cut extraordinary capers,
Which Morgan often mentioned in the papers,

CXII

Mentioned with tenderness as well as mocked.

“This millionaire,” he said, “has some idea
Of things at which the Philistines are shocked,
As if a message came from Cassiopeia.

But some day, when the fellow has unlocked

His ample brain, the consequence will be a
Rare bombshell, which will stir the nauseous unity
Of this much over-civilized community.”

CXIII

And people read and wondered and forgot. —

One day they visited a movie show,
Aurelia always eager for a plot,

Percival following where she chose to go,
And welcome, even behind the scenes, for not

A few knew now his name and wished to know
His face. On this occasion, between reels,
He asked to speak, and, when with his appeals,

MORGAN

CXIV

Aurelia joined, the manager agreed,
Told who he was, withdrew, and said, "What next?"
Percival let him see. The gorgeous screed
He poured forth left no restless hearer vexed.
He gave them all his cloudspun, rainbow creed
Of life made joy by laughter; but the text
Was nothing, the embellishment was all
And held those gapers under magic thrall.

CXV

It was not merely the swift words he uttered,
Of misery transformed right here and now,
And songs blown broadly out of curses muttered,
Although the words, like stars, shot high and low.
It was the glorious radiance which fluttered
Across his face and burned about his brow,
That glory and that gleam sufficed to capture
The common, listless throng in one wide rapture.

CXVI

Some wept, some laughed, some begged him to go on.
Some madly cheered and some were strangely quiet.
But when they realized that he had gone,
They almost threatened to begin a riot.
As for the manager, how the thing was done
He could not guess, but knew he liked the diet,
Besought a booking for another day.
Percival only laughed and turned away.

BOOK III

AURELIA

I

THAT winter Jarvis's wealthy father died,
Leaving the son unlimited possessions.
Now Jarvis junior really had both pride
And brains, for all his amiable transgressions.
He therefore, for the moment, brushed aside
His old companions and their frolic sessions,
And minded business, as if bonds and stocks
Were all of life, in spite of Morgan's mocks.

II

But when the April light grew full of mirth,
He took a brief vacation and invited
All his mad friends to taste the sunshine earth
And pass a few, sweet merry days, united
About his splendid, hospitable hearth.
He had a country place well known and cited
For perfect beauty of its parked seclusion,
Far from the press of citified intrusion.

AURELIA

III

So there, upon an April afternoon,
Along a terrace rich with budding glory,
Set round with chattering waves that dance and croon,
Were gathered all the leaders of our story :
Percival and Aurelia knit so soon
By an affection, sweet, if transitory,
Aurelia's aunt, companion, chaperone,
Or by whatever name she might be known,

IV

A gentle, sleepy, amiable, mellow,
Stout lady, who embodied all propriety,
Yet cultivated not a touch of yellow
Or sullen spite against such mad society
As bumped about her now and called her fellow.
In fact, she sleepily enjoyed variety,
An indolent admirer of laughter,
Without the slightest thought of what came after.

V

Aunt Millicent, they called her. Let her be.
Morgan was there, wildly disposed to tease
This lady with his boisterous irony ;
And there was Nancy, frolic as you please,
Dazed and delighted with such luxury,
And Jessie, made demure by so much ease ;
While, further, a new face you'll find to fill
Our comic catalogue, that of Slippery Bill.

A PROPHET OF JOY

VI

He was Aurelia's brother, movie actor,
A genius, though some said he was not right.
At any rate, his most confirmed detractor
Could not deny his charm to ear and sight:
A strange, quaint creature, bound to be a factor
In any web of innocent delight,
Blonde haired, blue eyed, lithe limbed, with face so mobile,
It could be all things, from grotesque to noble.

VII

A motley, many-colored group they were,
The men light-suited with bright ties and socks,
The women gleaming in a rainbow blur,
Fairly fitted in translucent frocks,
With hats to set a sinner's soul astir,
Laid like perched birds upon their dancing locks.
A company whose every word and gesture
Were richly variegated as their vesture.

VIII

So on the terrace, with bewildering chatter,
They daffed aside the lovely April day,
Making the most inconsequential matter
A theme for dainty jest and mockery gay;
And now and then amid the tinkling patter
Of quip and laugh, Bill let his fancy play,
Like piquant hints of flavor in a salad,
With snatches from some old forgotten ballad.

AURELIA

IX

Finally, at a pause, if ever pause

Came in that tempest of tumultuous glee,
Percival said, "Harry, I think the Cause
Demands the burning of your library."

"My what?" said Jarvis. But discreet applause
Urged on the prophet to cry eagerly,

"Yes, Harry, yes. For the most cunning hooks
In Satan's hands to-day are books, books, books.

X

"The world is overwhelmed, smothered with books.

We all are ignorant with too much learning,
And piles of print, heaped up in spidery nooks,
Afflict the native wit of the discerning.

The place for books is in the running brooks,
Or on the ash-heap, dust to dust returning.

Congratulate my laudable design."

"All very well," groaned Harry. "But why burn mine?"

XI

"They're handsome, and they cost my father money.

Nobody ever reads them, to be sure."

Here Morgan intervened. "The ceremony

Is that old Spanish laughter's who would cure
His hero's book-bred frenzy by it. Sonny,

Whatever else you do, you can't secure
Renown by aping others. Let your tricks
Be new, not fetched from the other side of Styx."

A PROPHET OF JOY

XII

“Be new!” cried Percival. “The imputation
Cannot hurt me. For I myself am new
And give my own delight’s re-incarnation,
To brighten ancient mirth with modern hue.
Wise old Cervantes claims our imitation.

And, Harry, soar for once. These petty few
Poor books of yours, once fired, may serve the nimble
Wit of the world for an immortal symbol.

XIII

“It is not books mankind needs now, but life.
Too long the mists of thought have kept life hidden,
And years of barren intellectual strife
Have made joy cower like an infant chidden.
Few starlike books were well, not books grown rife
As hurrying autumn leaves, till man, o’er-ridden,
Finds his chill veins informed with murky ink.
The soul was made to live and act, not think.

XIV

“So, Harry, let your people build a pyre
And fetch the dusty authors out in troops.
Then we ourselves to-night will feed the fire
With shadows of those melancholy dupes
Who mourned in black and white their pale desire.
Seldom have they illuminated groups
Of drowsy toilers with so bright a ray
As they will shed on our immortal play.”

AURELIA

XV

He said it, and they did it, and the stars

Beheld them gathered round old wisdom flaming.

Not often had so much wit burst its bars

And soared beyond all systematic taming,
While furious disputants forgot their jars

And found their heterodoxies scarce worth naming,
When once their gilt and ponderous coats were crackling.
Meantime the prophet more and more kept tackling.

XVI

“Throw history on,” he said, “and throw on fiction;

Dream of what might be spoils the joy that is.

Throw on philosophy. Its false conviction

Makes men forget superb realities.

Throw science on. It breeds eternal friction,

Quarrels and feuds and personalities.

Throw tactics on, strategics, and logistics,

And — carefully, they'll blaze too high — statistics.

XVII

“Pile on the law and do not spare theology,

Nor medical treatises, out of date when new.

But what are these?” Jarvis made some apology.

“Rare books and costly books? Yes, quite a few.

Well, let them join the general necrology.

Only the sacred poets we'll spare.” “Not you,”

Cried Jarvis, grown decidedly indignant.

He threw them on, with gesture mock-malignant.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XVIII

And then they danced about the splendid blaze,
Which soared and roared with intellectual fuel,
Or glowed, to their entranced, enraptured gaze,
In spangled gleams, like an imperial jewel.
Particularly Bill, with quaint, wild ways,
Although he thought their burning poets too cruel,
Impelled and urged them on to actions antic,
Until Aunt Millicent believed him frantic.

XIX

He made them dance till weary, then alone
He danced on still, the mad Victrola playing,
Or, as he danced, he sang, in piping tone,
Incomparable melodies, displaying
The oddest wit. Then, quiet as a stone,
He sat apart, as if the world were graying,
And he were left, a solitary mourner,
To watch the ruins from a sheltered corner.

XX

It was a wild, disordered, charming revel,
And all the days they stayed were filled with such,
Although the prophet bade them not dishevel
Joy's delicate grace with anything too much.
The purple hours flowed onward in a level
Tide of delight that sorrow could not touch.
And no concealed repining or resentment
Came to disturb their infinite contentment.

AURELIA

XXI

Sometimes they wandered idly on the lake,
When the broad April sun invited boating,
Whether the North wind made the bright waves break,
Or a wide calm held them in heaven floating.
And after sunshine came a storm to make
Contrasted days more exquisite. Devoting
The time throughout to merriment and jollity,
They gave to sun and storm divine equality.

XXII

Aurelia often strayed with Percival
And talked and talked in effort to persuade him.
His gentle soul, she said, his love for all,
His universal kindness betrayed him.
His hopes, she said, for sterner measures call,
And crimes must be washed out with blood. She made him
First smile at her, then gaze at her in sorrow
For such a cruel vision of to-morrow.

XXIII

“Aurelia,” he persisted, “never man
By wrath or strife or bloodshed was made better.
Only by spiritual process can
The tethered soul shake off its sordid fetter.
The crimes you blame, in ignorance began,
Called crimes from narrow clinging to the letter.
Folly and ignorance find reincarnation
At length by love’s sweet interpenetration.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXIV

“The world must be made better bit by bit,
But never through a violent cataclysm.
And Patience, tenderly anointing it,
Will gain her ends by her celestial chrism.”
Aurelia writhed. “You spend your agile wit
Distorting harsh facts in a rainbow prism.”
So through the dreaming hours they debated.
One knew he loved, the other thought she hated.

XXV

Meantime the rest dwelt in a cloud of laughter
And neither cared for hating nor for loving.
They filled the house from living-room to rafter
With flames of mirth perpetually moving.
Morgan and Bill, who each seemed modeled after
• One phase of Percival’s spiritual roving,
Mocked, sang, and lived with an immortal zest,
As if to renovate the world by jest.

XXVI

Morgan’s fat wit would tell a common story
And Bill would cap it with a dainty catch.
Jess had a song of flavor transitory
And Jarvis a swift anecdote to match.
Then they all joined to mock the prophet’s glory
With any happy trick device could snatch.
Oh, days! oh, days! beyond my verse to measure.
But Percival stopped them in the tide of pleasure.

AURELIA

XXVII

Just because no one tasted it so keenly
As he, he wished to pause before excess.
“Come, friends,” he said. “We have enjoyed serenely
Delight here. Do not let us make it less
By lingering till ennui, intruding meanly,
Has dulled the exquisite edge of happiness.”
“Ah, bah!” growled Morgan. “Don’t be always preaching.
Your practice spoils the flavor of your teaching.”

XXVIII

Thus Morgan grumbled. Morgan always grumbled.
Yet somehow Percival’s charm, like juice of poppy,
Kept Morgan’s willfulness securely humbled.
Besides, he thought him admirable copy,
The best, indeed, on which he’d ever stumbled.
But, Jarvis, too, was getting full of shop. He
Longed for the ticker, eager to disturb
The monetary madness of the curb.

XXIX

So motors swept them cityward, brown and merry.—
Now Jess still worshiped with adoring soul,
Not jealous of Aurelia, oh, not very,
Because she knew her hopeless, starry goal.
Moreover, she was grown a missionary,
And wished her prophet to receive the whole
Immense delight of her new-found reliance;
For Jessie was a votary of Science.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXX

“Yes, Percival, I learned it first from you.
And Science teaches very much the same,
That we might live far happier than we do,
If care and fear and doubt we overcame.
Come, Percival, now let us take you to
One service, it will touch your heart with flame.
And I believe that in the Science Church
You ’ll find just that of which you are in search.”

XXXI

“I ’m not in search of anything,” laughed Percival.
“But, come, by all means let us try your cult.
A creed that would remove the bitter curse of all
Nature by drug, or prayer, or catapult,
Interests me. You know I ’m the reverse of all
Carpers who go to scoff or to insult.
Come, lead me like a lamb in flowery halter,
To edify at the Christian Science altar.”

XXXII

So they all went, with Jessie in the lead.
And even Morgan joined to make a quorum,
And never showed by any word or deed
That he was not at home in such a forum.
Jarvis and Nance gave profitable heed,
And also Bill behaved with huge decorum.
During the whole his manner could not jostle
The comfort of the most devout apostle.

AURELIA

XXXIII

As for the prophet, his austere attention
Suggested nothing but profound respect.
No worshiper of grave, inborn convention
Could have produced a more devout effect.
In fact, his attitude of comprehension
Was more than Jess had ventured to expect.
“With what delight,” thought she, “I should behold
Him added to our spiritual fold.”

XXXIV

But when the services were quite completed,
He gently rose and took his turn to speak.
The audience, already half unseated,
Sat down again and wondered what this meek,
Insinuating youth, with tone not heated
And exquisite repose, had come to seek.
Under his manner courteous and bland
He soon contrived to make them understand.

XXXV

He said he had been greatly interested
And much approved their creed of elevating
Man's lot above the sorrows that infested
This earthly life, all of his own creating
He said that he and they alike detested
The morbid attitude forever waiting
For some expected horror to descend
Lost in anxieties that never end.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXXVI

“The mind alone makes woe,” he cried, “you ’re right.

The mind alone can also give us joy,
Can dissipate the shadows of the night
And scatter all vexations that annoy.

Wrong thoughts, wrong fancies are the devil’s spite,
And these your noble vision can destroy.”

So far they heard with little animosity.
At least this fair youth was a curiosity.

XXXVII

Then he went on. “I’ve watched you now some time,
And you deserve thus much in high laudation.

But there are other points that do not chime
So well with an unstinted approbation.

Excessive seriousness is not a crime,
But surely it demands consideration.

And I must needs inquire of you imperiously
Why you should take yourselves so very seriously.

