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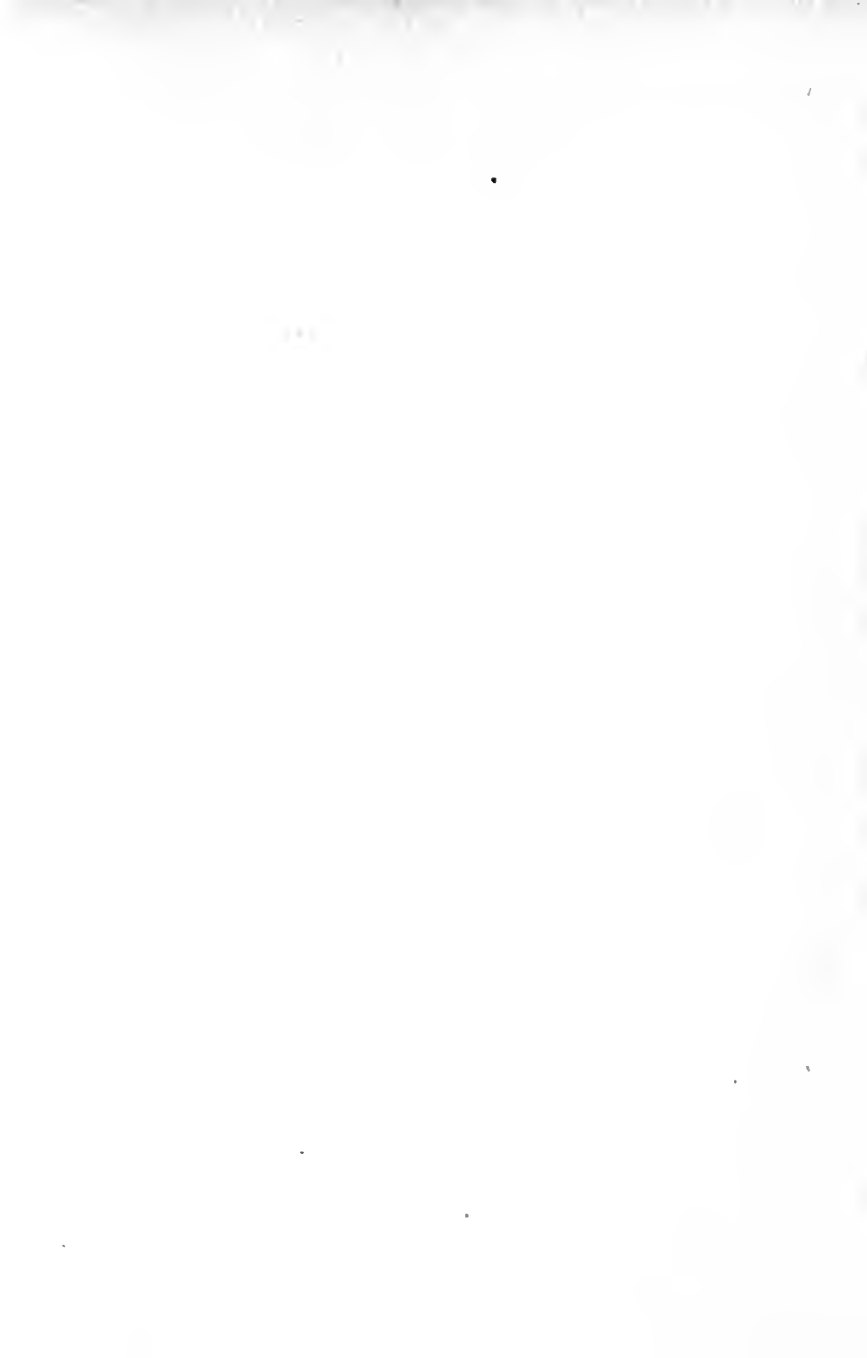
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The Song of Life  
and Other Poems

## *The Works of William H. Davies*

### *Poetry*

- The Soul's Destroyer.* 1906. 4th impression. *Fifield.*  
*New Poems.* 1907. 2nd impression. *Mathews.*  
*Nature Poems.* 1908. 3rd impression. *Fifield.*  
*Farewell to Poesy.* 1910. *Fifield.*  
*Songs of Joy.* 1911. *Fifield.*  
*Foliage.* 1913. *Mathews.*  
*The Bird of Paradise.* 1914. *Methuen.*  
*Child Lovers.* 1916. 2nd impression. *Fifield.*  
*Collected Poems.* 1916. 3rd impression. *Fifield.*  
*Forty New Poems.* 1918. *Fifield.*  
*The Song of Life.* 1920. *Fifield.*

### *Prose*

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







W. H. DAVIES, 1920  
A Portrait by Laura Knight

# The Song of Life and Other Poems

By  
William H. Davies

*With a frontispiece from a portrait  
by LAURA KNIGHT*

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## Oh, Sweet Content !

