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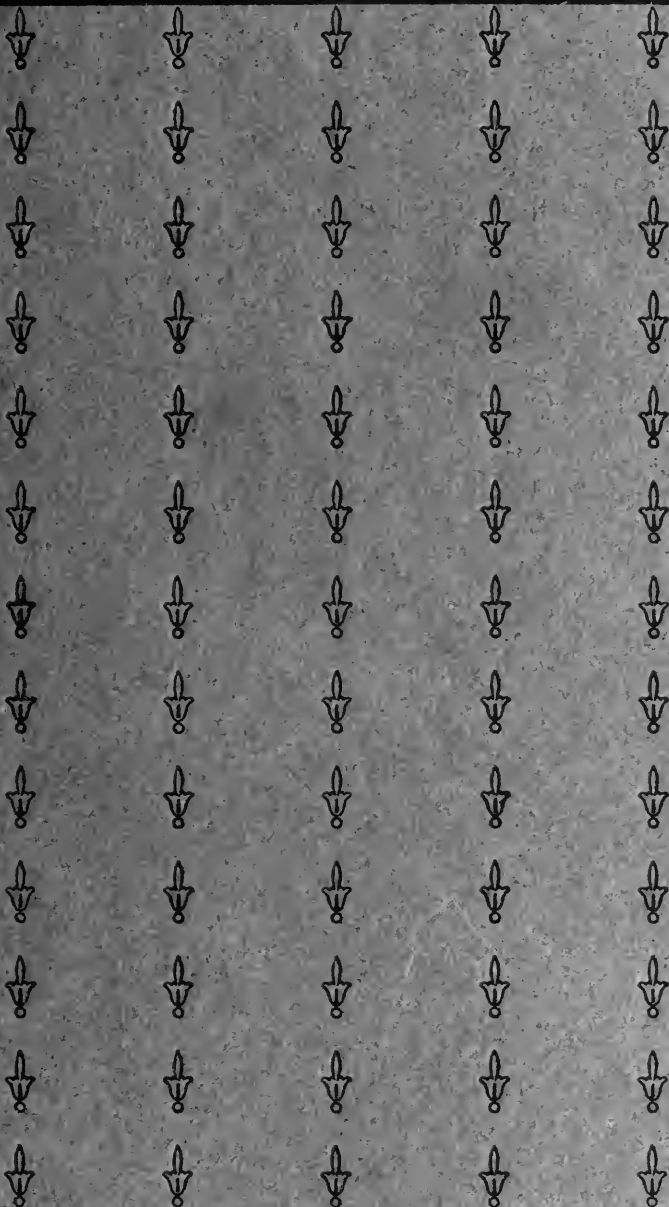
# This Green Mortality