XXXVIII

“You take your clothes so seriously, your dress,
Expending thought and substance on your raiment,
Although sometimes, I may presume to guess,
The garb is substance and the shadow payment.

Money you take so seriously, success,
That some might wonder what the things you say meant.
And then you take so seriously this shoddy
(As you esteem it) instrument, the body.

AURELIA

XXXIX

“Life is a dream, so far I hold with you,
An airy thing, phantasmal and fantastic.
But, if it be a dream, ah, dream it through
Without solemnity ecclesiastic.
Nor purse nor hearse is worth so much ado.
Your theory’s good, but make it still more drastic.
And add to your most praiseworthy experiment
The glow of inextinguishable merriment.”

XL

They heard him with surprise, with wrath, with doubt,
They heard his gibes with gibing thoughts to match,
And every one looked angrily about.
But when he ceased, and they could fully catch him
His dubious drift, the cry of “Turn him out,”
Rose to a roar, “and do it with dispatch.”
The prophet leisurely their stir anticipated
While Bill kept whistling low a ditty dissipated.

XLI

Morgan, meantime, was writing up the scene,
Sure it would make a feature for his daily.
But little Jess, who felt distinctly mean,
Followed her hero’s footsteps rather grayly.
Her hero himself, however, strolled serene,
And answered all her moaned objections gayly:
“I thought a word of mine might do them good.
And if they’d had the ears to hear, it would.”

A PROPHET OF JOY

XLII

Aurelia had been absent from this feast,
Partly about her work and partly busy
With all the human hopes that never ceased
To feed her brain with cogitation dizzy.
Jessie informed her that their great high priest
Was turning to Christian Science. She said, "Is he?
I'm glad he goes where folly's to be lashed."
Poor Jessie wilted, very much abashed.

XLIII

Aurelia, hardly noticing, continued:
"I'll show him other things than worlds of dreams,
Fantastic realms of contemplations thin-hued
And reveries tricked out with pale moonbeams.
I'll bring him heart to heart with men tough-sinewed,
Whose theory of living is, not seems,
Men who want hard fact now. Let jests come after
And all his cloud of amiable laughter."

XLIV

Poor Jessie sighed. She had small love for fact.
But her intense companion had forgot her,
A creature born perpetually to act,
With no desire to see pale shadows totter.
And lately she had managed to contract
A friendship with a true, ideal plotter,
Whose breath of life was seeking notoriety
By working weal — and damage — to society.

AURELIA

XLV

This man's cognomen was Ezekiel Waters.
Others he may have had, but this one now.
He had an eye prognosticating slaughters,
Which burned beneath a tight, dogmatic brow,
Inspiring many spiritual sons and daughters
With cruel, bloody, anti-bourgeois vow.
His tongue was always eager to rehearse
Some customary socialistic curse.

XLVI

He also had a preternatural gift
For organizing every force of evil,
Could most appear determined to uplift,
When most he used devices of the devil,
Alert with every cunning wile and shift
To make his dreams of sanguinary revel,
By arguments ingenious, apt, evasive,
Seem to the simple splendidly persuasive.

XLVII

I have no doubt that he was self-deceived,
And really thought he had an austere mission.
At any rate, his followers so believed,
Regarding him without the least suspicion.
But no one of the conquests he achieved
Had so completely satisfied his ambition,
So blended the triumphant and the sweet,
As when he saw Aurelia at his feet.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XLVIII

For there she was, not out of love for him,
But just because he realized her notion
Of a millennium, exquisite but dim,
Which filled her soul with an immense emotion.
She thought, for all she cared, the world might swim
In a tempestuous, ensanguined ocean,
If she might see her royal hopes embark
In an ideal, imperishable ark.

XLIX

She lived in regions of vague possibility,
But Waters in a world of gross reality.
She had a truly feminine facility
For overlooking man's innate rascality;
And could ascend with ravishing agility
Above the present's sordid externality.
Therefore the agitator's cunning tropes
To her seemed pregnant with her highest hopes.

L

She was most anxious to arrange a meeting
Between this revolutionary star
And Percival, prophet of joy. You see, her heating
And fierce desires obscured the things that are,
Or she would scarce have hoped a friendly greeting
Between the dreams of peace and those of war.
At any rate, she did so. And they met.
That you and I were not there, I regret.

AURELIA

LI

But Morgan managed to be there, and Bill,
The first observing, and the second fiddling.
At least he was, with thoughtless, careless skill,
Until the prophets were ready for their riddling.
And I believe he might have fiddled still,
His interest in prophets being but middling,
If he had not got notice from his sister.
He loved her so, he never could resist her.

LII

Aurelia started things: "This youth," she said,
"Believes life can be mended without trouble."
Here Percival broke in. "Interpreted
By you, with labor half and pleasure double,
My theories might easily be read.
But I prefer to blow my own soap-bubble."
He set to work, his fancies strange unraveling.
To follow him was for Waters heavy traveling.

LIII

He drew a world where men were actuated
No more by envy, but by gentleness,
Where manifold enjoyments were created
By innocence and cares did not distress.
They heard him with delight, as Morgan stated
On paper, while Bill played a dream caress.
Even Waters listened, soothed, yet unconvinced.
And, when he spoke, his phrases were not minced.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LIV

“All freaks and fancies, pretty but misleading.
You overlook the facts, perhaps not know them.
The misery, the sorrow, millions bleeding
For the fat few who trample those below them,
Age upon age of agony succeeding,
Unless we learn our foes and overthrow them.
In all your dreams have you considered this?”
Bill softly clasped his bow and played a kiss.

LV

But Percival replied, sedate, serene,
With further insubstantial, rosy vision.
“I know full well the miseries you mean.
Sorrow, disease, and death, and hate’s derision,
The varied tragedies of life’s mortal scene,
Cannot be cured by prophet or precisian,
Nor yet by bullet or bomb. Both rich and poor
Still find disaster waiting at their door.

LVI

“But I maintain that all these woes the mind
Can, if not cure, enormously alleviate,
That we intensify the ills we find
And of our own accord too often deviate
From happiness, by fair contentment lined,
To sorrow we might easily abbreviate.
Men can fly fear by dreams, as you know well.”
“Hell!” Morgan growled. “Particularly hell.

AURELIA

LVII

“Thought makes the most of woes and thought can mend them.

He who can rule his thoughts can conquer death.

External troubles fade, if we transcend them.”

But Waters interrupted. “Waste of breath.

Such theories bear no fruit. Their grace you lend them.

Capital cares not for what prophet saith.

Words, words, vague words how many have sacrificed!”

Bill softly murmured, “Even the words of Christ.”

LVIII

But Christ to Waters was not practical.

In fact, he thought him rather capitalist.

“You cannot really help mankind at all

By wrapping up their miseries in mist.

Or giving to the crimes of capital

A charitable glint of amethyst.

The hoary right of gold must be demolished;

And every form of privilege abolished.

LIX

“Wrong will be always wrong, in spite of talking.

The toilers of the world must fight their way,

And pride and greed tyrannically walking

On human hopes and hearts have had their day.

No more shall wealth, a hideous spectre stalking

Across the earth, devour its abject prey.”

Said Percival: “You’re just as vague as I

And preach your vagueness less agreeably.”

A PROPHET OF JOY

LX

So for an hour they argued and disputed,
Waters disputed, Percival always smiled.
As usual, each believed his foe refuted.
Meantime Bill slumbered, like a tired child.
At last Aurelia, seeing how untransmuted
The prophet's temper, how divinely mild,
Concluded the adventure by entreating
Him to go with them to an anarchist meeting.

LXI

“Oh, certainly,” he answered. “By all means.
Capitalist and anarchist, bring both.”
Waters demurred a little. “The youth leans
To trifling and old capitalistic sloth.”
So Waters, jealous. But such ugly scenes
Aurelia smothered in their earliest growth
By her intense and sweet enthusiasm,
Which would have soothed an even harsher spasm.

LXII

They went, and Bill and Morgan too, of course,
The former for want of his fiddle, driven to whistle
Quaint airs and lively tunes, which spelled divorce
Of his round flesh from anarchistic gristle.
They were prepared for preaching to enforce
A paradise by dynamite and missile,
Complete upheaval of a world disjointed.
At any rate, they were not disappointed.

AURELIA

LXIII

In a large room, not elegantly lighted,
A horde of nondescripts was oddly gathered.
In most the inner man might be clear-sighted,
But certainly the outer was unlathered.
A pale professor or two had been invited,
But the majority were unknown, unfathered,
Unwholesome, unattractive, uninformed,
Minds not to be mildly argued with, but stormed.

LXIV

Waters himself did not attempt to speak.
He much preferred to watch and pull the wires.
But others spoke, one with a scraping squeak,
Quite professorial: consuming fires
He urged should cleanse mankind, but urged so meek,
You thought him piping pastoral desires.
The audience listened in some discontent.
They wished a more sonorous instrument.

LXV

They got it. An immense, cadaverous Russian,
Thick-necked, low-browed, blue-spectacled, and sweating,
Belabored life from militarism Prussian
To harmless factories dividend-begetting.
The universe was minced in his discussion,
Upset beyond all possible upsetting.
The hearers jumped at each new invocation,
And sweated too for very admiration.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXVI

Morgan was charmed and Bill in ecstasy.
The prophet was distinctly entertained,
Though it was natural he should not be
Pleased with the mad ideas the Russian rained.
And, when the tempest had subsided, he,
Bent on explaining what should be explained,
Rose, though Aurelia had bound him to be quiet,
At least, not to precipitate a riot.

LXVII

Riots to him were dew-drops to a duck,
He met them as a ship meets summer seas,
Aware that men must out of peril pluck
The substance of divine felicities.
Besides, he trusted that his golden luck
Would take him to what port he chose with ease.
And then his voice, following that spent typhoon,
Was lovely as an autumn afternoon.

LXVIII

He told them he had listened with distress
To doctrines to themselves so prejudicial,
Admitted that our present happiness
Might be regarded only as initial,
But urged they could not make their misery less
By blowing up an innocent official,
Or fully satisfy an age-old grudge
By making mince-meat of a petty judge.

AURELIA

LXIX

Then he enlarged upon his favorite topic
Of lighting life by some celestial ray,
Mellifluously turned his microscopic
Analysis upon their passions gray,
Until his fancy, with its sunshine tropic,
Grew almost bright enough to melt away
The impenetrable, icy mass of solid
Inapprehension from their faces stolid.

LXX

Aurelia, when he first began his speech,
Looked round her with considerable anxiety,
Hardly expecting they would hear him preach
With anything approaching to sobriety.
When she perceived they did, she looked for each
Of those who boasted any notoriety.
To her surprise she found they were not there,
And instantly began to wonder, where.

LXXI

Her keen intelligence divined a trick.
She knew the mob must somehow have been schooled
To listen to her prophet's rhetoric,
For even by him that wrath could scarce be cooled,
Those narrow brows be touched with rapture. Quick
She went herself to find out who was fooled.
Ere the door closed behind her, the police
Came rushing in to guard the public peace.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXII

I hardly need explain that Waters planned it,
To damage Percival, from jealous hate
(You see that Waters was a lovely bandit),
And that he also planned to extricate
Himself and those he wished to understand it.

The multitude would escape at any rate.
But Percival, he thought, would get a sentence
That might insure him leisure for repentance.

LXXIII

And what a scene of turbulence there was!
The officers with their clubs prepared for battle,
The anarchists, stronger with their tongues than claws,
Protesting in a polyglottic rattle
The arch-angelic innocence of their cause,
Till they were driven, like a herd of cattle,
And groveling, groaning, swearing, forced to scatter.
What happened to them afterwards is no matter.

LXXIV

But Percival, the prophet, was arrested,
Since all the other leaders had escaped.
That is, it happened as Waters had suggested,
His plan being most ingeniously shaped.
Morgan of course with vehemence protested,
And Bill at moments whistled and then gaped.
Yet whistling, gaping, and expostulation
Could not avert their friend's incarceration.

AURELIA

LXXV

Percival's attitude was chiefly curious.

In fact, he took the whole thing as a lark.
His equanimity made Morgan furious.

“Young man,” he said, “so gayly to embark
On law's perplexed entanglements injurious
Is quite too much like leaping in the dark.”

Percival did not heed him, but slept well,
For all the inconvenience of a cell.

LXXVI

Next morning he was brought before the judge,
Duly and properly interrogated.

Perhaps he may have guessed at Waters's grudge,
But he determined it should not be stated.

The officers urged his guilt and would not budge
From their belief that he was implicated.

And when the judge had learned the prisoner's name,
His attitude was very much the same.

LXXVII

He was a short, squat man, red-faced and shrewd,
And not at all accustomed to be kindly.

“I've heard of you,” he said. “Your sort intrude

On simple folk, who might have toiled resignedly,
And stir their hearts with speculations crude,

Until they take to bloody business blindly.

Officer, have you evidence displaying

The sort of thing the prisoner was saying?”

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXVIII

The officers had it and they brought it out,
Two anarchists (both were coached by Waters duly),
Who tossed the prophet's character about
With notable contempt for speaking truly.
The judge, although he entertained a doubt
As to the tales of persons so unruly,
Grew every moment more and more inclined
To see the prisoner jailed as well as fined.

LXXIX

Nor was he moved by Morgan's evidence,
Who swore the lad was nothing but a child,
A creature of most perfect innocence,
Who ran his head into the noose, beguiled
By his own utter lack of common sense
And by a woman's folly. The judge smiled.
"Morgan," he said, "I know your ways of old.
Go, write your scoop, before the thing gets cold."

LXXX

"I will, your honor, and give the court good space."
Here the judge smiled once more. "Young man," he said,
"Have you a reasonable plea for grace?"
And Percival, quite undiscomfited,
Began his answer, with angelic face,
While Morgan groaned, "Now he will talk us dead.
In the police court! The insensate boy!
A pretty place for driveling of joy!"