O H, sweet content, that turns the labourer's  
sweat

To tears of joy, and shines the roughest face ;  
How often have I sought you high and low,  
And found you still in some lone quiet place.

Here, in my room, when full of happy dreams,  
With no life heard beyond that merry sound  
Of moths that on my lighted ceiling kiss  
Their shadows as they dance and dance around.

Or in a garden, on a summer's night,  
When I have seen the dark and solemn air  
Blink with the blind bat's wings, and heaven's  
bright face  
Twitch with the stars that shine in thousands  
there.

## The Villain

WHILE joy gave clouds the light of stars,  
That beamed where'er they looked ;  
And calves and lambs had tottering knees,  
Excited, while they sucked ;  
While every bird enjoyed his song,  
Without one thought of harm or wrong—  
I turned my head and saw the wind,  
Not far from where I stood,  
Dragging the corn by her golden hair,  
Into a dark and lonely wood.



## Love Speechless

**I** LOOK on Nature and my thoughts,  
Like nimble skaters, skim the land ;  
But when I watch my loved one near,  
My thoughts are walkers in soft sand.

I am a man that sees a sky  
Alive with stars that cannot rest ;  
My eyes are here, my eyes are there,  
Above, and then below her breast.

Much like the summer's bee am I,  
A thousand flowers before his eyes ;  
He, knowing each one's power to please,  
No sooner settles than must rise.

I sit bewildered by those charms  
That follow wave by wave all day ;  
When I would with one wave make free,  
The others take my breath away.

## The Dog

**T**HE dog was there, outside her door,  
She gave it food and drink,  
She gave it shelter from the cold:  
It was the night young Molly robbed  
An old fool of his gold.

“Molly,” I said, “you’ll go to hell——”  
And yet I half believed  
That ugly, famished, tottering cur  
Would bark outside the gates of Heaven,  
To open them for Her!

## The Rat

“**T**HAT woman there is almost dead,  
Her feet and hands like heavy lead ;  
Her cat's gone out for his delight,  
He will not come again this night.

“ Her husband in a pothouse drinks,  
Her daughter at a soldier winks ;  
Her son is at his sweetest game,  
Teasing the cobbler old and lame.

“ Now with these teeth that powder stones,  
I'll pick at one of her cheekbones :  
When husband, son and daughter come,  
They'll soon see who was left at home.”

## The Cat

**W**ITHIN that porch, across the way,  
I see two naked eyes this night ;  
Two eyes that neither shut nor blink,  
Searching my face with a green light.

But cats to me are strange, so strange—  
I cannot sleep if one is near ;  
And though I'm sure I see those eyes,  
I'm not so sure a body's there !

## To-day

I HAVE no hopes, I have no fears,  
Whether my dreams are gossamers  
To last beyond my body's day,  
Or cobwebs to be brushed away.  
Give me this life from hour to hour,  
From day to day, and year to year ;  
This cottage with one extra room  
To lodge a friend if he should come ;  
This garden green and small, where I  
Can sit and see a great big sky.  
And give me one tall shady tree,  
Where, looking through the boughs, I'll see  
How the sharp leaves can cut the skies  
Into a thousand small blue eyes.

## How Kind is Sleep

**H**OW kind is sleep, how merciful :  
That I last night have seen  
The happy birds with bosoms pressed  
Against the leaves so green.

Sweet sleep, that made my mind forget  
My love had gone away ;  
And nevermore I'd touch her soft  
Warm body, night or day.

So, every night deceived by sleep,  
Let me on roses lie ;  
And leave the thorns of Truth for day,  
To pierce me till I die.

## The Force of Love

**H**AVE I now found an angel in Unrest,  
That wakeful Love is more desired than  
sleep :

Though you seem calm and gentle, you shall show  
The force of this strong love in me so deep.

Yes, I will make you, though you seem so calm,  
Look from your blue eyes that divinest joy  
As was in Juno's, when she made great Jove  
Forget the war and half his heaven in Troy.

And I will press your lips until they mix  
With my poor quality their richer wine :  
Be my Parnassus now, and grow more green  
Each upward step towards your top divine.