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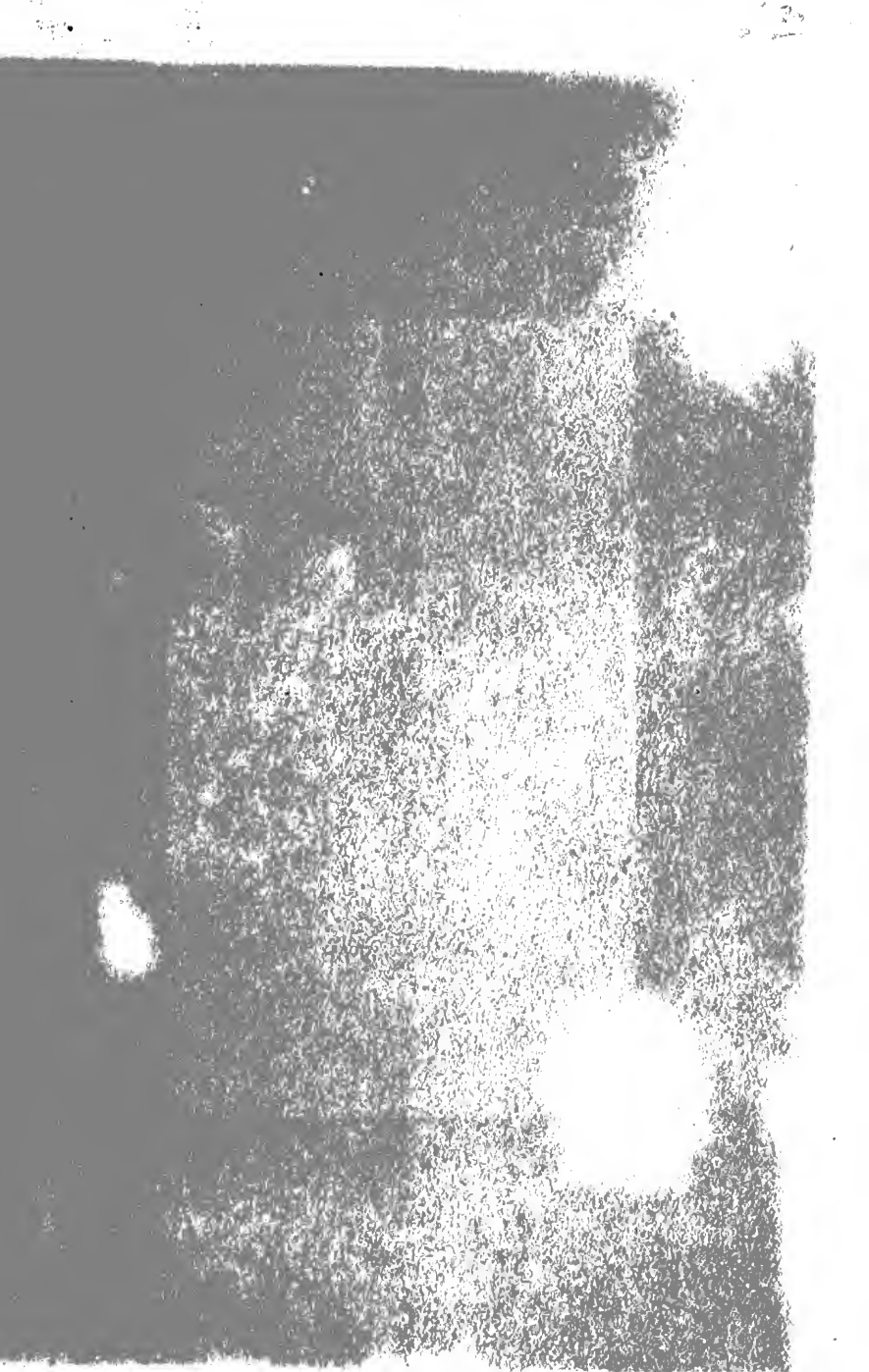
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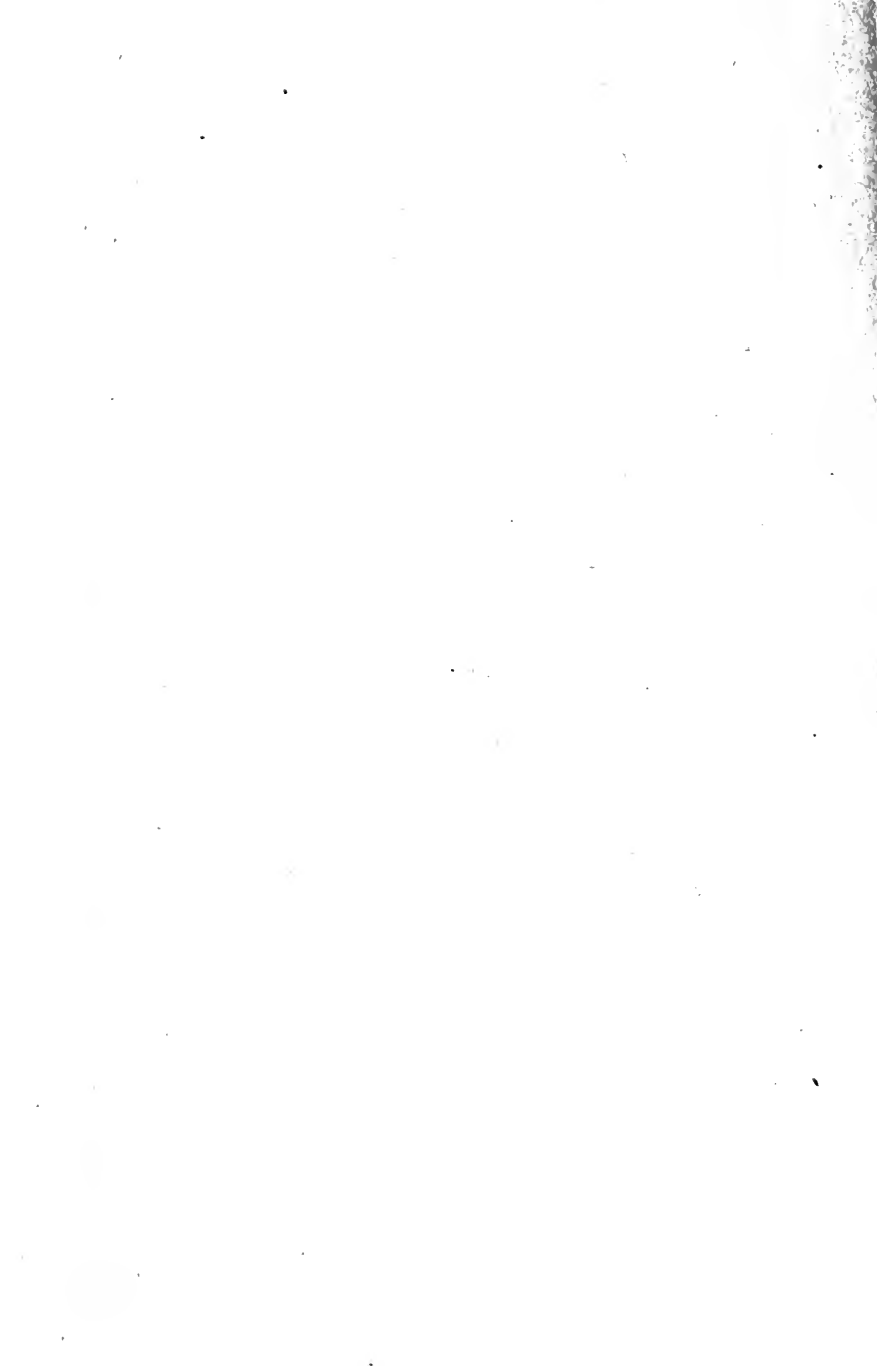