AURELIA

LXXXI

Drivel of joy he did there, just the same,
Told all his hopes with such a tenderness,
With such a glowing and enchanting flame,
Told all his pity of the world's distress,
That public prejudice he overcame.

Yet still the judge's tone was no whit less
Stern and severe. "Young man," he said, "your tongue
Will ultimately bring you to be hung."

LXXXII

But here there came a break in the proceeding.

Aurelia entered, and she was superb.
No princess, after centuries of breeding,
Could be more calculated to disturb
The imagination even of hearts unheeding.

She kept her royal passions under curb;
Yet for the shrewd 't was easy to surmise
Their glory by the splendor of her eyes.

LXXXIII

The judge, like others, knew the movie star
And wondered at her sudden apparition.
He did not wonder long. Before the bar
She stood with her impetuous petition.
"Take me," she said. "How many miles you are
From truth, in holding him under suspicion.
Take me. His innocence you should divine.
Mine was the guilt. The punishment should be mine.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXXIV

“His words, his hopes, his thoughts are all of light.

Why, at the moment when your people seized him,
He was endeavoring nobly to set right

The madness of the fools who had displeased him,
To shed clear day upon their murky night.

And it was I alone whose folly teased him
Into their midst. Shut him up in a cell?
You might as fitly mure a saint in hell.

LXXXV

“I am the culprit, I the instigator.

I would make clean the world by crimes you punish.
But I beseech you, brand not me a traitor

By overwhelming one who will astonish
All men in days to come. He is no prater

For judges in police courts to admonish.
By justice, truth, and innocence, set him free!
I have deserved ill. Do as you please with me.”

LXXXVI

After her passionate words deep silence fell.

The judge sat quiet a moment and reflected.

“Miss McGoggin,” he said. “We know you well.

And few are more deservedly respected,
Especially when coming here to tell

The truth of those with whom you are connected.
There is no charge at all for you to meet.
Only — I wish you had been more discreet.”

AURELIA

LXXXVII

He turned to Percival: "For you, young man,
Your case takes on a different appearance.
I found it rather black when we began;
But this last witness may effect your clearance.
I recommend in future change of plan.
For certainly an obstinate perseverance
In things like those you have been doing lately
Will risk your reputation very greatly.

LXXXVIII

"You are young, you are rich, you are free to make your way
In any course of life you may prefer.
Your father's son, I hardly need to say,
Has many a chance to set the world astir.
I urge you not to let your fancy play
With dreams that will be sure to ruin her.
Yet idle fools find many a pretext
For dancing gayly to destruction. — Next!"

LXXXIX

The next was brought. But you will not believe
That Percival was ready to part so.
A flood of eloquence prepared to leave
His eager lips and in its golden flow
Drown judges, clerks, and officers. I grieve
To say that his two friends, divining woe,
Cut his prospective oratory short
And physically dragged him out of court.

BOOK IV

CECILIA

I

NOW Percival for the time had had enough
Of all this varied flavor of Bohemia.
He did not find the human touch too rough,
Or have the slightest fear of septicæmia
From hands, however coarse. But softer stuff,
Though bordering even on genteel anæmia,
In fine, the grace of Theodora's flattery,
Seemed lovely after anarchistic battery.

II

Therefore one royal day in early June^t
He found himself at Theodora's door.
And she, poor lady, took his latest lune
With perfect thankfulness. Nor asked for more
Than just to hear his frolic voice, a tune
Piped by a fairy on a pleasant shore,
And in its light suggestion of vagary
More sweet to her than pipe of any fairy.

CECILIA

III

Did Theodora love the prophet then ?

She never would herself have used the word,
Or owned the love that women feel for men.

In fact, she would have called it quite absurd.

You do not love a wandering sunbeam, when

It comforts all your life, or love a bird

Which in a summer morning sings away

The plague and discontent of yesterday.

IV

We do not say we love them, yet without

Sunshine and birds life were a paltry thing.

And Theodora's heart had twined about

This casual sunbeam threads entangling

Her whole existence, till she came to doubt

If death itself would be more torturing

Than to forego forever his rare coming,

Though his departure left a pang benumbing.

V

Therefore, at each arrival her first thought

Was to delay such parting hour by hour,

With every quaint device her fancy taught

And exquisite invention in her power.

She knew his stay could not be crudely bought,

That, like a butterfly swinging on a flower,

With flaunt of silken wings beneath blue heaven,

He would enjoy delight as it was given.

A PROPHET OF JOY

VI

So now she seized upon a vague pretence,
Which father Smith had long ago suggested
For captivating Percival's innocence.

This was to get the prophet interested
In a fair cousin whom kind Providence
With various attractions had invested,
With beauty, youth, much money, and vivacity,
Also, a not unamiable loquacity.

VII

Her name, Cecilia Braybrooke, and her home,
Her father's, in the summer by the sea.
If Percival could be induced to roam
Thither for days or weeks, the end might be --
"No, it might not," cried Theodora. "Foam
Might sooner be made permanent than he."
Besides, her jealous heart conceived no life
Worse than to have Cecilia for a wife.

VIII

She did not like Cecilia, not a bit,
But for the time this might prevent his roving,
And little as she would have relished it,
She did not really fear the prophet's loving.
Indeed, she thought the hardest thing to hit
Would be to induce him to the first removing.
Whereas, he went at once, to her surprise,
Without regarding her apologies.

CECILIA

IX

The truth is, like the rest of us, he enjoyed
Not only what was new, but what was charming.
And any taste would have indeed been cloyed
That did not find Cecilia's home disarming.
The very thought of ennui was destroyed
By outdoor sports, from golf to fancy-farming.
As for the house, it was so sweet and roomy,
A pessimist could hardly have been gloomy.

X

Cecilia's self I cannot praise so much.
But yet she was distinctly appetizing,
To see, to hear, to laugh with, and to touch.
Her eyes were brown, her cheeks were brown, surprising
Sometimes with depths of delicate color such
As tint the clouds before the day's uprising.
And she could sparkle, dance, caress, and flatter.
Whether she had a heart can scarcely matter.

XI

At any rate, she welcomed Percival
So heartily you almost thought she had.
As for the heavy father Braybrooke, all
He needed was Smith's wealth to make him glad.
Therefore they crowded garden, bower, and hall
With merriment luxurious, if not mad,
And gathered in a flock of neighboring sinners
To revels, dances, fêtes, and sports, and dinners.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XII

And Percival enjoyed it to the full
With all his ecstasy of casual mirth.
Under the frocks and frills and lace and tulle
His instinct quickly picked the human worth.
Jewels to him were quite as beautiful
As dewdrops gemming the enchanted earth.
He turned from sunlit day to lamplit night
With inexhaustible ardor for delight.

XIII

Just then his temper hit Cecilia's mood
And she was wildly anxious to ensnare him;
For she was one of that capricious brood
Which seeks to win a man, but not to wear him.
To-morrow she might turn to other food
And with a shrug proclaim she could not bear him.
But she was bent in every cunning way
To bring him to subjection for to-day.

XIV

With Percival her arts had little weight.
To conquer him was something different far
From mastering the usual train whose fate
Hangs on the follies of a summer star.
She smiled, she charmed, she tried to fascinate
With all the varied wiles of sexual war.
Percival laughed and most politely mocked her,
With an indifference that really shocked her.

CECILIA

XV

And ever as she grew warmer, he grew colder,
Until she almost thought she had a heart.
She changed so that she liked to have him scold her,
And in her pain she quite forgot her part.
Yet Percival was merely a beholder,
As one enjoys a pretty piece of art.
In fact, his attitude throughout his stay
Was that of a spectator at a play.

XVI

After his winter of outrageous glee,
With Morgan's freak and Bill's fantastic jest,
He relished their polite frivolity,
Their common corpses exquisitely dressed,
Their lofty air of aristocracy,
Assuming that the richest must be best.
He framed his song, his laughter, and his mirth
To suit these choice inheritors of earth.

XVII

To them of course he was a curiosity,
For they had read the papers and they thronged
To revel in this trumpeted atrocity,
And hear their ways and manners sharply wronged.
But this subdued his natural verbosity,
And made him choose to show that he belonged
As fully by his breeding to their set
As any addled phantom they could get.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XVIII

Yet underneath, a certain discontent
Fluttered the quiet of his joyous ease,
And now and then he stirred their merriment
With some wild outburst of his ministries.
Further, to Theodora oft he went
And asked if she could not detect disease,
This simulacrum of delight infesting.
“The poor,” he said, “I find more interesting.

XIX

“I get amusement here and so do they.
But they believe amusement calls for riches,
Whereas a merry heart can toil all day
And intermingle mirth with many stitches.
I could be happy in a sunnier way
Than they are, if my life were digging ditches.”
And Theodora thought he argued well;
But she would have agreed, if he preached hell.

XX

Just at this point appeared the Reverend Nichols,
A clergyman of Episcopalian creed,
One of the sort from whose whole being trickles
A panacea for each human need.
'T is true that something in their manner tickles
The unregenerate of profaner breed.
But even the most hardened and most earthy
Admit that they are estimably worthy.

CECILIA

XXI

The Reverend Nichols's collar might be high,
The Reverend Nichols's aim was vastly higher.
His clerical coat was fashioned to imply
The crushing of inordinate desire.
No priest could ever be more piously
Perfect in every matter of attire.
Yet clothes to Reverend James were but a symbol
Of something nobler than the tinkling cymbal.

XXII

In the abstract he did not favor marriage.
Miss Braybrooke was adorably concrete.
Therefore he would have cast his perfect carriage
In dusty desperation at her feet.
But the young lady often would disparage
This incarnation of the Paraclete.
So, in its varied mixture of devotion,
James Nichols's soul was a tormented ocean.

XXIII

Now James had heard of Percival's arrival
And heard him charged with many a strange achievement,
As if he were attempting a revival,
Though sadly ignorant what to believe meant.
Moreover, James in him divined a rival
Prognosticating horrible bereavement.
Therefore he visited the Braybrooke mansion,
Prepared in full for pastoral expansion.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXIV

He watched the prophet with some doubt at first.
Could this slim youth, who hardly knew the barber,
Be propagating doctrines so accursed
And such abominable fancies harbor?
But finally, insisting on the worst,
He cornered Percival in a shady arbor,
Which looked upon the splendid, sunlit sea,
And there examined him industriously.

XXV

He heard the youth desired to teach men happiness.
Well, yes, the youth admitted that he did.
And did he think such desultory scrappiness
Of mirth and laughter could reveal things hid
From all the ages? With no sort of snappiness
Percival tolerantly smiled amid
The sunlit roses and inquired of James
His method of checkmating Fortune's games.

XXVI

There followed, as Percival probably expected,
A torrent of profuse, not new, theology.
The prophet listened till he had collected
The other's argument. Then, without apology,
He broke the sermon short and interjected
Bits of his own peculiar sociology,
Which made the Reverend Nichols stare and gasp,
As if he had sat down upon a wasp.

CECILIA

XXVII

First Percival commended James's position,
And gently patronized his high belief.
Of course he wished to better men's condition,
To cure disaster and desire and grief.
The only trouble with the Christian mission
Was, it apparently postponed its chief
Comfort, until the dawn of heaven's day.
"To me," said Percival, "this seems far away."

XXVIII

"By all means teach mankind to dream of heaven.
But I prefer to show them heaven here.
You lecture them on sins to be forgiven.
My method is to make sins disappear :
With just a touch of joy's celestial leaven
To banish envy, malice, doubt, and fear.
And so I state my creed, as you requested.
I'll give you more when this has been digested."

XXIX

He nodded, smiled, and, whistling, strolled away.
The Reverend James was left, forlornly sitting,
Heedless of roses and the cheerful day,
His complicated meditations knitting,
Snarled in the most uncomfortable way.
Nor did it tranquilize his fancy's flitting
To see this new disturber of existence
Serenely join Cecilia at a distance.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXX

“Fie! Percival, you’ve been tormenting James.”

“No,” Percival answered, “James tormented me.
Why do you thus intrude your long-quenched flames,
To cast cold shades on our felicity?”

“You must not call the Reverend Nichols names,”

Cecilia cried, with artificial glee.
Her glee was artificial as her face;
But art had given her fascinating grace.

XXXI

She played with Percival like a frolic kitten,
Inventing jests not laughable but dainty.
If he, like Reverend Nichols, had been smitten,
She would have given him ecstasies in plenty.
But he was fairly versed in the unwritten
Ways of her sex, though little over twenty.
The youth who was indifferent to Aurelia
Was hardly likely to adore Cecilia.

XXXII

She plied him, though, with many a tender glance
And many a subtle amorous invention,
Begged him to tell her why he wished to dance
After the ragged children of dissension.
Whereat he asked her if by any chance
She’d heard what Reverend James had tried to mention.
She pouted, but with sturdy will insisted
On probing him, however he resisted.

CECILIA

XXXIII

“Oh, come,” she said, “you’ve had enough of wandering.
Come, settle down and taste life’s ample sweet.
Joy does not come from theoretic pondering,
But just from plucking flowers at your feet.
I understand the interest of squandering
Money and time to see the world complete.
But you have strayed. Now rest and feed your fill.”
“Oh,” Percival cried, “you don’t know Slippery Bill.”

XXXIV

She sighed, he laughed. Then father Smith appeared,
Come for a day to see his son a-wooing;
At least he hoped to find his fancy cleared,
Forgetting dangerous fads in turtle cooing.
With him he brought a friend who knew he feared
Fantastic freaks would prove the boy’s undoing,
The multi-millionaire, old Peter Scrimp,
Shrewd, greedy, human, swift for all his limp.