## When Leaves Begin

**W**HEN leaves begin to show their heads,  
Before they reach their curly youth ;  
And birds in streams are coming north,  
With seas of music from the south ;

Then—like a snail with horns outstretched—  
My senses feel the air around ;  
There's not a move escapes my eyes,  
My ears are cocked to every sound.

Till Nature to her greenest comes,  
And—with her may that blossoms white—  
Bursts her full bodice, and reveals  
Her fair white body in the light.



## Passion's Hounds

WITH mighty leaps and bounds,  
I followed Passion's hounds,  
My hot blood had its day ;  
Lust, Gluttony, and Drink,  
I chased to Hell's black brink,  
Both night and day.

I ate like three strong men,  
I drank enough for ten,  
Each hour must have its glass :  
Yes, Drink and Gluttony  
Have starved more brains, say I,  
Than Hunger has.

And now, when I grow old,  
And my slow blood is cold,  
And feeble is my breath—  
I'm followed by those hounds,  
Whose mighty leaps and bounds  
Hunt me to death.

# Love Impeached

**L**ISTEN for pity—I impeach  
The tyrant Love that, after play,  
Dribbles on Beauty's cheek, and still  
Refuses to be moved away.

That, not content with many a kiss,  
Plays with his fingers on her lip ;  
And if she turns her back to him,  
Drums with his hand on either hip.

Sometimes he squeezes, then he slaps,  
I've heard he even bites her breast.  
Now, how can Beauty keep her charms,  
If she gets neither sleep nor rest ?

Is there no punishment, I ask—  
No small corrections, soft and mild :  
For let us never once forget  
That, after all, he's but a child.

## The Truth

SINCE I have seen a bird one day,  
His head pecked more than half away ;  
That hopped about, with but one eye,  
Ready to fight again, and die—  
Ofttimes since then their private lives  
Have spoilt that joy their music gives.

So when I see this robin now,  
Like a red apple on the bough,  
And question why he sings so strong,  
For love, or for the love of song ;  
Or sings, maybe, for that sweet rill  
Whose silver tongue is never still—

Ah, now there comes this thought unkind,  
Born of the knowledge in my mind :  
He sings in triumph that last night  
He killed his father in a fight ;  
And now he'll take his mother's blood—  
The last strong rival for his food.

## The Coming of Peace

**I**T was the night when we expected news from  
France,

To say the war was over, and the fighting done ;  
The tidings that would make my heart rejoice at  
last,

For foe as well as friend, and make the peoples  
one.

And as I moved amidst that silent multitude,

Feeling the presence of a wild excitement there,  
The world appeared to me so strange and  
wonderful—

I almost heard a cuckoo in Trafalgar Square !

## April's Lambs

“**T**HOUGH I was born in April's prime,  
With many another lamb,  
Yet, thinking now of all my years,  
What am I but a tough old ram?”

“No woman thinks of years,” said she,  
“Or any tough old rams,  
When she can hear a voice that bleats  
As tenderly as any lamb's.”

## The Coming of Spring

**H**OW I have watched thy coming, Spring,  
From back in March, thy first-born day,  
When smiles, all meaningless and strange,  
    Would twist thy face and pass away ;  
Such as will cross the faces of  
Our babes before they grow to love,  
    Or wonder at the new-made light—  
To this, thy great, all-smiling hour,  
    When thou hast soul and sight.

How I have waited for this day,  
    When thou, sweet Spring, art three weeks' old ;  
And I can hear that strange, sweet voice,  
    To seal the wonder of thy world ;  
That lifts the heart of old and young  
To sing an echo to that song  
    Which cries "cuckoo" in every grove ;  
When I, who did but smile before,  
    Must laugh outright for love.

## A Song

**M**Y love has gone long since,  
She sleeps, and yet I stay ;  
To think of her is my  
    Good night till break of day.  
So, in my room, alone,  
    I still awake am keeping ;  
Thinking of my white heaven,  
    And all its angels sleeping.

Sleep shall not hold me yet,  
    Her power I'll not obey ;  
I fear she has strange dreams  
    To take my love away.  
So, in my room, alone,  
    I still awake am keeping ;  
Thinking of my white heaven,  
    And all its angels sleeping.

## Love's Caution

**T**ELL them, when you are home again,  
How warm the air was now ;  
How silent were the birds and leaves,  
And of the moon's full glow ;  
And how we saw afar  
A falling star :  
It was a tear of pure delight  
Ran down the face of Heaven this happy night.