LOUIS LAVATER



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THIS GREEN MORTALITY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

BLUE DAYS AND GREY DAYS

A LOVER'S EPHEMERIS

THIS GREEN  
MORTALITY  
BY LOUIS LAVATER

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COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA  
SYDNEY J. ENDACOTT MEL-  
BOURNE P. O. BOX 655 :: 1922

THE GALLEON PRESS  
18 Norris St Canterbury, Vic.  
P. O. Box 655 Melbourne



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Certain verses here collected first appeared in "The Australasian," "Birth," "The Book-lover," "The Bulletin," "The Triad."

To the Editors of these journals I desire to make courteous acknowledgment.

Melbourne, 1922.

L.L.

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D A Y - D R E A M

Always I see those hills, the lake, the little town  
That dips one foot in, like an undecided swimmer  
Stirring his mirrored counterpart to tremulous motion;  
Always the grassy path that wanders up and down,  
Threading the forest, dimmer grown and dimmer,  
Till—blue beyond—the ocean;  
The blue, the ever-changing, nay, the changeless sea,  
With the blue everlasting fields of heaven above. . .  
And at my feet this green mortality  
Of life and death and love!

FROM A HILL-TOP

No cloud in either heaven—for there are two—  
The lake smiles upward with an equal blue;  
And at its foot the little town is seen,  
A swimmer's garment flung upon the green.

Those wind-blown petals drifting white and red  
Are browsing cattle o'er the pasture spread—  
Fat, sleepy meadows, drunken with the spring  
And noonday honey smeared on everything.

A S S A U L T

I close my eyes in the velvet dark,  
Waiting for sleep;  
But in the quiet of the night,  
When the harsh noises of the Outer World  
Are shut away, as by the closing of a padded door,  
My heart awakes and listens.

And it hears  
The soundless blowing of innumerable trumpets,  
Marchings—musterings—  
It is the army of the Spring gathering underground;  
And when morning comes I see  
The brown earth shivered through and through with  
slender arrows,  
Each one tipped with a tiny green bomb.

THE RISING OF THE SAP

While yet too soon eye-prisoning darkness falls,  
And Winter trails his ragged overalls,  
There wakes up in my spirit suddenly  
An elfin something that says: "Come with me!"

Then leafy fingers flutter into mine,  
And off we scamper, at a secret sign,  
To pagan orgies in some woodland lair,  
Stark joyous mad, with blossoms in our hair.