XXXV

Now Peter had an interest in souls
Quite equal to his interest in gain,
Which rather was a zeal for winning goals,
Without regard to what they might contain.
Dollars to him were little more than coals,
To burn, to spurn, to turn to gold again.
Peter was keen for anything uncommon,
Mill-wheels or millions, also man or woman.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXXVI

He and the prophet had been friends before,
When Percival's wild ideas were just beginning.
Therefore they both were pleased to meet once more.

"Ah, Mr. Scrimp," said Percival, "still sinning
After the old, old fashion I deplore?"

The millionaire, who found his manner winning,
Replied, "Yes, Percival, the old, old game.
I think you'd better join me in the same.

XXXVII

"You're fond of spending money, come and get it,
And grow familiar with the wicked world.
You ought to learn its ways, if you'd upset it.

Possibly, in the end, you might be whirled
Along the stream. It charms you, if you let it,
Has vast surprises of amusement furl'd
Under the surface which the vulgar see.

Now, won't you change your life and come with me?"

XXXVIII

"And come with you?" cried Percival, amazed,

"Relinquish light and laughter just for cash,
Turn from the realm of joy to creatures dazed
By constant cracking of the industrial lash,
Where the amusement is to have barely grazed
A monetary, monitory crash?

And come with you? Well, since you raise the question,
I must confess I'm pleased with the suggestion."

CECILIA

XXXIX

So they three chatted in the morning sun. —

Meantime Cecilia, greatly discontented,
Asked Theodora what was to be done.

Now Theodora often had repented ;
And, rather than the prophet should be won,
She liked to see Cecilia circumvented.

Therefore to all her cousin's lamentation
She offered very little consolation.

XL

“I don't think you can wean him from his hope,”
Said Theodora. “Hope!” the other gibed.

“He must be weaned. We cannot let him grope
In the wild course his fancy has described.”

“Wean him !” said Theodora. “Smiles and soap
Are not the means by which his like are bribed.”

So, after seeking comfort from that quarter,
Cecilia's temper, never long, grew shorter.

XLI

Just then, as love would have it, Reverend Jim

Came to her side imploring her compassion,
Quite ready to be nourished with a dim

And altogether ineffectual ration.

But she was ready to dispose of him

In a most barbarous and ghastly fashion.

“Miss Braybrooke,” he began, with much timidity,
Not perfectly divining her acidity,

A PROPHET OF JOY

XLII

“Miss Braybrooke, I confess your youthful cousin
Has given my ideas quite a shock.

I tried to turn him from the way he was in,
But found him adamant as a rock.”

“My friend,” she cried, “that child is worth a dozen
Of you and all that ever wore your frock.

Go pray, and leave your betters free to roam.”

The Reverend James went flabbergasted home.

XLIII

Though Percival had found his fancy teased

By the excellent Peter's business invitation,

The plan was not immediately seized,

But left to work in his imagination.

Meantime, no doubt, he still continued pleased

By poor Cecilia's manifest admiration.

Yet now and then his memory would recur

To all that group, so different from her.

XLIV

He thought of Morgan's growling, grumbling satire,

Of Jarvis, wealthy, commonplace, but sunny ;

Of Jessie, who adored but did not flatter,

Of her amusing Science ceremony,

Of Bill, who mingled merriment with matter,

As wax is exquisitely stored with honey.

And of Aurelia he thought most of all.

Beside her these late doings seemed so small.

CECILIA

XLV

He thought of the superb defense she made
Of him amid the tumult in the court.
He saw her at the movie masquerade. —
The masquerade? The memory cut him short.
Cecilia — could she possibly be betrayed
Into devising something of the sort?
Then he could gather his whole motley crew
And let them loose among the sacred few.

XLVI

Thought sped to action in his fiery brain.
He told Cecilia. She was charmed to find
Anything to induce him to remain
And be at least a little longer kind.
Between them the affair was soon in train
And everybody had his part assigned.
Percival found his friends without much labor,
All eager to respond to pipe and tabor.

XLVII

It was a most magnificent occasion,
Money and flowers and music and some glee.
Even the Reverend James, upon persuasion,
Lent the affair a touch of sanctity. —
Disguised, of course, that most profane invasion
Did not at first offend propriety.
Bill as a clown and Morgan as a cop
Could surely be excused for acting shop.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XLVIII

Aurelia was a nun. Cecilia wore a
Most fascinating garb of street musician,
And charmingly set off Miss Theodora
As a Venetian Renaissance patrician.
Finally Percival had as troubadour a
Superb array befitting such condition.
Dozens of figures, in confusion quaint,
Made chaos, from a sinner to a saint.

XLIX

The prophet saw with pleasure apostolic
That all his friends were mingled with the rest,
Each one engaging in the tangled frolic
And tasting it with unutterable zest.
The Reverend James, professional melancholic,
Was sermonizing Nancy at his best.
And Percival thought with glee of Morgan's notes,
As merry as a sunbeam full of motes.

L

What charmed his heart beyond all else was Bill,
By whom Cecilia clearly was bewitched.
She chattered, laughed, and danced with him her fill,
And listened while his whispering grace enriched
Her ready ear, weaving with artless skill
His jests, and quips, and scraps of rhyme that twitched
Her nerves with ecstasy made much more zealous
Because she hoped that Percival was jealous.

CECILIA

LI

So the triumphant evening flew along.

Each minute set the next one flying faster.

And every heart amid that noisy throng

Fluttered and thrilled with titillation vaster,

Till the invaders found the fit so strong,

The prophet feared they might forget their master.

It had been planned before that he should ask

At midnight everybody to unmask.

LII

Thus, as the hour approached, they flocked together

Into the supper room about the table,

A gorgeous, glittering company. Jewel and feather

Flickered and sparkled in a whirl unstable,

Until the eye could scarce determine whether

All were a fleeting dream; and such a Babel

Assailed the ear as plagued the puzzled sense

With a complexity of impotence.

LIII

Percival drew his company apart,

Loudly announced unmasking, and began :

“My friends, into this atmosphere of art,

By what I think a pardonable plan,

I've brought some genuine artists. Do not start,

But profit by my kindness while you can.

For, truth to tell, a freeborn spirit stifles

In such an endless whirl of frills and trifles.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LIV

“This, then, is Miss McGoggin, whom you all
Know and admire upon the movie screen,
A creature of magic mighty to enthrall
With every touch the polished and the mean.
This is her brother, Bill, whom I should call
As delicate a soul as I have seen.
And this is Matthew Morgan, a reporter,
Who will describe us in the proper quarter.

LV

“Miss Walker and Miss Gates are quite expert
At making everybody feel their charm.
I ’m glad to see the Reverend James alert.
Miss Walker will not do him any harm.
On Mr. Jarvis I need not exert
Persuasive power to soothe your fond alarm.
His father was a millionaire, though he
Estimates life at its true quality.

LVI

“And now, my friends, let’s make the evening merry,
Double distil the essence of delight.
You ’ll find my guests here sympathetic, very.
Come, make them feel that I did not invite
Their gracious presence in a cemetery.
Also, luxuriate in the winning sight
Of my seductive person, while you may,
For I shall vanish with the dawn of day.”

CECILIA

LVII

There was a moment's silence. Then his words
Found echo in their hearts well warmed with laughter.
They twittered like a flock of morning birds,
With glee resounding up to ridge and rafter.
There might have been a few close-muttered girds
Bound to develop ugly things hereafter.
But in the main they wished to let the present
Be, as the past had been, divinely pleasant.

LVIII

The women thought Aurelia grand, and Bill
They all agreed was positively delightful.
They laughed at Morgan's power of doing ill,
And hoped he would not make his record spiteful.
The men, even Reverend James, wooed Nancy still,
And Jessie's cup of ecstasy was quite full.
In short, their joy and revelry were more
Abundant even than they had been before.

LIX

Cecilia and Aurelia had a duel.
They each at once divined the other's attitude,
And jealousy provided snapping fuel
Under the smooth and well-directed platitude.
You could detect desire to be cruel
Beneath the perfect smile of social gratitude.
"You've known our friend some time?" Cecilia said.
Aurelia bent her grave, majestic head.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LX

“Of course you think his theories are wrong.”

“I do,” Aurelia said. “He’s much too gentle.”

“Too gentle! He would sell life for a song.”

“He makes our happiness too accidental.”

“I well believe your influence is strong.

I only hope it won’t be detrimental.”

“I hope it won’t,” Aurelia said. “But you
Can easily repair the harm I do.”

LXI

Here they were parted; for the first dim dawn

Gave signal that outsiders must be going.

The glitter of the dewdrops on the lawn

Made pale the diamonds’ superbest glowing.

Percival was as gay as a young fawn.

But other cheeks were pale and temper growing
Short over things that really little mattered.

So, with one final burst of song, they scattered.

LXII

Cecilia and Miss Theodora both

Tried to persuade the prophet to repent.

“No, no,” he cried, “you must not counsel sloth

To one by nature always indolent.”

Alas, they saw that he was far from loath

To leave their charms. At any rate, he went.

His last words gave a most prophetic summing.

“So live as to be ready for my coming.”

CECILIA

LXIII

Then Morgan and the others whirled him off

To a resort as gay as it was common.

Cecilia would have called it pigs in trough.

To Percival it seemed divinely human.

Just now he was not much disposed to scoff.

When they arrived, Morgan produced a woman

Whom he declared the desolate survivor

Of a departed Scotchman named McIvor.

LXIV

She was a jolly widow, rubicund,

With cheery voice, eyes blue as China plates.

Her wholesome bust inclined to the rotund,

And she comprised two anxious people's weights.

But she could always draw upon a fund

Of spirits wide as the United States;

And though her waist was not politely measurable,

Some persons found her conversation pleasurable.

LXV

She was as common as the air we breathe,

But common things are frequently diverting.

And though her ordinary speech would seethe

With vulgar turns, she was averse to hurting.

Her ways with Morgan I should over-wreath

With adulation to describe as flirting.

And yet, for all his wit in matters shady,

He meditated marriage with this lady.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXVI

For Cupid is a deity obscure
And aims at ends exceedingly perplexing.
But one thing was beyond all question sure,
That Percival's crew would find it no way vexing
To see that sum of corporal charms allure
Their portly scribe and cynic to annexing
Such an attractive mass of seasoned honey
In all the formal bonds of matrimony.

LXVII

They did not find it vexing, but delightful,
Took every possible means to urge it on.
Bill painted lonely age as something frightful,
And bachelorhood as simply woe-begone.
They teased the lovers all day, till Morgan, spiteful,
Declared that he would leave and love alone.
Then they caressed him with such petting carriage,
He finally said they might arrange the marriage.

LXVIII

But for a moment leave the widow's charms.
Aurelia had a little score to settle
With her dear prophet. She faced him under arms,
Majestical as Popocatepetl.
Does he not know, she said, how much he harms
The cause he serves by touching brassy metal
Such as Cecilia? Treachery, she called it later.
Percival smiled. "Waters I thought the traitor."

CECILIA

LXIX

“Waters,” she cried, “was loyal to the cause,
Would gladly lay his life down to advance it.”

“His friend’s, I rather had opined it was.”

Percival smiled again, then turned the lancet.

“His love for you at least deserves applause,
And hate of me would naturally enhance it.”

Aurelia raged. But you and I can see
How love and hatred twine inextricably.

LXX

Meantime the others passed the days in riot,
And made the starry nights more riotous still.

For nobody could possibly be quiet

When near the indefatigable Bill.

They danced, they sang. Sometimes they kept joy’s diet

Just for themselves. Sometimes their wayward will

Charmed with its exquisite solicitation

Others to join their mad concatenation.

LXXI

When Morgan’s matters had attained a crisis,

Percival planned a picnic by the sea,

Without regard to pulmonary phthisis.

The widow leaped at the idea with glee,

Although she had a cautious word on prices.

The set day came, it dawned delightfully,

And everything was fitted to content your

Heart, if you liked that kind of an adventure.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXII

They ate, they drank, they strolled about in groups
 (Although the widow longed to wash the dishes),
Surveyed the deep, diversified by sloops,
 Or gazed from rocks upon the darting fishes.
No doubt they would have even looped the loops,
 If loops had been there. But they looped in wishes.
And all the time, making the sun seem tame,
Bill's vagrant fancy flickered like a flame.

LXXIII

He sang weird songs of exquisite vulgarity,
 Turning low laughter to a grace supreme,
As if it were a dim, delicious rarity,
 Bewitching as the fragrance of a dream.
Then all at once, out of his Christian charity,
 He wooed the widow, till he made it seem
As if he wished to turn her stout adorer
Into a tame nonentity before her.

LXXIV

He dogged her footsteps, tended her desires,
 Praised her pronounced felicity in clothing,
Assured her that he had far fiercer fires
 Than Morgan, underneath his airy frothing.
"A journalist's devotion soon expires,
 And habit makes divorce to him seem nothing.
But where my love once comes, it comes to stay.
It trembles, but it never fades away."

CECILIA

LXXV

The widow was bewildered, yet enchanted.

This golden day meant a new life for her,
And really gave her everything she wanted.

But soon, with no appreciable stir,
Bill vanished, and she found her path was haunted

By Percival, with fresh, delicious blur.
He too, in words quite competent to move
Diana's heart, insinuated love:

LXXVI

Told her that Morgan's flesh was much too gross

For one whose spirit far outsoared her body,
That she could only love him at a loss.

Being at best an animated clod, he,
So Percival declared, was merely dross,

And massive as he was, would prove but shoddy.
Surely the widow had good taste enough
To turn her thoughts to more ethereal stuff.

LXXVII

By this the widow was no doubt completely

Intoxicated. But the opportunity
Of lecturing this wandering prophet sweetly

Could not be offered to her with impunity.

"Young man," she said, and smoothed her wide skirts neatly,

"I've heard about your course in the community.

If you'd please me, you must be less erratic."