Our kisses are but love in flower,  
Until that greater time  
When, gathering strength, those flowers take wing,  
And Love can reach his prime.  
And now, my heart's delight,  
Good night, good night ;  
Give me the last sweet kiss—  
But do not breathe at home one word of this !



## Trees

**T**HEY ask me where the Temple stands,  
And is the Abbey far from there ;  
They ask the way to old St. Paul's,  
And where they'll find Trafalgar Square.

As I pass on with my one thought  
To find a quiet place with trees,  
I answer him, I answer her,  
I answer one and all of these.

When I sit under a green tree,  
Silent, and breathing all the while  
As easy as a sleeping child,  
And smiling with as soft a smile—

Then, as my brains begin to work,  
This is the thought that comes to me :  
Were such a peace more often mine,  
I'd live as long as this green tree.

## What County ?

**W**HAT county sends me this surprise,  
That had more rainbows in its skies—  
More songsters in its woods and fields,  
Than any other county yields ?  
For, judging her by her fresh look,  
She never lived in grime and smoke.  
So here we are, the thrush and I—  
How we enjoy our ecstasy !  
While one blue egg employs his tongue,  
For two blue eyes I sing my song.  
Yet when I think how my love's eyes  
Shine with a soul so clear and wise,  
Your egg, poor bird, I fear to tell,  
May have no baby in its shell.  
Yon cuckoo too, whose voice doth fail  
When more than one sing in one vale,  
Hear how her voice becomes more sweet  
Among a number, when they meet.  
And yon pale star that loses light  
When other stars appear in sight,  
See how her light is magnified,  
With other women at her side.

## A Child's Pet

WHEN I sailed out of Baltimore,  
With twice a thousand head of sheep,  
They would not eat, they would not drink,  
But bleated o'er the deep.

Inside the pens we crawled each day,  
To sort the living from the dead ;  
And when we reached the Mersey's mouth,  
Had lost five hundred head.

Yet every night and day one sheep,  
That had no fear of man or sea,  
Stuck through the bars its pleading face,  
And it was stroked by me.

And to the sheep-men standing near,  
" You see," I said, " this one tame sheep ?  
It seems a child has lost her pet,  
And cried herself to sleep."

So every time we passed it by,  
Sailing to England's slaughter-house,  
Eight ragged sheep-men—tramps and thieves—  
Would stroke that sheep's black nose.

# The Flirt

A PRETTY game, my girl,  
To play with me so long ;  
Until this other lover  
Comes dancing to thy song,  
And my affair is over.

But love, though well adored,  
Is not my only note :  
So let thy false love-prattle  
Be in another man's throat  
That weaker man's death-rattle.

Ah, such as thou, at last,  
Wilt take a false man's hand :  
Think kindly then of me,  
When thou'rt forsaken, and  
The shame sits on thy knee.

## The Captive Lion

**T**HOU that in fury with thy knotted tail  
Hast made this iron floor thy beaten drum ;  
That now in silence walks thy little space—  
Like a sea-captain—careless what may come :

What power has brought your majesty to this,  
Who gave those eyes their dull and sleepy look ;  
Who took their lightning out, and from thy throat  
The thunder when the whole wide forest shook ?

It was that man who went again, alone,  
Into thy forest dark—Lord, he was brave !  
That man a fly has killed, whose bones are left  
Unburied till an earthquake digs his grave.

# The Clock

EVERY tick and every tock  
That comes from my old clock,  
Keeps time to Molly's step ;  
And when it cries "Cuckoo,"  
Her hand should knock below.

Unless—for now I see  
The clock looks down at me  
With a white and silent face ;  
It stops, and not one beat  
Keeps time to Molly's feet.

Then, staring at that clock,  
Whose every tick and tock  
Should be one step of hers,  
"Why have you stopped," I said—  
"Has Molly dropped down dead?"

## A Bird's Anger

A SUMMER'S morning that has but one  
voice ;

Five hundred stooks, like golden lovers, lean  
Their heads together, in their quiet way,  
And but one bird sings, of a number seen.

It is the lark, that louder, louder sings,  
As though but this one thought possessed his  
mind :

"You silent robin, blackbird, thrush, and finch,  
I'll sing enough for all you lazy kind !"

And when I hear him at this daring task,  
"Peace, little bird," I say, "and take some rest ;  
Stop that wild, screaming fire of angry song,  
Before it makes a coffin of your nest."