W A T T L E - B L O O M

Ere yet harsh Winter, with his noisy tread,  
Has blustered by, chasing the clouds above,  
So soon the wattle shows its dainty head,  
Brave little blossom as my own dear Love!  
What of the years between us and the tomb?  
Without a winter cometh never a year;  
Nor any year without the golden bloom,  
True to its promise as my dearest Dear!  
On city lawns its fragrance may be found,  
But in the bush's unprofaned retreat  
It better loves to shed its sweets around,  
Dear, gracious unthrift! Ah, my Love is sweet,  
Sweet as the wattle-bloom! My Love is, too,  
As dear and gracious, and as brave and true!

DISSONANCE

Again the flute-note of the Spring, again  
The rapid brush that colors all things new,  
Regilds the sun and stains the heavens blue!  
Once more the breath that warms the winter rain  
And joyous wakens every sleeping lane  
To shy green tremors as the buds burst through—  
Ah, sweet persuasive Spring, can it be true  
Thy vibrant call is ever heard in vain?  
Hark, that persistent murmur? 'Tis the Sea,  
Hoary in grief and heedless of the call,  
Mumbling of wars that batter and destroy. . . .  
With many voices does it speak to me,  
But not a silver throat among them all  
To strike unfalteringly the note of joy!

T I D E S

Distraught by care I wandered to the sea  
In nobler strife to find heart-comforting:  
Alas! far as the eye its net could fling  
Lay bare a desolate monotony  
Of slimed waste that held no joys for me,  
No battle-swirl, no marshalled thundering:  
But in the shallows some unsightly thing  
Beat out its life in rhythmic agony.  
I pressed from out my eyes the omen dread,  
Lifting the wet sand to my fevered face,  
Until, serene at last and comforted,  
I turned again unto the self-same place—  
To see upon the smiling shore outspread  
A fair green garment fringed with foamy lace.

I N   T H E   G R A S S

The Spring is come, and this old earth of ours  
Is pink and white in patches, yellow, green  
And red and regal purple, like the side  
Of some gigantic dolphin plunging on  
Across a boundless, blue, abysmal sea.

And here and there upon it may be found,  
Sporadic or in clusters, ruthless Man,  
Who scars it o'er with ugly red-raw wounds  
And bores into its vitals ceaselessly  
And cumpers it with wall and battlement.

Eons may pass ere Earth shall hear the call  
Of new worlds waiting to be born, and seek  
A mate among the planets; then, perhaps,  
The fiery ardours of that dread embrace  
Shall seal the doom of Man, her parasite.

Meanwhile, the Earth is fair, and Spring is come,  
And wasteful blossoms spill their sweets about,  
And birds and bees are choking with their songs,  
And even in the grass a murmur swells  
As jubilant as music of the spheres.

R A I N B O W - S P I D E R S

Before my eyes a wonder came to pass:  
On a green mound, new-carpeted with grass,  
Between me and the slant rays of the Sun  
Uprose a tent of gleaming silver spun;  
Well-seasoned stalks the sturdy uprights made,  
On either side and to each other stayed  
By ropes so silken fine one could not spy them  
Save where the sun's rays touched in passing by them.

I lay upon the grass to peer within  
Where a soft, greeny shine was filtered thin  
Through dewdrop-lanterns hanging from above—  
The half-light that the Little People love.  
Fairies? I caught my breath in very awe  
As in the twilit glimmer there I saw  
The strangest sight, perhaps, was ever seen  
The Outer and the Inner Worlds between.

Of what their plan was I had scarce a notion,  
But there were hundreds of them, all in motion;  
The quaintest creatures! habited in hues  
Like those against a cloudy sky one views  
When wrangling elements have cursed and kissed,  
And the Sun's hair is wet with weeping mist.

Some climbed the grassy blades, some from their rims  
Floated away, flourishing their long limbs;  
Others were creeping, sweeping, sliding, leaping  
Regardless that a mortal eye was peeping:  
But, crowning-feast or wee princess's bridal,  
Whate'er it was no single soul was idle.