She clinched the comment with a tap emphatic.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXVIII

“I’ve listened to your rigmarole of joy,
And I confess I find it reprehensible.
It seems that you are trying to annoy
Poor common souls with notions indefensible.
You’re rich, you’re handsome. Then why not employ
Your time in pleasant ways, like me? Be sensible.
Eat, drink, and spend your money, and quit stalking
Other folks’ cares that can’t be cured by talking.”

LXXIX

To which the prophet, grieved, responded slowly:
“Mrs. McIvor, with extreme regret
I recognize at last that you are wholly
Unfit to appreciate my mission. Yet
I could not part from one so roly-polly
And be the same as when at first we met.
To think that you can leave a three-banked organ
Just for a wiry Jew’s harp! Take her, Morgan.”

LXXX

The widow sighed and wore a puzzled air,
Then strolled away in amorous proximity
With Morgan, whom the prophet bade prepare
To renovate her banished equanimity.
“Matthew,” she moaned, “I must say I can’t bear
A bubble like him. Now ain’t he just the limit? He
May suit Aurelia well for an insane beau;
I like roast mutton better than a rainbow.”

CECILIA

LXXXI

Through these delights they hurried on the wedding
With every sort of joyous preparation,
To give the doubtful path the pair were treading
At least a look of rosy jubilation.
Bill had concocted a superb scare-heading
To spread the news throughout the whole creation.
The prophet, as one who at no trifle stickles,
With some expense procured the Reverend Nichols.

LXXXII

The Reverend came. The joyful day arrived,
A day most fortunate for such festivity.
No merrier wedding ever was contrived,
Since Aphrodite's aqueous nativity.
No stout colossus e'er was apter wived,
Nor pair more packed with mutual proclivity;
While vested James completely crowned the ball
By being out of sympathy with it all.

LXXXIII

Then they were whirled off in a nuptial storm,
Pelted with shoes and oversnowed with rice,
Bill singing in his most delightful form,
And everybody squandering good advice,
While Morgan bowed, his ample features warm
Red as a bull dressed up for sacrifice. —
So, heading these for matrimonial rocks,
Percival turned his thoughts to bonds and stocks.

BOOK V

PETER SCRIMP

I

AND now behold the prophet tied to Scrimp
And for the moment seated at a desk.
You might suppose that not a gargoyle imp
On a cathedral would be more grotesque.
But yet the millionaire forgot his limp
In watching one so oddly picturesque,
And felt as if the sun had shed a ray
On his old heart, wrinkled, forlorn, and gray.

II

Before the thing was settled they had talked
Quite frankly and the youth gave his opinion,
That no one might suppose that he had walked
Into this perfectly untried dominion
With his eyes shut. If hopes were to be balked,
When he soared free upon his ample pinion,
He did not wish the hoppers to allege
That he had violated any pledge.

PETER SCRIMP

III

“Of course,” said Scrimp, “when you are tired, you quit.

But for a brief space dwell amidst our clutter.

The gloom will most agreeably be lit

By one fantastic flash before you flutter.

Besides, I think that we shall find you knit

More and more closely to dull bread and butter,

Say what you please of recreation sunny,

There’s nothing charms the human mind like money.”

IV

“Money,” said Percival, “will not charm me.

And if I poke among your pigeon-holes,

It simply is because I like to see

Every variety of human souls.

The charm of money is a mystery.

And what enormous evils it enrolls :

Meanness and greed and underhanded tricks,

Which make life seem the darker side of Styx.”

V

“The darker side of Styx and greed and meanness.

Well,” was Scrimp’s thoughtful comment, “you are right.

Money may be the acme of uncleanness

And filthy shadow of eternal night.

But, though it frets your outward form to leanness,

I find a fascination in the fight :

No other snare’s so cunningly benetting,

Not in the having it, but in the getting.

A PROPHET OF JOY

VI

“Why, boy, what equals the intoxication
Of slowly working out elaborate schemes,
Spun and devised with far-wrought divination
And haunting even your nocturnal dreams?
To watch their long and patient realization
Until success inimitable gleams,
Is victory well worthy of the strife,
And, after all, what else is there in life?”

VII

“What else in life?” the indignant prophet cried.
“What else but counting cash and signing cheques?
And floating, if you do float, on the wide
Sea of disaster, overstrewn with wrecks?
Why, Peter Scrimp, you only see one side
Of life so broadly, splendidly complex.
If I can bring a breath of how to live,
My stay will mean not only get but give.”

VIII

“Oh, life is full of fountains of delight,
Not all, like yours, exuding potions bitter,
But infinitely sweet as well as bright
And sparkling in perpetual starlike glitter.
Why, you, even you, might get you wings for flight
And join the birds that innocently twitter,
Lame body, lamer soul so cast behind you,
Pecuniary care could never find you.”

PETER SCRIMP

IX

And Peter laughed. He liked this sort of thing.

He would have twittered, could you have taught him how.

“Alas,” he said, “I am too old to sing,

A moping owl upon a wintry bough,

And you’re so young, so young. The suffering,

The bitter dregs of life you cannot know,

But miss the hidden horror of existence,

While twittering joyous at a rosy distance.

X

“Wait till you come to see the heart of man,

With all its crooked turns and ugly corners,

With watchful eye more accurately scan

The equal pettiness of scorned and scorners.

Then get such mad excitement as you can.”

“Oh, well,” said Percival, “when I join the mourners,

I probably shall do as mourners do.

Just now I’m studying stocks and studying you.”

XI

“Studying stocks and studying me?” Grim-faced,

Scrimp listened. Then he made this proposition.

“One hundred thousand dollars will be placed

At your disposal quite without condition.

You may invest it in what suits your taste,

To stimulate your speculative ambition.

I can suggest some things, which, if you try,

Will bring a handsome profit by and by.”

A PROPHET OF JOY

XII

“A hundred thousand dollars to invest,”
Said Percival, extremely nonchalant.
“Also a financier to suggest,
In case I seek to find my way and can’t.
Well, Mr. Scrimp, I think it will be best,
Since I’m desired to get a business slant,
That, of these dollars, I should put a few in
Whatever I choose, to bring about my ruin.

XIII

“I’ve been quite interested in ‘Zona Oil.’”
“In ‘Zona Oil’?” Scrimp answered, with dismay.
“In that, my son, you easily could spoil
A hundred thousand dollars in a day.
Rank, riotous speculation! I’d not soil
My fingers with it in the smallest way.
Just now it soars as high as a balloon.
It may be flat before the next full moon.

XIV

“If you want oil, take ‘Eagle,’ take ‘Eclipse.’”
“Thank you,” said Percival, “I’ll think it over.
There surely is no better source for tips.
But, after all, I fear you don’t discover
The charm of wild finance. His lady’s lips
Have not more fascination for a lover;
Nor for an alcoholic, fume of liquor,
Than for a fool the ticking of the ticker.

PETER SCRIMP

XV

“And I ’m a fool, with glimmerings of wit.
Give me my principal and let me go.”
Scrimp drew the cheque, rather regretting it.
Percival left him, with a joyous glow,
And sallied forth into the wide world, bit
With all the frenzy that the gamblers know.
He put the whole sum into Zona stock.
Smith’s son so doing gave the street a shock.

XVI

The price at once went soaring to the sky,
And Percival was chosen a director;
Not that they rated his advice so high,
But thought his name might fool a chance inspector
And he himself was filled with ecstasy
At such an opening for a soul-dissector.
He went to all the meetings, gravely dressed,
And listened to the talk as if impressed.

XVII

Oh, what a lovely set of men they were
From Percival’s point of view, some thin, some fat,
Some jaunty, some severe, some set astir
By every breeze of rumcr, some knocked flat.
Just for amusement Percival tried to blur
Their hungry eyes by preaching joy. They sat,
Dull, heavy, deaf to such a merry saviour.
Percival hugely relished their behavior.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XVIII

But let us leave this atmosphere so stifling
And turn to something softer, if not sweeter.
At first Cecilia would not one small sigh fling
After her fled adorer. He defeat her!
That advocate of monumental trifling,
Who read the wide world in fantastic metre,
Whose sparkling nonsense vanished like a stray brook,
Should he teach loving to Cecilia Braybrooke?

XIX

But with his absence life grew thin and dull,
As if invaded by a summer cloud.
She picked the brightest blossoms she could cull,
But they had lost their brilliancy. A crowd
Of merry faces, once so beautiful,
Seemed empty and unmeaning. She was proud,
Cecilia Braybrooke, and it made her smart,
To think this dream had settled in her heart.

XX

And actually then she wandered forth,
Under the cold moon, by the sounding sea,
And fixed her gaze upon the steadfast north,
Revolving love, past, present, and to be.
Was it, she asked herself, ah, was it worth
While to consider such felicity?
She shook her pretty head and clenched her fist,
And then she found she wished she might be kissed.

PETER SCRIMP

XXI

But not by Reverend James, oh, not by him,
Though pastorally minded to assuage
Her amorous grief, of which he had a dim
And misty comprehension. All her rage
She vented on the wretched, Reverend Jim,
Whose personal ecstasy had reached that stage
Where he could find no cure for his devotion
But love's acceptance or the engulfing ocean.

XXII

Then he was quite astonished to discover
That she took pleasure in his conversation, —
Provided he would talk about her lover.
In fact, poor James was getting education,
Not having been an intellectual rover.
No charitable feeder of starvation
Was ever welcomed more than he when spreading
The interesting news of Morgan's wedding.

XXIII

He dwelt upon details, Cecilia hummed,
Described the widow's garb, Cecilia sniffed,
Mourned over vulgar jests, Cecilia drummed
Her restless fingers. Then, with challenge swift,
Her curiosity she briefly summed:
“And what did Percival do?” He caught her drift,
And, with insinuating phrase meticulous,
Endeavored to make Percival ridiculous.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXIV

It did not seem quite suitable that one
So wealthy and so properly brought up
Should mix with company he ought to shun
And drink of such a very common cup.
Here James regretted what he had begun.
Cecilia called him a complacent pup,
And only when his words were well repented,
She sent him home extremely discontented.

XXV

But she preferred a wiser ear than his
In which to pour her longing and desire,
Her new conception of love's mysteries
And glimmerings of elemental fire.
Therefore she took her curiosities
To Theodora, hoping to get nigher
Through her to what just now aroused her passion
In such a very tantalizing fashion.

XXVI

The interviews between them were delicious,
If I could only give their subtle meaning.
Each toward the other was a bit suspicious
And each concealed it, personal bias screening.
They both believed the prophet was not vicious,
They both deplored his habit of demeaning
Such inborn charm by low association,
Both thought his company quite beneath his station.

PETER SCRIMP

XXVII

And then Cecilia frankly spoke her mind.

“If he would put aside his silly chatter,
The idle dreams to which he’s so inclined
And wholly inessential pitter-patter,
Would leave his wandering fantasies behind
And fill his life with really sober matter,
Would make his worthy father due amends,
He might become a credit to his friends.”

XXVIII

“I don’t agree with you at all, my dear,”
Was Theodora’s answer. “I believe
He dwells in a diviner atmosphere
Than you or I or father Smith conceive,
That some day he will help to banish fear
And bring delight to many souls that grieve.
In fact, I will confess my own ambition
To be a modest figure in his mission.”

XXIX

“You?” cried Cecilia, openly satirical.
“Oh, cousin Theodora, can it be
That you could entertain a penchant lyrical
For this fantastic shred of fluttering glee?
My nostrums for the case are quite empirical;
But this would be a perfect remedy.
Oh, cousin Theodora, could we patch
An eminently suitable family match?”

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXX

“Cecilia, you ’re impertinent,” was all
That cousin Theodora would reply.
And then they let the conversation fall.
Cecilia closed her visit speedily.
But afterwards she never could recall
The little episode agreeably.
The memory of it spurted hotter flames
Into her dealings with the Reverend James.

XXXI

And Theodora too was deeply stung
By her delightful visitor’s suggestion.
She knew the tricks of that enchanting tongue,
And sought in general how she could it best shun.
As for the prophet, she thought she might have flung
Wisdom aside and wed him without question,
If he had asked her. But that such a word
Should ever be uttered, was a dream absurd.

XXXII

Meanwhile she longed to see him, hear his speech,
Learn all the secret of his new surroundings.
By this time she was sure that she could teach
Her heart to stop unnecessary boundings.
Could it be possible that Scrimp could preach
The passion for that sea beyond all soundings?
And with his sordid sophistry could mar
The radiance of her bright, celestial star?

PETER SCRIMP

XXXIII

She asked him for a Sunday and he came.

They sat upon the garden seat together.

She mentioned that she found him on the same,

A year ago in lovely autumn weather.

He laughed, "How changed we are!" She strove to tame

The storm in memory by asking whether

He proved himself the aptest of Scrimp's scholars

And still enjoyed manipulating dollars.

XXXIV

"Dear Miss Theodora, it is so amusing.

I love the guileless children of rapacity,

Who designate their limitless abusing

Of God's best gifts as creditable sagacity.

Besides, I do enjoy their way of using

Me with a most transparent unverity.

They love to hear my father's millions clink;

But when I turn my back, I know they wink.

XXXV

"I've always been completely spoiled by petting.

It does me good awhile to be despised.

And then, with all their rabid greed for getting,

Miss Theodora, you would be surprised

To see how love and joy creep in, upsetting

The plans they have so cunningly devised.

Sometimes I almost wonder how I can quit

This varied and delectable human banquet."

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXXVI

Dismay awoke in Theodora's heart.

“Why, Percival, you don't think of remaining?
I really could not bear to have you part
With all your lofty dreams without complaining.”
He laughed. “I'm sorry I gave you such a start.
Yet, after all, I think I might be gaining
As many followers from high finance
As from the fields where piping shepherds dance.

XXXVII

“But don't be troubled. I shall soon shake off
The bonds they've tied about me and go free.
I cannot reconcile poor Peter's cough
With any dream of what delight should be.
Moreover, he's inclined to carp and scoff,
Though I admit he's rather fond of me.
Before long I shall flit into the wide
Delicious mysteries of the world outside.