## Bird and Brook

**M**Y song, that's bird-like in its kind,  
Is in the mind,  
Love—in the mind ;  
And in my season I am moved  
No more or less from being loved ;  
No woman's love has power to bring  
My song back when I cease to sing ;  
Nor can she, when my season's strong,  
Prevent my mind from song.

But where I feel your woman's part,  
Is in the heart,  
Love—in the heart ;  
For when that bird of mine broods long,  
And I'd be sad without my song,  
Your love then makes my heart a brook  
That dreams in many a quiet nook,  
And makes a steady, murmuring sound  
Of joy the whole year round.



## One Thing Wanting

“YOUR life was hard with mangling clothes,  
You scrubbed our floors for years ;  
But now, your children are so good,  
That you can rest your poor old limbs,  
And want for neither drink nor meat.”  
“It’s true,” she said, and laughed for joy ;  
And still her voice, with all her years,  
Could make a song-bird wonder if  
A rival sweetness challenged him.  
But soon her face was full of trouble :  
“If I could only tear,” she said,  
“My sister Alice out of her grave—  
Who taunted me when I was poor—  
And make her understand these words :  
‘ See, I have everything I want,  
My children, Alice, are so good ’—  
If I could only once do that,  
There’s nothing else I want on earth.’

## The Mint

NATURE has made my mind a mint,  
My thoughts are coins, on which I live;  
The dies, with which I stamp my thoughts,  
Trees, blossoms, birds, and children give.

Sometimes my die's a homeless man,  
Or babes that have no milk and perish ;  
Sometimes it is a lady fair,  
Whose grace and loveliness I relish.

But all my love-thoughts, until now,  
Were false to utter, and must cease ;  
And not another coin must pass  
Without your image on each piece.

So, you shall be my queen from now,  
Your face on every thought I utter ;  
And I'll be rich—although the world  
May judge my metal's worth no better.

## Worm-Proof

“**H**AVE I not bored your teeth,” said Time,  
“Until they drop out, one by one :  
I’ll turn your black hairs into white,  
And pluck them when the change is done ;  
The clothes you’ve put away with care,  
My worm’s already in their seams——”  
“Time, hold your tongue, for man can still  
Defy you with his worm-proof dreams.”

## Comfort

**F**ROM my own kind I only learn  
How foolish comfort is ;  
To gather things that happy minds  
Should neither crave nor miss :  
Fine brackets to adorn my walls,  
Whose tales are quickly told ;  
And copper candlesticks or brass,  
Which soon must leave me cold.

From my own kind I only learn  
That comfort breeds more care ;  
But when I watch our smaller lives,  
There's plainness everywhere :  
That little bird is well content,  
When he no more can sing,  
To close his eyes and tuck his head  
Beneath his own soft wing.

## Her Mouth and Mine

AS I lay dreaming, open-eyed,  
With some one sitting at my side,  
I saw a thing about to fly  
Into my face, where it would lie ;  
For just above my head there stood  
A smiling hawk as red as blood.  
On which the bird, whose quiet nest  
Has always been in my left breast,  
Seeing that red hawk hovering there,  
And smiling with such deadly care—  
Flew fascinated to my throat,  
And there it moaned a feeble note.  
I saw that hawk, so red, and still,  
And closed my eyes—it had its will :  
For, uttering one triumphant croon,  
It pounced with sudden impulse down ;  
And there I lay, no power to move,  
To let it kiss or bite its love.  
But in those birds—Ah, it was strange—  
There came at last this other change :  
That fascinated bird of mine  
Worried the hawk and made it whine ;  
The hawk cried feebly—“ Oh dear, oh !  
Greedy-in-love, leave go ! Leave go ! ”

## Let Me Confess

LET me confess, before I die,  
I sing for gold enough to buy  
A little house with leafy eaves  
That open to the Southern skies ;

Where I, in peace from human strife,  
Will wish no Lazarus brought to life.  
Around my garden I will see  
More wild flowers than are known to me ;

With those white hops, whose children are  
Big, heavy casks of ale and beer ;  
And little apples, from whose womb  
Barrels of lusty cider come.

Good food, and ale that's strong in brew,  
And wine, I'll have ; clear water too,  
From a deep well, where it doth lie  
Shining as small as my own eye.

And any friend may come to share  
What comfort I am keeping there ;  
For though my sins are many, one  
Shall not be mine, when my life's done :  
A fortune saved by one that's dead,  
Who saw his fellows starve for bread.