I studied them again for a full minute,  
Convinced their business had a purpose in it:  
Each, doubtless, was some sort of artisan,  
And labored on a preconcerted plan,  
But their material was so fine and slim,  
And the dew-filtered underlight so dim,

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T h i s   G r e e n   M o r t a l i t y

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That details everywhere escaped my vision—  
And so I could not come to a decision.  
Meanwhile, an ill wind seemed to grow apace;  
Earth shrugged her shoulders in the Sun's red face,  
And the frail tent, with all its shine and sheen,  
Vanished away as it had never been.

D E E P S

As water from the skies  
Its aspect takes,  
So do thine eyes—  
Unboated, virgin lakes  
From whose blue-dusky deeps  
Thy spirit's troubles  
With starry leaps  
Uprise  
To break like bubbles.

L O V E ' S   W A R F A R E

Patches of gold in the green near by,  
Patches of white in a blue, blue sky—  
'Tis a fighting country below and above,  
And, sweetheart, I am a soldier of Love!

I warn thee, beware of a fighting lover,  
Skilled in advancing and taking cover;  
Onward and forward with never a halt  
Till the garrison yield to the last assault!

Dost fly the open, the woods to gain?  
He'll ambush thee in a leafy lane:  
'Gainst frontal attack hast made thee strong?  
He'll drop from the clouds in a winged song,

Shedding sweet words that hold the senses  
Till he dismantle thy heart's defences—  
Beware, I say, of a fighting lover,  
Skilled in advancing and taking cover!

Ah! not for long may thy heart resist me,  
Nor shall be peace till thou have kissed me—  
'Tis a fighting country below and above,  
And I, sweetheart, am a soldier of Love!



A L O S T   K I N G D O M

'Tis the strangest kingdom that I have seen,  
With its hills and hollows of bright grass-green—  
At least, 'twas a kingdom ages ago;  
How many I know not, but this I know:  
On yonder summit a crumbling stone,  
Rusty and red, is the Hill-king's throne,  
And those broad basins half-filled with water  
Are beauty-baths of the Hill-king's daughter,  
Once bubbling hot, though they're now so cold—  
Green-water, white-water, water-of-gold.

An inland kingdom, it yet can boast  
A harbor or two in a rock-bound coast;  
For a prisoned ocean runs north and south,  
Bitter and salty and harsh to the mouth,  
Where there sit on an island, breast by breast,  
Fat, fluffy, grey chicks in the white gull's nest;  
But the glistening waters hide never a weed  
Among the shoals where a fish may feed,  
And the slow waves murmur along the shore  
Meaningless tags of forgotten lore.

Gone and forgotten, and his rock-throne rotten,  
Yet the Earth every birth-time puts forth her green.

S E P T E M B E R

As in the marriage-month a bride  
Sings as she clings to her husband's side,  
Sweets on her lips, in her heart a tune,  
A hymn of the Golden Marriage-Moon.

So in the World of Whispering Green  
Sings the slim Wattle, September's queen,  
Sings and rejoices the whole month long  
With color and fragrance for speech and song.

O lovely Silent Sister! Be  
Thy every blossom a fertile tree  
When thou and I, having fallen sere,  
May never again such music hear!

THE WIND IN THE OATFIELD

What is it that seems oftentimes to float  
Above that green and silver when the wind  
Ruffles it gently, as if loth to wound  
Its delicate beauty with too rough a flight?  
Look . . . was it not the passing of a fleet  
Of shadowy boats on seas that massed and waned,  
Obeying some unseen magician's wand,  
To the soft clash of cymbals . . . and a flute?  
Soon must the crop before the sickle fall,  
The ripening ears be ravished of their grain;  
Yet still my hope is, ere the vision fail  
Or memory die with rapid weeds o'ergrown,  
That I may know—or, haply, I shall feel!—  
What floated there on seas of silver and green.

T H E   C A L L

Come to me, come, nor seek to hide thy face  
Beneath those shadowy tresses' vain eclipse!  
Thy breath is honey, and I burn to trace  
Its madding course unto thy scarlet lips.  
The year's ungirdled; 'tis for bees and flowers  
Their golden time—and shall it not be ours?

See how in Summer's arms the sweet Spring lies,  
Her green hair twined about him, starred with blooms,  
Her throat all murmurous with melodies,  
And in her breath a flutter of perfumes!  
See, at this moment each is lost in each,  
As waves are mingled on a quiet beach!