XXXVIII

“You know, I sometimes fancy that we two
Should find incomparable zest in roving,
I preaching, you enjoying as you do,
And both of us forever mad for moving.
We might meander indolently through
Both hemispheres and always be improving
The souls of other people and our own
With exquisite inventions yet unknown.

PETER SCRIMP

XXXIX

“How does it strike you?” She was quite struck dumb
And for some seconds could not find an answer.
Before her hesitancy was overcome,
His spirit leaped, incorrigible dancer,
To dally in its darting play with some
Equally wayward freak that should entrance her.
She could not tell, when he had taken flight,
Whether he left more grief or more delight.

XL

He could not tell, nor did he greatly care,
Whether the day with her was more adorable,
Or that he spent the following week elsewhere,
In Bill's and Morgan's company deplorable.
Morgan was busy making people stare
With stories of oil. He found the prophet more able
To furnish bunches of sensational writing
Than matrimony, murder, or prize-fighting.

XLI

And then the widow was more round than ever
And more superbly vulgar in jocosity,
Though, finding her husband and Percival would not sever,
She viewed him with a certain animosity.
But Bill assuaged her with a running river
Of mirth fantastic almost to monstrosity.
Oh, 't was a royal day and it had set
Almost before they realized they had met.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XLII

Only Aurelia was not there. Her days
And nights, though always full, were touched with grief,
When she considered Percival's new ways.
Indeed, she felt it almost past belief
That he could deign to wander in the maze
And mire of money, to become a thief;
For so she branded business in her ardor,
And would have liked to brand it even harder.

XLIII

She found she turned to Waters more and more,
Though she disliked his amorous attention.
His doctrines pleased her, when he coldly swore
Life must be mended by some new invention,
Some panacea never known before,
Though what it was he did not clearly mention.
Tired of Percival's laughter in the sun,
She wanted something definite to be done.

XLIV

One evening Percival finally sought her out.
At once she told him all her bitter feeling,
Her agony, her longing, and her doubt,
More than she meant her inmost heart revealing.
"Oh, Percival," she cried, "do turn about.
Don't let the frost of dollars grow, congealing
Your high enthusiasm. Don't be disloyal
To all your visions, so superb and royal.

PETER SCRIMP

XLV

“ Does not the poignant pity of the world
Yet penetrate your dream of pleasant things?
Deep in your passionate spirit must be furled
The consciousness of human sufferings.
Is not a cry of endless sorrow whirled
Into the glow of your imaginings?
Don't sell your splendid ecstasy for gold,
Or let your human heart be bought and sold.

XLVI

Percival greatly humored her distress.
“The pity of the world and human pain
Must sometimes overwhelm us, I confess,
And I confess, too, that I daily gain
More notion of my mission's arduousness.
But I believe I shall not preach in vain.
Laughter and love and joy may not quite cure
Our sorrows, but they help us to endure.

XLVII

“ And well I know that wrath and violence
Can never help, if love and joy cannot.
The calm delights of patient innocence
Can comfort in the most abandoned spot.
And the firm will can scatter an immense
Pure gleam across the dark's detested blot.
We'll see, Aurelia, which will more beguile
The world's regret, your pity or my smile.”

A PROPHET OF JOY

XLVIII

She listened to him, charmed, if not persuaded.

She could have listened till the morning broke.
As to his plans, he quietly evaded.

His free thought to her zeal he would not yoke,
Or have his frolic liberty invaded.

So, when he left her, her distress awoke,
And she inclined once more to Waters's view :
The old world must be shattered by the new.

XLIX

Percival returned to business. It was time.

That day there came a wild report which shook
The market, stocks went crashing. Whose the crime

Nobody knew, or none was brought to book.
High hopes collapsed when just prepared to climb.

Fortunes that yesterday wore a golden look,
To-day, when once the ticker cut its caper,
Were found to be no more than printed paper.

L

To Percival the whole affair seemed strange,

A mad confusion and chaotic flurry.

Men who, he thought, were able to arrange

Their daily lives without unseemly worry,
Now paled and shivered in the breath of change

And rushed to ruin in a desperate hurry.

Even he, who commonly could see joy clear,
Required a microscope to find it here.

PETER SCRIMP

LI

As for poor "Zona Oil," it just went out,
With one last pale spurt, like a candle guttering.
In that wide tumult and disordered rout
Few took the pains to note its final fluttering.
And what would otherwise have raised a shout,
Now passed away in a discordant muttering.
The stock of "Zona Oil" became a thin
Phantom among the things that might have been.

LII

A few of the directors, for pure form,
Gathered to pay respect to the departed.
They all were men who had foreseen the storm
And saved themselves, although the public smarted.
But none of them would have prophesied the warm
Dressing they got when Percival once started,
After official note of the bereavement,
To tell them what he thought of their achievement.

LIII

He called them rogues right out and then accused them
Of crafty, shameless, cowardly duplicity,
Admitting all the while, as he abused them,
An equal guilt in his own eccentricity.
Even pleasure in their dull greed he refused them.
"Come, come with me, if you would know felicity.
Come, leave your speculations and your schemes
And wander in a world of moonlit dreams."

A PROPHET OF JOY

LIV

Some smiled, some glared, some yawned, some really listened.

And then he turned upon his heel and went,
Told the whole story to Scrimp, whose blue eyes glistened,
Perhaps with tears, perhaps with merriment.

“My boy,” he said, “I fear when you were christened
A prophet, nothing but a fool was meant.”

“Peter,” said Percival, “venerable Peter,
A fool in prose may be a prophet in metre.

LV

“It happens every day. And now, farewell.”

“Farewell?” said Peter. “You don’t say, you’re going?”
“Going I am. I’ve had enough of hell.”

Scrimp laughed. “You’ve made a very pretty showing.
But even a prophet could, I think, foretell

Your speedily the business world outgrowing.
I have another suggestion that will fix
Your gifts much better, that is, politics.”

LVI

“Politics!” answered Percival. “Politics!”

His tone expressive of extreme disgust.

“Why, Mr. Scrimp, you really seek to mix
My bright career with ignominious dust.

How could I mingle with the smooth, prolix

Creatures who coax a tramp and rob a trust?

Indeed, you must seek something else to bait your
Hook, more alluring than the legislature.”

PETER SCRIMP

LVII

But Scrimp persisted. "Waters, whom you know,

Now plans to run for Congress, swears that he
Will flaunt the blood-red banner to and fro.

He has a host of followers, but we,
Your father and I, believe that you can go

Into the ring and beat him easily.
You would be glad to see a man like this tricked
Out of his triumph in your own home district.

LVIII

"Your father's influence is very great,

And mine, if I may say so, is not small.

The public knows you well; for you've of late
Been featured in a fashion to appall.

And you can talk on any point of state,

Or any other point, to beat them all.

Here is the chance of a lifetime, better take it.

If the career lacks laughter, you can make it."

LIX

Percival passed a day in meditation,

Day really given to solitude reflective.

Then he deferred to Scrimp's solicitation,

Admitting that his argument was effective.

He longed to wrestle with Waters's aggregation,

Knew he could fling political invective,

And saw on earth no better road to reaching

The most magnificent audience for preaching.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LX

The party took him with a huge acclaim.

And Waters, who to some extent from spite
Against the Smiths, into the contest came,
Heard of the nomination with delight,
Believing that he understood the game

And could not fail to win a splendid fight.
There was a gay disturbance and the battle
Made common contests seem an infant's rattle.

LXI

At first the prophet took the usual lines;

In fact, appeared most carefully conventional,
Went on the platform with august divines
And equaled them in gravity intentional,
Showed how the Socialist theory combines

All possible dangers. But I need not mention all
Such tedious matters. He pleased the Lord's anointed.
More frivolous souls were rather disappointed.

LXII

Yet something in his manner was so winning,

Even on themes that men heard hammered daily,
And the bright aura of his fancied sinning
Made common politics dance and gleam so gayly,
That people finally found themselves beginning

To feel that Waters's cause was looking palely.
We'll leave it now, in hope of its undoing,
And turn a moment to Cecilia's wooing.

PETER SCRIMP

LXIII

For she persuaded Percival at last
To spend a Sunday with her in the middle
Of his political fury, and with vast
Persistence she endeavored to unriddle
The motives of his future and his past.

Percival smiled at her and played the fiddle,
Would take down any topic from the shelf
Of fancy to torment her but himself.

LXIV

“I am so glad that you at last are settled,
Your talents in the field to which they ’re fitted.”

“Just so,” said he. “A horse, however mettled,
Is very little use unless he ’s bitted.”

His mockery made the lovelorn damsel nettled
And she pursued the theme with forehead knitted.

“I ’ve understood that politics mean talk.
If so, you ’ll win the contest at a walk.

LXV

“You ’ll talk to comely matrons in the street
And well-turned compliments will catch a vote.

You ’ll talk to every workingman you meet
And cram your curious gospel down his throat.

I do not see how any one can beat
You spouting platitudes in a long frock-coat.”

“I ’m sorry,” said he, “my tongue is such a menace.
Won’t you feel better for a game of tennis?”

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXVI

They played, and then they strolled along the beach.

Cecilia was full charged with sentiment,
Or such a substitute as she could reach.

She first explained their cousin's deep intent,
With phrases apt as jealousy might teach.

"You know how much she loves you." Percival sent
This fancy spinning with a kindly smile.

"Love me?" he said. "Oh, no, I'm not worth while."

LXVII

"Learn this, Cecilia: nobody loves me,

Or ever could. You cannot love a dream,
A wayward tangle of felicity,

Where passions do not dwell, but only gleam.

I'm just a tongue, as you so courteously

Have pointed out, a wandering sunbeam."

"Nevertheless, she loves you, though the word
At her age does seem perfectly absurd."

LXVIII

And then her manner changed. For she could use,

When she desired, a strange solicitation
To charm men's hearts. "Oh, Percival, don't abuse

Your natural privilege of peregrination.
Take joy. Take love. Take pleasure. Don't refuse

The full delight that's fitted to your station.

Don't be a weathercock flitting on a steeple;
But live the life of ordinary people."

PETER SCRIMP

LXIX

Just then, as always opportunely apt,
The Reverend James appeared, bowing politely.
It was too plain Cecilia could have slapped
His yearning features. But the prophet brightly
Took up the ball, affectionately tapped
The clergyman on the shoulder, jested slightly,
When offered an appropriate reflection
As to his certain prospect of election.

LXX

“Oh, yes,” he said. “Election. I shall win.
But, James, your wooing is much more essential
Than my first step in this career of sin,
Though it may have an ending presidential.
Yes, woo her, James, ere long she will begin
To lay aside her airs inconsequential.
And, James, she is a dainty thing for wooing,
Quite fitted for a clergyman’s undoing.

LXXI

“For you, Cecilia, you must end with James.
And really I don’t think you could do better.
He may not overwhelm his love with flames,
Most certainly he never will forget her,
Nor derogate from the very highest aims.
But, if you’ll pardon me, I’ll write a letter.”
He left them, James beyond all measure harassed,
And even Cecilia moderately embarrassed.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXII

Now Theodora's love was more maternal.
She sought the prophet's welfare, not her own,
Teased by a fret nocturnal and diurnal
Such as her mellow life had never known.
Politics seemed to her a gulf infernal,
And into it her joy must not be thrown.
Besides, Aurelia, since the masquerade,
Disturbed her rest a trifle, I'm afraid.

LXXIII

Then why not visit Aurelia? So she did,
Found out her dwelling, called, sent in a card.
Aurelia was delighted, or she hid
All other feeling. By some chance ill-starred
Morgan and Bill were with her. Caught amid
Their most Gargantuan pranks, they labored hard
To greet the visitor with due propriety,
Yet Theodora thought them odd society.

LXXIV

Morgan at last tried Percival for diversion.
"Miss Perkins, an extraordinary youth."
"Is he?" said she. "Oh, yes. Such vast dispersion
Of brains, and not yet cut a wisdom tooth!
You know, it's an unusual excursion
For any journalist to tell the truth.
But I confess my pen cannot unravel
The simple facts as fast as he can travel.

PETER SCRIMP

LXXV

“ He may be anything, he may be nothing,
May live to fire the world with visions new, —
Or turn out just a bubble of foam and frothing.

I cannot possibly tell, nor yet can you.
May prove a star in sublunary clothing,
Or just a speck of glass of glittering hue.
At any rate, for my mirth he was sent.”
Miss Theodora gasped and Morgan went.

LXXVI

Alone with Aurelia, it was harder still
For her to find the words for what she wanted.
She felt the glory of Aurelia's will,
The throb of life that in her bosom panted,
Those splendid eyes that burned to kiss or kill,
And she herself seemed one the gods had scanted
Of all that gives existence fiery worth.
How should she speak? At length her speech slipped forth.

LXXVII

“ What do you think of our prophet? ” Aurelia gazed
Beyond her into distance, while her cheek
Flushed with desire and her black eyes blazed.
She clasped her eloquent hands, like those who seek
Things above mortal vision, wandering dazed
In the vain search, and she began to speak,
With utterance dreamy, passionate, and low,
Which made poor Theodora throb and glow.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXVIII

“What do I think? I don't know what to think.
I've watched him darting in his course erratic,
Flinging forth glory that makes dull eyes blink
With shifts of splendor blindingly prismatic.
And I confess to you, I often shrink
Before a fate so strangely enigmatic.
What will he do or be? Where will he go?
As Morgan says, nor you nor I can know.

LXXIX

“Can we?” Thus caught, Miss Perkins could but stammer.
Stammer of hers did not affect the flood
Aurelia still poured out with queenly glamour.
“Miss Perkins, when I see his fresh youth bud
With zeal to quench the fierce and angry clamor
Of hate, to silence sorrow's sullen thud,
I feel as if a god had come again,
To change the changeless destiny of men.