## Love's Silent Hour

**T**HIS is Love's silent hour, before the tongue  
Can find expression happy in a song ;  
Yet your sweet, generous lips shall have their hour,  
Believe me, when my song comes back to power ;  
So shall those eyes, so dark, so warm, and deep,  
That wake for me, and for all others sleep :  
Meanwhile I do no more than sit and sigh,  
Watching your movements with a greedy eye.

Those birds that sing so sweet in their green bogs,  
Their season over, croak like common frogs :  
My thoughts, I hoped, would like those nightingales  
Sing sweet for you, but still my music fails ;  
My music fails, and I can only kiss  
Your cheek and chin, and to myself say this—  
There never was a thing so fair and bright,  
By sun or moon, by gas or candle-light.

## Now That She Gives

**N**OW that she gives my love consent,  
I hear an evil spirit near ;  
A mocking spirit, day and night,  
That whispers threats in either ear.

“Since you are twice her age,” it says,  
“Thick-lipped, with features large and coarse ;  
And she, so young and beautiful,  
Could all her life do nothing worse ;

“Since she, poor girl, mistakes for love  
The feelings that possess her heart—  
She must be daft, and you, strong wretch,  
Should burn in hell for such a part !”



## You Interfering Ladies

**Y**OU interfering ladies, you  
That prove your minds enjoy less rest  
Than those poor mortals you advise,  
Whose habits shock your dainty taste—  
Peace, let the poor be free to do  
The things they like—be happy, you !

Let boys and girls kiss here and there,  
Men drink, and smoke the strongest weed ;  
Let beggars, who'll not wash with soap,  
Enjoy their scratching till they bleed :  
Let all poor women, if they please,  
Enjoy a pinch of snuff, and sneeze.



# The Song of Life



# The Song of Life

## I

**A** SNEEZE from Time gives Life its little  
breath ;  
Time yawns, and lo ! he swallows Life in Death ;  
When we forget, and laugh without a care,  
Time's Prompter, Death, reminds us what we are.

## II

O thou vain fool, to waste thy breath and theirs,  
Who pipes this day to make thy fellows dance ;  
To-morrow Death will make thy body show  
How worms can dance without thy music once.

## III

We are but fools, no matter what we do.  
By hand or brain we work, and waste our breath ;  
Life's but a drunkard, in his own strange way,  
Sobered at last by thy strong physic, Death.

## IV

Life is a fisherman, and Time his stream,  
But what he catches there is but a dream ;  
Our Youth and Beauty, Riches, Power and Fame,  
Must all return at last from whence they came.

# The Song<sup>CRATUM</sup> of Life

## V

Death gives a Royal Prince the same dumb grin  
As to the beggar's wayside brat of sin.  
The cunning Spider soon himself must lie  
Dead in that trap he sets to catch a Fly.

## VI

Time grants to man no freehold property ;  
The power of man, however great it be,  
Is only granted here for a short lease.  
Voices the world has called divine must cease.

## VII

Fools that we think of Fame, when there's a force  
To make a coffin of this world of ours  
And sweep it clean of every living thing—  
What then becomes of man and all his powers?

## VIII

Think of our giants now—they're auctioneers,  
That shout and hammer for the people's cheers ;  
They blow in gales, but no good ear can find  
The small clear voice that deepens Nature's wind.

# The Song of Life

## IX

We call these rockets steadfast stars, and give  
Them honours, wealth, and swear their works  
will live ;

We call them giants, while the greater ones  
Move like dark planets round those favoured suns.

## X

This world, that licks them with its pleasant slime,  
Will swallow them in but a little time ;  
Their Fame's like Death's, when that cold villain  
places  
Bright looks of youth on dying old men's faces.

## XI

We pass away, forgotten and neglected.  
When thou, poor fool, hast lately filled thy grave,  
Thy friends will bring thee cut and costly flowers,  
Flowers that will leave no living seed behind,  
And fade and perish in a few short hours.

## XII

Perchance they'll set the soil with roots of plants  
To live and bloom again there, year by year,  
Moistened at times by Heaven's dew or rain—  
But never once a loving human tear.

# The Song of Life

## XIII

Plants that will need no help from human hands  
To make thy grave look lovely, warm and  
sweet—

When all, except the fierce wild cat, has gone,  
That lies in wait to pounce upon those birds  
That beat the snails to death against thy stone.

## XIV

I hear men say : “ This Davies has no depth,  
He writes of birds, of staring cows and sheep,  
And throws no light on deep, eternal things——”  
And would they have me talking in my sleep ?