Let not a whisper in thine ear dismay thee,  
Nor in thy heart a tapping at the wall!  
Oh, put thy hand in Love's; let nought delay thee,  
But run to meet me when thou hearest my call!  
Come to me—come with golden love at noon  
Or silver kisses underneath the moon—  
Only come soon, sweetheart, come soon!

S U M M E R

I am weary,  
Weary of bracing myself against the sun's hot hand;  
I am weary, and I dream of cool places. . . .

I see a grassy couch  
Under a canopy of leaves;  
A reedy river murmurs by,  
Crooning an old, old melody  
Tuned to a long-forgotten scale,  
Made when the world was young.

Rolled to the river's edge the hills lie fast asleep;  
Pale stars slip o'er their ledge and sink into the deep:  
Down in the deep they sink to slumbrous peace,  
Down in the deep they drink the water of peace;  
In the quiet deep they quench their fires in sleep  
And drown in a cool green dream. . . .

The sun insists his burning hand upon my head;  
I am weary, and I dream of cool places.

S C A R L E T - F L O W E R I N G   G U M S

Wantons are ye, to madden so the bees,  
Drunk with your drifted sweetness through long hours  
Of shimmering summergold. There are no flowers  
Dapping the green of any sorts of trees  
Can match your blaze of scarlet ecstasies—  
Wantons ye are, indeed, whom Nature dowers  
With greater wealth than heaped Old Persia's bowers  
Or ripened for remote Hesperides.  
In time to come (they say) shall trees no more  
Foam up in sudden beauty, nor the furze  
Be all with flecks of yellow scattered o'er,  
Nor bees nor moths be Cupid's messengers.  
How in that day shall tender souls be hurled  
Back to this era from a blossomless world!

THE GREEN SOUL

Moved by I know not what of spirit needs  
I turned my prow among the Water-Reeds,  
That strange republic of the lonely shoal,  
Whose slender bodies harbor a green soul.

In stately courtesies they bent and swayed  
To the long ripples my intrusion made,  
And at the very heart of their demesne  
A tremor rustled through the ranks of green;  
Yet scarce my oars had ceased their muffled clack  
Before I heard the quiet drifting back.

I sat and listened till the silence grew  
When growth of root and shooting of the stem  
Into a mood primeval natures knew,  
Were the whole meaning of the world for them;  
And contemplation dribbled all away,  
Lost in the stillness that around me lay.

It was not doze nor reverie—we keep  
A tally of the hours even in our sleep,  
The clock of consciousness, with punctual chime,  
Marking unheeded the slow lapse of time—  
But I had lost myself; nor did I know  
Wide things or narrow, neither swift nor slow.

Maybe I stumbled, by obscure mishap,  
Upon some mystery of leaf or sap;  
Upon some secret way or guarded door  
Till now inviolate, but so no more.

Nothing I know, save . . . finding me disarmed,  
Empty of guile and able to be harmed,  
It . . . Something . . . came, swirling upon the  
boat  
Like a green mist . . . and tightened round my  
throat. . . .

T H E   G R E E N   W O R L D

Is it an enemy, this world that breeds  
Tall trees and bushes and the lesser weeds?  
Consider! They would live and thrive as we,  
Unit and race, in close analogy;

Would live and love, and from the earth and air  
The means of living gather and prepare;  
And store up, each according to its kind,  
Sufficient for the young they leave behind.

Think of a red-souled world of robbers, then,  
Of birds, beasts, fishes, beetles, worms and men,  
Whose very sustenance whereby they grow  
Is sack and plunder, and the Green World's woe.

Is it for nothing that the tall bamboo  
Dons flinty armour? And those others, too,  
Bear sword or spear or cunning poison-dart?  
What is the purpose of this warlike art?

Could bushes hear, or if the grass had eyes,  
Who could forecast our altered destinies?  
If roots and branches were but hands and feet  
Green World or Red World, which would rob to  
eat?

Or should the forest become conscious, then  
Which would be ultimate victors—Trees or Men?



SONGS A MAN SHALL SING

What are the songs a man shall sing  
To save his soul alive?  
For the soul that is shrunken and parched with  
    pain  
Thirsts for a song as a field for rain,  
And he that is faint and ready to swoon  
Leaps to the lilt of a marching tune.  
Then what are the songs a man shall sing  
To save his soul alive?