LXXX

“A tongue like his, a heart like his, a hope
Like his might guide the weary, restless stir
Of those who heed not theorist nor Pope,
Might find a track through the chaotic blur
Of wrath and greed that so forlornly grope.
Who knows but he might be the minister
To make the rich themselves forget their pence?
For wealth must go, by love or violence.

PETER SCRIMP

LXXXI

“The world will have no longer rich and poor.
And who so fit to foster this great end,
With his superb touch to fling wide the door
By which the soul to heaven must ascend?
Yet now, alas, I see him more and more
To meaner thoughts and baser creatures tend.
Perhaps it pleases you? For you were born
A capitalist?” She spoke with royal scorn.

LXXXII

“Who? I?” said Theodora. “I don’t count.
A capitalist? Yes, I suppose I am.
No doubt, you find in capital the fount
Of every cruelty, deceit, and sham.
But I’m a woman. And to see him mount
Until his spirit overpours the dam
Of dead convention and soars bright and free,
No matter on what theory, interests me.

LXXXIII

“Your creed of rich and poor I do not grasp.”
“No wonder,” said Aurelia, “as you’re rich.”
So they continued, with the prick of asp
Making each other’s tortured fancy twitch.
They parted with affectionate handclasp,
Covering love or hate, I wonder which.
But Theodora, whether in love or hate,
Feared such a fiery star in Percival’s fate.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LXXXIV

The fiery star herself could not endure
Longer the doubt about her hero's straying.
His presence might alleviate, if not cure
Her fears that he was carelessly betraying
The cause she loved, alas, she was not sure
He loved it too. She sent a message saying
That he must come and see her, and he came.
She met him with her passionate praise and blame.

LXXXV

"Prophet," she cried, "you know I'm disappointed
To see you in the path you've lately trod.
I cannot bear to have the Lord's anointed
Traffic with sordid slaves, forgetting God.
You talk like them, too, through a world disjointed
Apparently content to creep and plod,
Oblivious, it would seem, of higher things,
You whom God blessed with such superb white wings.

LXXXVI

"Oh, Percival, can't you see you're bought and sold?
These men have one intention, one desire,
To keep mankind enslaved with chains of gold.
If they can quench your swift, celestial fire,
Can keep your high, prophetic ardor cold
And devilishly unteach you to aspire,
This earthly life will ever after be
A different thing, at any rate for me."

PETER SCRIMP

LXXXVII

And Percival, calm as always, soothed her pain,
Told her she must not question his career,
That his ideal purpose would remain
Fixed, howsoever changed it might appear.
Bade her not fret her heart with torments vain,
Nor let her lofty soul be soiled with fear.
She listened with delight, while he was present :
His speech was so incomparably pleasant.

LXXXVIII

But when he left her, she was teased with doubt
And listened equally to Waters's plea :
" This infant does not know what he 's about.
He teach a suffering world felicity !
Aurelia, shut your heart and keep him out.
His tongue can charm with summer minstrelsy ;
But his light soul has nothing of the sober,
Confirmed endurance that outlasts October.

LXXXIX

" Watch this campaign, Aurelia. He is fooled
By these enchanters with their bonds and stocks,
Their jarring interests for a moment pooled
To drive our beaten vessel on the rocks.
A spirit like his, devoted but unschooled,
Will certainly not long resist the shocks,
Devised and engineered by careful cunning
To damage each opponent in the running.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XC

“ Oh, join with us, Aurelia, join with us.
I shall be winner in this present struggle,
For all the tempting baits iniquitous
That capitalistic greed contrives to smuggle.
And, if I lose now, thrice victorious
After the failure of deceit and juggle,
The dawning day must on our banners shine.
Aurelia, leave his childish cause. Choose mine.”

XC I

Between the two Aurelia's soul was torn.
Waters's high cause she liked, but not his passion;
Believed his soul was for achievement born;
But he made love in execrable fashion.
The prophet's doings left her heart forlorn
And gave her hope a very meager ration.
Her longing was to see the world made over
By him she loved, instead of by her lover.

XC II

Meanwhile the gay campaign went on with vigor,
And even grew exceedingly exciting,
As if it dealt with issues rather bigger
Than commonly attend congressional fighting.
No doubt in part it owed its eminent rigor
To Matthew Morgan's happy style of writing,
Who every day contrived to give the preacher
Some interesting and unexpected feature!

PETER SCRIMP

XCIII

'T is true that Percival left vituperation
To Waters, and himself continued firm
In his original course of argumentation,
Rarely employing a fantastic term.
But something in his face spelled fascination,
And Morgan kept predicting that the worm
Would finally emerge a butterfly.
So things grew livelier as the days went by.

XCIV

When the campaign at last had reached its end,
Percival's party advertised a rally,
And everybody crowded to attend,
Until they overflowed in street and alley.
Men bore in mind the things that Morgan penned
And hoped that now the words and facts would tally,
Although the earlier talk was rather tame,
And some began to wonder why they came.

XCV

Then Percival arose, with innocence
Enshrined in every feature of his face.
"Now it is coming," Morgan said, quite tense.
And every hearer straightened in his place.
The prophet at first attacked the turbulence
Of those opposed and, while he gave scant grace
To anarchy and the white sheep's garb it wore,
He added little to what he had said before.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XCVI

But then he shot into an orbit new
And told his hearers they were little better,
Completely ridiculed their point of view
And called them slaves of obsolete dead letter.
Did they believe a party drenched in dew
Of foggy custom e'er could be begetter
Of thought or hope or any splendid birth
That would perfect man's sojourn on this earth?

XCVII

"You fools," he cried, "who think that you can fight
The eager rush of stormy hearts like these
By turning back the clock and shutting tight
The human soul in your dim fallacies?
Black-frocked, ink-thoughted, you expect to blight
The glorious growth of life's felicities!
I spurn your foes' insane and violent ends,
But when I look at you, they seem like friends.

XCVIII

"The truth is, government is but a dream,
And you've evolved a monstrous mass of clutter,
Through which man's choked wit shoots a strangled gleam
And vague, portentous murmurs darkly mutter.
Your ballots, parties, platforms, creeds, all seem
Excuses for interminable flutter
Of talk, talk, talk, in limitless ado.
May God forgive me, for I'm talking too.

PETER SCRIMP

XCIX

“ Oh, yes, the weary world goes on and will,
And government will govern as it can,
And tongues will wag interminably still,
Tossing wild words for misery of man.
And hate, revenge, and wrath will seek to kill,
And greed and selfishness like yours will plan
To leave the poor and pitiful to grope
And rob the world forever of its hope.

C

“ Until one day mankind shall slowly learn
That only from within comes renovation,
That each soul to itself alone must turn,
If it would know the secret of salvation,
That fire of love must more intensely burn,
Fed high with hope and joy in quick creation.
Then government and governors will cease,
And the vexed world begin to find its peace.

CI

“ Meanwhile I am a candidate, oh, yes.
But I would have you all to understand,
I cling to no man's banner and caress
No party's covertly rewarding hand.
Where my soul leads, I follow, and repress
No heart that calls me in this whole broad land.
The sweet, untrammelled liberty I use
Shall still be mine. — Elect me, if you choose.”

A PROPHET OF JOY

CII

He ceased. A tumult rose. He disappeared,
Some thought that he had forfeited election,
Some hissed and groaned and others loudly cheered.
Some called it inexcusable defection.
Old Peter Scrimp laughed long at those who feared,
And scouted any prospect of rejection.
Old Scrimp was right. His elfin favorite won,
And laughed as he defeated would have done.

BOOK VI

PERCIVAL

I

SCRIMP had a country place quite near his mills,
And there the prophet and his friends were staying,
Cecilia, Theodora, James, whose ills

His lady seemed more mercifully weighing,
She being one whose love rejection kills,

Although herself inclined to wanton playing
With any lover, whether Bacchanalian
Or piously disposed Episcopalian.

II

It was a charming villa, on a height,
With a delicious beachy pond below,
And Percival found such rural sojourn quite
Refreshing after all that civil woe.

The factory hands, indeed, were full of fight
And threatened trouble, if they once let go ;
But Scrimp concealed this danger from his visitor,
Who, for the time, was guest and not inquisitor.

A PROPHET OF JOY

III

Scrimp and Miss Perkins did not much resemble
Each other; but they had one common ground;
For every day they saw their thoughts assemble
In growing, curious obsession round
This bright, fantastic visionary tremble
Of quivering laughter with joy's halo crowned.
And oft they questioned, argued, and debated
To what end such a creature was created.

IV

“You'll find,” said Scrimp, “at last he'll lay aside
This garment of exaggerated glee,
And you will watch his splendid gift applied
To common uses of mortality.
Meanwhile, thank God, he lives to furnish wide
Amusement to a withered thing like me.
I get new fuel for life's waning taper,
Each time he cuts another frolic caper.”

V

“Amusement!” sighed Miss Perkins. “Ah, no, surely
You can't imagine such transcendent gift
Created for old folks' amusement purely.
He must be given a mission to uplift
The grosser clay that now snores on securely,
To break the darkness with some heavenly rift.
Don't you believe it?” Peter was a skeptic,
Impervious to all spiritual antiseptic.

PERCIVAL

VI

The object of their argument, however,
Did not discuss the end of his existence,
Nor try to stir the world with hard thought's lever,
But cast care to an undisturbing distance,
Letting his lovers tangle and dis sever
Conjectural threads without the least resistance,
Content himself to watch all shimmering mirth
Across the lovely, variegated earth.

VII

And certainly his vision found such shimmer,
Where other mirthless eyes would least expect it.
For instance, who 'd have thought to see it glimmer
In Reverend James, or with his frock connect it?
Yet Percival joyed to see his passion simmer
And every day was eager to detect it.
So when the Reverend finally won his lady,
He found his friend's congratulations ready.

VIII

“Yes, Percival, at last she has consented,”
Said James, and coyly claimed his blushing bride.
“James, don't let Percival think you are demented,
But try to keep your ecstasies inside.”
“I can't,” said James, prodigiously contented.
“Each portal of my soul is open wide,
And everywhere some rapturous thought flies out,
Proclaiming my good fortune all about.”

A PROPHET OF JOY

IX

“Why, James,” the prophet answered, “you’re poetic.

But can’t you tell me how the thing occurred?
You know I am immensely sympathetic.”

“I can’t,” said James. “My memory is blurred.
One day she called me an effete ascetic

And slapped my face. The next she spoke the word
That made my cup of every rapture rare full.”

“And I’ll unspeak it, James, if you’re not careful.”

X

“Oh, no, she won’t!” cried Percival, delighted.

“I do rejoice to see long love rewarded.
Cecilia, you could not be so benighted
As to neglect poor James’s devotion hoarded;
And I affirm, his love will ne’er be blighted
By creeping age or by vexations sordid,
The warmth of his attachment quite as solar
As its enduring constancy is polar.

XI

“I see you now in vision beatific,
As long as Destiny twirls its patient spindle,
Voyaging on in nuptial seas pacific,
Where Hymen’s flames perpetually rekindle,
About your hearth a progeny prolific,
To supplement your forces when they dwindle,
As ample brood as cheers the proletariat,
And nourished on a better commissariat.”

PERCIVAL

XII

Thus everybody lived in cheerful humor.

If only such felicity could last,
And fortune were not cunning to exhume her
Keenest annoyance from a pleasant past !
But shortly mirth was withered by a rumor
That trouble in the factory grew fast
And any day might see the peaceful village
Wholly upset with riot, tumult, pillage.

XIII

Scrimp, to be sure, made light of the suggestion.

“The men will talk,” he said. “I let them talk,
For conversation always helps digestion.
If they like walking too, I ’ll let them walk.
But as for entertaining any question
Of having them run my business, I will chalk
A rigid line that shall my limits show
And not one inch beyond it will I go.”

XIV

Then Morgan came to study the details,

And he at once told Percival the facts.
“The men hate Scrimp,” he said. “He wholly fails
To win their confidence by words or acts.
They are a lawless set and when one rails,
His neighbor neither disputes nor counteracts.
They ’ve worked themselves into a state so furious
That the result is bound to be injurious.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XV

“Then, Waters is behind it all, I know.
He is not here, but he is on the way;
Aurelia, too, as I have heard, although
Whether to help or hinder, I can't say.
Waters hates Scrimp and you, and he will blow
The coals into a blaze without delay.
He will keep dark, but by his introduction
There 'll be the very devil of a ruction.

XVI

“The long and short is, prophet, I advise you
To go elsewhere at once, or you may see
Things that will hurt as much as they surprise you.
You know I 'm not the sort of man to be
Much frightened by unwarranted surmise. You
Must suit yourself, however, as commonly.”
Percival tapped him on his massive shoulder
And laughing said, “Ah, Benedict, you grow older.”

XVII

In due course Waters came, Aurelia too,
As Morgan said, an ominous conjunction.
With Waters's coming the strike vote went through,
As if he had performed a natural function.
Scrimp did precisely what he meant to do,
Stopped every wheel without the least compunction.
“I 'm old, I 'm rich, I can afford to wait,
Let them sit down and starve outside the gate.”

PERCIVAL

XVIII

Aurelia, with neither coyness nor debate,
Went up to Scrimp's at once to see her friend.
Before he came, Scrimp passed, by evil fate.
"You wished to see me?" "No," she said, "but lend
Your ear a minute. I will try to state
What hours of eager speech could hardly end."
And then, with words to make the sun turn dim,
She told her enemy what she thought of him.

XIX

His cruel, bitter, hungry greed she battered,
Then further blamed him for the prophet's fall,
Such hopes and dreams so insolently shattered.
As to the strike, she painted to appall,
Those tattered souls half hid in bodies tattered.
"Don't think," she cried, "they care for money at all.
For years you've lashed them till the blood would start,
And now they'll plant a weapon in your heart."