## XV

I say : “ Though many a man’s ideas of them  
Have made his name appear a shining star,  
Yet Life and Death, Time and Eternity,  
Are still left dark, to wonder what they are.

## XVI

“ And if I make men weigh this simple truth,  
It is on my own mind the light is thrown ;  
I throw no light on that mysterious Four,  
And, like the great ones, nothing I make known.”



# The Song of Life

## XVII

Yet I believe that there will come at last  
A mighty knowledge to our human lives :  
And blessèd then will be the fools that laugh,  
Without the fear Imagination gives.

## XVIII

Aye, even now, when I sit here alone,  
I feel the breath of that strange terror near ;  
But as my mind has not sufficient strength  
To give it shape or form of any kind,  
I turn to things I know, and banish fear.

## XIX

I turn to Man, and what do I behold ?  
What is the meaning of this rush and tear  
To ride from home by water, land, or air ?  
We'll want the horses soon, when our life fails,  
To drag a corpse along as slow as snails.

## XX

Why should this toil from early morn till night  
Employ our minds and bodies, when the Earth  
Can carry us forever round the Sun  
Without the help of any mortal birth ?

# The Song of Life

## XXI

And why should common shelter, bread and meat,  
Keep all our faculties in their employ,  
And leave no time for ease, while Summer's in  
The greenwood, purring like a cat for joy ?

## XXII

For still the People are no more than slaves ;  
Each State a slave-ship, and no matter which  
The figure-head—a President or King ;  
The People are no more than common grass  
To make a few choice cattle fat and rich.

## XXIII

They toil from morn till eve, from Youth to Age ;  
They go from bud to seed, but never flower.  
“ Ah,” says the Priest, “ we're born to suffer here  
A hell on earth till God Almighty's Hour.”

## XXIV

A hell on earth ? . . . We'll ask the merry Moth  
That, making a partner of his shadow thrown,  
Dances till out of breath ; we'll ask the Lark  
That meets the Rain half-way and sings it down.

# The Song of Life

## XXV

In studying Life we see this human world  
Is in three states—of copper, silver, gold,  
And those that think in silver take the joy ;  
Thinking in copper, gold, the poor and rich  
Keep mis'ry in too little and too much.

## XXVI

Though with my money I could cram a mouth  
Big as an Alpine gorge with richest stuff,  
Yet Nature sets her bounds ; and with a lake  
Of wine—to-night one bottle is enough.

## XXVII

If I can pluck the rose of sunset, or  
The Moon's pale lily, and distil their flower  
Into one mental drop to scent my soul—  
I'll envy no man his more worldly power.

## XXVIII

What matters that my bed is soft and white,  
If beggars sleep more sweet in hay, or there,  
Lying at noon beneath those swaying boughs  
Whose cooling shadows lift the heavy air.

# The Song of Life

## XXIX

Not owning house or land, but in the space  
Our minds inhabit, we are rich or poor :  
If I had youth, who dances in his walk,  
On heels as nimble as his lighter toes,  
I'd set no price on any earthly store.

## XXX

And wine and women, both have had their day,  
When nothing else would my crazed thoughts  
allow ;  
Until my nerves shook like those withered leaves  
Held by a broken cobweb to the bough.

## XXXI

I touched my mistress lightly on the chin,  
That girl so merciless in her strong passion :  
“ Since love,” she said, “ has reached that flippant  
mood—  
With no more care than that—I'd rather you  
Had struck my mouth, and dashed my lips with  
blood.”

## XXXII

And is there naught in life but lust ? thought I ;  
Feeble my brain was then, and small, and weak ;  
She held it in her power, even as a bird  
With his live breakfast squirming from his beak.

# The Song of Life

## XXXIII

Man finds in such a Woman's breast the tomb  
Where his creative powers must soon lie dumb ;  
To kiss the tomb in weakness, hour by hour,  
Wherein she buries half his mental power.

## XXXIV

They say that under powerful drugs the tongue  
Will babble wildly of some sin or wrong  
That never happened—even virgins then  
Tell devilish lies about themselves and men.

## XXXV

Under that drug of lust my brain was mazed,  
And oft I babbled in a foolish way ;  
And still she bounced the babies in her eyes,  
For Love's mad challenge not to miss one day.

## XXXVI

But that is passed, and I am ready now  
To come again, sweet Nature, to your haunts ;  
Not come together like a snake and stone,  
When neither body gives the other heat—  
But full of love to last till Life has gone.

# The Song of Life

## XXXVII

A little while and I will come again,  
From my captivity in this strange place ;  
That has these secret charms to lure me on,  
In every alley dark and open space ;

## XXXVIII

That makes me like the jealous lover who,  
Eavesdropping at a keyhole, trembles more  
Because the silence there is worse to him than  
    sound,  
And nothing's heard behind the fastened door.

## XXXIX

To you I'll come, my old and purer friend,  
With greater love in these repentant hours ;  
To let your Brooks run singing to my lips ;  
And walk again your Meadows full of flowers.

## XL

I'll stroke again the foreheads of your Cows,  
And clothe my fingers in your Horses' manes ;  
I'll hear that music, when a pony trots  
Along your hard, white country roads and lanes.

# The Song of Life

## XLI

Kissed with his warm eyelashes touching mine,  
I'll lie beneath the Sun, on golden sheaves ;  
Or see him from the shade, when in his strength  
He makes frail cobwebs of the solid leaves.

## XLII

I'll see again the green leaves suddenly  
Turned into flowers by resting butterflies ;  
While all around are small, brown, working bees,  
And hairy black-and-ambers, twice their size.

## XLIII

And there'll be ponds that lily-leaves still keep—  
Though rough winds blow there—lying fast  
asleep.

And pools that measure a cloud from earth to sky,  
To sink it down as deep as it is high.

## XLIV

And many a charming truth will I discover ;  
How birds, after a wetting in the rain,  
Can make their notes come twice as sweet ; and  
then

How sparrows hop with both their legs together,  
While pigeons stride leg after leg, like men.

# The Song of Life

## XLV

Nature for me, in every mood she has ;  
And frosty mornings, clear and cold, that blind  
The cattle in a mist of their own breath—  
Shall never come and find my heart unkind.

## XLVI

And I'll forget these deep and troubled thoughts ;  
How, like a saucy puppy, Life doth stand  
Barking upon this world of crumbling sand ;  
Half in defiance there, and half in fear—  
For still the waves of Time are drawing near.

## XLVII

Would birds, if they had thoughts of their short  
days,  
Stand on the boughs and carol such sweet lays ?  
Is it not better then that we should join  
The birds in song than sit in grief and pine ?

## XLVIII

Come, let us laugh—though there's no wit to hear ;  
Come, let us sing—though there's no listener near ;  
Come, let us dance—though none admire our  
grace,  
And be the happier for a private place.



# The Song of Life

## XLIX

A quiet life with Nature is my choice  
And, opening there my Book of Memory,  
The record of my wild young roving blood—  
I'll sail the seas again, and reach strange ports,  
And light a fire in many a silent wood.

## L

Under white blossoms spread all over him,  
Have I not seen the Ocean laugh and roll ;  
And watched a boundless prairie, when it lay  
So full of flowers it could employ the whole  
World's little ones to pick them in a day ?

## LI

I'll sail the great Atlantic, whose strong waves  
Could lift the ship "Tritonia" up so high  
That to my wondering mind it ofttimes seemed  
About to take the air above, and fly !

## LII

Up North I'll go, where steel, more cold than  
death,  
Can burn the skin off any naked hands—  
Down to those woods where I'll at midnight read  
By one fat glow-worm's light in Southern lands.

# The Song of Life

## LIII

I'll see again, in dreams, the full-rigged Ship  
Wearing the Moon as a silver ring at night  
On her main finger ; while the water shines,  
Fretted with island-shadows in the light.

## LIV

With all the wealth of Heaven: those perfect stars  
That draw near earth in numbers to amaze ;  
The bubble-light of others deep impooled,  
The shadowy lustre of those lesser rays.

## LV

I'll see again, in my long winter dreams,  
That ice-berg in the North, whose glorious beams  
Fluttered in their cold prison, while the Sun  
Went up and down with our good ship, like one.

## LVI

I'll dream of Colorado's rushing stream ;  
And how I heard him slap his thighs of stone  
So loud that Heaven had never power to make  
His cañon hear more thunder than his own.

# The Song of Life

## LVII

There will I live with Nature, there I'll die ;  
And if there's any Power in Heaven above,  
A God of vengeance, mercy, and sweet love—  
If such a judge there be, I can but trust  
In Him for what is only fair and just.

## LVIII

I'll place my hope in some few simple deeds  
That sacrificed a part of my own needs  
All for the love of poor Humanity—  
Without a single thought, O Lord, of Thee.

END.



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