XX

Scrimp laughed, a laugh harsh, arrogant, provoking.
"What Sibyl or what harridan have we here,
Who tries to jar with her discordant croaking
A perfectly unsympathetic ear?
Go tell your people that this sort of joking
Will do them not the slightest good, my dear.
I'll not be changed by threat or by appeal."
So saying, Peter turned upon his heel.

A PROPHET OF JOY

X

Then Percival came. Aurelia boiled at first.

Scrimp's bitter scorn had made her nearly frantic.

It seemed as if her swelling heart would burst

In wild commotion, like the tossed Atlantic.

"I should have liked it better, if he 'd cursed.

He treats men's madness like an infant's antic.

Oh, Percival, come with me. You're out of place

Among these children of a blasted race.

XXII

"Their day is over, ours is yet to come.

You're one whom heaven to hasten ours has sent.

Why then remain and amplify the sum

Of their inevitable punishment?

Let not their wooing vanity benumb

In you the spark of heavenly discontent."

He smiled: "Aurelia, they're not wholly evil.

You overrate God and underrate the devil."

XXIII

She still persisted in her passionate prayer.

But when his gentle firmness would not alter,

At least she bade him for his safety care,

And bade with eagerness that made her falter.

"You can't conceive," she urged, "what these men dare.

They'll use the knife, the gun, the torch, the halter.

Percival, I implore you hasten hence,

Before the mob breaks out in violence."

PERCIVAL

XXIV

He answered with words infinitely tender.

“ Aurelia, you exaggerate, I know ;
Your visions seem so real, both of splendor
And equally unutterable woe.
Merely upon the strength of fears so slender
You cannot dream that I should turn and go,
Much more, that I should flee in terror blind
And leave my unregarded friends behind.”

XXV

She left him, when she found her plea was vain ;
But sought Miss Perkins's aid, ere she departed,
And to her sympathetic ear made plain
The serious danger of the thing once started ;
If Percival decided to remain,
Frankly confessed she should be broken-hearted.
“ You love him.” Her gesture swept aside denial.
“ You love him. I implore you, make a trial.

XXVI

“ Go hence at once, and take the boy along ;
For this will prove to be no place for preaching ;
And not a human soul can tell how strong
Their furious rage will be, or how far-reaching.”
Miss Perkins thought her visitor was wrong ;
But still her heart was moved by such beseeching.
She knew no suppliant words of hers could ever
Change Percival's mood, yet promised to endeavor.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXVII

And Percival, though he never thought of fear,
Was by Aurelia's warning much affected,
Went straight to Peter Scrimp and made it clear
He grieved to have the men's demands rejected.
"Old friend," he urged, "your grudge will disappear
When you have fully reasoned and reflected.
You've known me now six months, and you can't be
Impervious still to sweet humanity.

XXVIII

"What can your dollars buy more worth your having
Than these poor people's love, esteem, and gratitude?
Cannot so many years of patient saving
Allow at last a little kindly latitude?
I beg you, hear their prayers and stop their raving."
The prophet did not yet divine Scrimp's attitude.
He might as well have tried to charm a glint
Of human kindness from a piece of flint.

XXIX

"I like you, boy," he said, "and your facility
Has given grace to solitary hours
And dulled the gathering tedium of senility.
But you're attempting tasks beyond the powers
Of even your exceptional agility.
A life of dealing with these people sours
Spirits by natural bent disposed to quiet.
And mine have never thriven on that diet.

PERCIVAL

XXX

“ Their gratitude? The thing does not exist.
Esteem? My son, they only bully and cringe.
And energetic action of the fist
Establishes a law they ’ll not infringe.
As for their threats, just show them you resist,
And they ’ll not break a pane or jar a hinge.
Come, please me with your customary chatter.
No, not another word about the matter.”

XXXI

So everything went criss-cross and askew.
The prophet failed with Scrimp. No more success
Attended Theodora’s plea. “ Can you,”
Percival said, “ Miss Theodora, stress?
My running away from here, because a few
Mad, miserable, passionate things express
Their long despair with incoherent phrases?
Why are souls lost in such perplexing mazes? ”

XXXII

“ But, child,” she said, “ the quarrel is not yours.
If Scrimp would hear you, all might be adjusted.
Then why not leave inhospitable doors,
Where laughter is not known, nor kindness trusted?
The men are set on clearing off old scores,
On blasting age-long habits, deep encrusted.
Leave them and come with me.” He turned away,
Less joyous than he had been for many a day.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXXIII

He was determined now to meet the men,
To talk to them and ascertain their aim.
And, as the thing fell out, he heard just then
Of an appropriate opening for the same.
The strikers were to gather in their den
And put some resolutions into frame.
Percival said at once, "I will be there."
For danger he had neither thought nor care.

XXXIV

He entered unobserved the smoky hall,
Mounted the platform, ere the meeting knew,
And took a prominent place before them all,
With Waters, Aurelia, and the chosen few.
Then some one in the crowd began to call
The attention of the haggard, hostile crew ;
And suddenly arose an angry murmur,
At first low, vague, then more widespread and firmer.

XXXV

Aurelia said to Waters: "He is here,
And you are bound to welcome and protect him.
Moreover, he shall speak: so make it clear,
The men must listen, even if they reject him."
Waters frowned darkly; but, when she showed no fear,
He said, "Oh, well, they 'll easily detect him."
He cried for order. "Men, here 's Mr. Smith.
Listen a moment, he will speak forthwith."

PERCIVAL

XXXVI

And Percival began, with graceful ease,
As quietly as if he were addressing
A parlor full of elegant nobodies.
At first he gave his whole heart to expressing
The deepest sorrow for their miseries
And dwelt with tender sympathy caressing
Upon their long, fierce struggle and vexation,
Their hideous daily battle with starvation.

XXXVII

Yet still he urged, not patience, but restraint,
Said violence could never do them good,
Encouraged every reasonable complaint
And pledged that he would further it as he could.
Then he went on with eager brush to paint
The ill effects of wrath misunderstood,
And showed how passion, once beyond control,
Was madly sure to overshoot its goal.

XXXVIII

At last, in subtle, tender, loving phrase,
He spoke of hope and rapture yet to come,
The promise of the all-enfolding days,
Joy and delight in unimagined sum,
Love that should walk in newly-trodden ways,
And bid hate, greed, and cruelty be dumb.
He spoke with charm to melt a stony will,
A will of iron, but these were harder still.

A PROPHET OF JOY

XXXIX

For most were foreigners, and so, obtuse
To arguments they could not understand,
And others' hearts were cold for want of use
And grown as callous as the toiling hand.
Yet many, even though withered by abuse,
Felt the sweet touch of that divine command,
Till Waters, fearing damage to his cause,
Withdrew the speaker at the earliest pause.

XL

He took him by the arm and forced him out,
With act distinctly vigorous, if not rough.
"Go home," he said. "I see your heart is stout;
But don't come here again. We've heard enough.
And don't suppose you can prevent the rout
Of all your kind by namby-pamby stuff.
I'll also add a purely personal warning:
Leave, or you'll find you won't wake up some morning."

XLI

"Waters!" cried Percival. "Oh, what silly chatter,
To think that where you can't persuade, you'll frighten.
I tell you now, you most forlornly flatter
Yourself, when you forbid my hopes to brighten.
And I believe, for all your hollow patter,
That I have somewhat managed to enlighten
Those poor, poor souls whom you have trained for ridding
Your selfish path of obstacles at your bidding.

PERCIVAL

XLII

“ You threaten me with death. Poor, blatant fool!
Know I am one whom death can never touch.
The sad, the dull, the anxious feel his rule,
Because they cower and shrink from him so much.
But we who live in love’s eternal school,
One bright, enduring Now, are creatures such
As make not life a thing of transient breath,
Children of joy, for whom there is no death.”

XLIII

He vanished swiftly as a fleeting thought,
And Waters shook his fist and nursed his rage.
The meeting ended in storm. Aurelia caught
The leader after it. Sad with dark presage,
She labored with him earnestly and sought
To bring his shifty passion to engage
That Percival should escape all bodily harm.
At last she cried, in anger and alarm :

XLIV

“ If he is touched, I’ll never see you more,
Forget your cause and plague you all I can ;
For I shall know the banner that you bore
Meant other things than benefit to man,
Meant jealousy long fed by brooding sore,
Old grudges fostered with malicious plan.
Oh, keep your struggle for legitimate ends,
And seek to hurt your enemies, not your friends.”

A PROPHET OF JOY

XLV

“Friends!” came the angry echo, harsh and thick,
“No enemy we have is worse than he.
His silly, endless dreaming makes me sick
And feeding fools with false felicity.
I tell you now, the climax will come quick,
Involving in its fierce catastrophe
The pretty pet for whom you make your prayer.”
They parted, he in wrath, she in despair.

XLVI

Meantime the prophet found another scene.
Bill, Jarvis, Nancy, Jessie had arrived.
The truth was, that their coming was a screen,
Which Morgan had ingeniously contrived,
Fearing, unless some chance should intervene,
That Percival might prove to be short-lived.
He telephoned the tribe to make diversion
By whirling off their friend for an excursion.

XLVII

They urged it; but he quietly declined.
“My place is here,” he said, “till I discover
What vengeance these poor creatures have in mind.
I must remain until the thing is over.”
They pleaded. He was firm, to danger blind.
Though Jess showed all the ardor of a lover,
He smiled. “If life outside is filled with queer,
Odd turns, remember joy is with us here.”

PERCIVAL

XLVIII

“Let’s have one other night like those of old,
Regardless of the accidents of morning.”
They acquiesced. At first he found them cold,
Shadowed by some obscurely ominous warning.
But gradually he managed to enfold
Their halting spirits in his, and lightly scorning
Care’s fetters, he persuaded them to be
Once more like him, felicitous and free.

XLIX

He told them stories, sang them magic songs
Of lovers old and chivalrous romances,
Till every thought of haunting modern wrongs
Was trodden out by vague and fairy chances.
He gave them all the witchery that belongs
To laughter’s bright dominion and to fancy’s.
And he was ably seconded by Bill,
Who made each quaint suggestion quainter still.

L

I will not say some touch of recollection
Did not at moments cloud the prophet’s brow,
Not danger to himself, but dark reflection
On all those angry eyes and foreheads low.
But he erased such hints of introspection,
And tossed the light laugh once more to and fro,
Till even Morgan, journalistic-eyed,
Believed that he had daffed the world aside.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LI

And when the evening reached its fullest glory,
Jarvis first whispered Nancy and then spoke:
“My friends, I’ll crown these pleasures transitory
By others more enduring.” So he broke
The news of their late marriage. At the story
Percival’s highest ecstasy awoke,
And he and Bill made all their mirth redouble,
Until the telephone burst the shimmering bubble.

LII

Percival answered and became quite grave.
“The mob is up,” he said, “and bodes disaster.
They’re marching on to Scrimp’s in one great wave,
And, so they tell me, moving ever faster.
I must go out at once and try to save
My friends, for, if the rioters overmaster
The few police, the damage may be serious.”
Morgan protested. With a touch imperious

LIII

Percival hushed him. “My words may avail
At least to patch up temporary quiet.”
“Your words!” said Morgan scornfully. “They’ll not quail,
Unless a strong hand feeds them harsher diet.”
Jessie grasped Percival’s arm, and, turning pale,
“Oh, Morgan, won’t the officers stop the riot?”
But Morgan could not find enough vocabulary
To utter his contempt for the constabulary.

PERCIVAL

LIV

They would have pleaded still. But Percival went.

And Jarvis went, and Bill and Morgan too.

The girls suggested going with them, bent

To follow such a wild adventure through.

But Morgan roughly blighted their intent.

“That crowd,” he said, “is not the place for you.”

They stayed, and Nancy hid her own distress

By comforting the agonies of Jess.

LV

So, hurrying on, the four first got a glimpse

Of all that furious rout in angry clamor,

Seeming a tumult of distorted imps,

With mock and mow and jibe and shriek and stammer.

They met them closer just half way to Scrimp's.

The torches shed a vague and lurid glamour.

And never yet upon a movie screen

Was thrown a more exciting, fearful scene.

LVI

Percival stepped right straight into the crowd,

Though Morgan and Jarvis begged him to keep clear.

His glorious figure soared among those bowed,

Bent, cowering, cringing shoulders. All could hear

The words in which he bade them, trumpet-loud,

Not threaten him, for he 'd forgotten fear,

But save themselves before the law awoke.

And then an automatic sharply spoke.

A PROPHET OF JOY

LVII

And Percival fell. Who fired it none knew.

Perhaps it was not difficult to guess.

Just then no soul in that disordered crew

Stopped to bewail one prophet's pettiness.

The mob swept onward, urged until it flew.

Percival's friends were dragged in close duress.

And when the hurrying multitude was gone,

The stars looked down upon the dead alone.

LVIII

Alone, except for one forgotten form.

Aurelia wept and struggled to revive him,

Unable to believe that sudden storm

Of all life's ample glory could deprive him,

Poured kisses on his cheeks and lips yet warm,

Poured curses on a God who could contrive him,

For the whole weary world's salvation meant,

And blast him with one hideous accident.

LIX

Then she grew calmer, and with reasoned speech

She let the tumult of her thought unroll.

"Oh, blessed fate," she said, "he did not reach

One step more toward the customary goal,

Did not have sordid, withering age to teach

The common thoughts that move the common soul,

But went out free, beyond the dull, oppressing

Trammels of care, his perfect self possessing.

PERCIVAL

LX

“ Yet what he taught shall not be lost ; for I
Will take the burden up, though far unfit.
His death has shown me violence must die,
Its hideous, tortured strength at last unknit.
The sullen hordes of greed and wrath must fly
And joy’s pure torch shall at his heart be lit.
So love will make him live on earth again,
Star of immortal hope to mortal men.”

THE END

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