They are songs of daring on field or foam;  
Songs of women and babes at home;  
Songs of achievement, of things well done;  
Songs of hearty, uproarious fun;  
Songs of birds and bees and flowers,  
Of walking abroad in sunny hours;  
Songs that swell in the heart like seeds  
To burgeon and blossom in kindly deeds.

They may be neither new nor strange—  
For simple folk are slow to change—  
But they must be true and they must be sweet  
To warm the heart and to stir the feet;  
And the songs that are sweet beyond all others  
Shall draw men close as a band of brothers.  
These are the songs a man shall sing.  
To save his soul alive?

K O O M O O R A N G

Men go not to the hill-country,  
Or if they go at all  
'Tis only in white daylight  
To hunt the warrigal.

If ever at all they go there  
'Tis from sun-up to sun-down.  
(They are afraid of the black night  
Who only know the brown.)

For night spreads over the plain-country  
Like a sea of soft brown waves;  
But the black night of the hill-country  
Brews in jinkarra-caves,

And fills the narrow gullies  
To look like honest ground;  
And men have been lost on Koomoorang—  
Lost and never found.

So when they scour the hill-country  
Where the wild horses roam,  
Soon as the sun sags downward  
They bring their quarry home;

And the treacherous mountain-darkness—  
The black, black dark—distils  
Where gather the wild horses  
In hollows of the hills,

A stallion at the mob's head  
With eyes of opal-fire,  
The swift, free, unhandled  
Son of a stolen sire—

Of a royal Arab, stolen  
In my grandfather's day,  
When outlawed men in the mountain  
Lived as birds of prey.

Like hawks that fly in the night-time,  
They swooped down on the plains,  
And to a foul eyrie  
Carried off their gains;

Till wrath grew hot against them,  
And they who preyed by night  
Were driven from the nest where they would  
rest  
And harried in daylight,

And the sheer rock-walls of Koomoorang  
Sharply answered back  
The angry rattle of rifles  
Instead of the stockwhip's crack.

Though the plainsmen mustered many  
Against a desperate few,  
A summer's day was scarce enough  
For what they had to do;

'Twas to make an end of it  
Once, and once for all,  
"Whether the damned hell-brood  
"Would fight, fly, or crawl!"

There was a scatter of broodlings,  
But the old hawk held his ground,  
Till day was gone from Koomoorang  
And black dark spread around,

Till the horror of the hill-night  
Gathered at their back,  
And—not every horseman  
Found the homeward track.

So if men go to the hill-country  
To hunt the warrigal,  
They go in the white daylight,  
Or go not at all.

A F T E R M A T H

These dainties, nay, these miracles:—  
Earth's mantle of new green;  
Cool glint of river-water  
Through netted boughs seen;  
Shy woodblossoms drifting  
A whole world sweet—  
It is our hearts defile them,  
Not hands or feet.

The silver-coated company  
Marching the midnight skies;  
The tiny gleams scattered  
Like star-dust in your eyes—  
The wonder of their shining  
I nevermore may see,  
For my own heart has shuttered  
Their heaven from me.

Once evening was a silken tent  
And morn a bath of blue;  
Each hour was a fresh marvel  
That I spent with you:  
But now the whispering dayfalls,  
The noons of shouting gold,  
I hear them through the silence,  
A sweet tale—told.

M O P O K E

Mopoke! . . . Mopoke! . . .  
Mysterious bird,  
What loneliness  
In thy one word!

Mopoke! . . . Mopoke! . . .  
The vague profound  
Of forest night  
Is in the sound.

The shifting hollows  
Are clogged with dark;  
My eyes can find  
No standing mark,  
Save in the distance—  
Oh! so far—  
A hand of sky  
Holds a sleepy star.

Night in the forest  
Is solemn and strange,  
And home is somewhere  
Over the range. . . .  
How far have I come?  
How far must go?  
Ere my window shines  
Like a star below.

Mopoke! . . . Mopoke! . . .  
'Tis nearer now;  
I strain my eyes  
To an unseen bough  
And . . . though I listen  
Nothing is heard,  
Rustle of leaf  
Nor rustle of bird;  
But a fleeting darkness  
Near? . . . or far? . . .  
Blots for a moment  
My sleepy star.

EVENING

The evening comes up silently  
In a pale-blue kirtle drest,  
With a grey cloud on her shoulder  
And a white moon at her breast;  
And it's O, my heart, beat loud and fast,  
And joyous thoughts go free,  
For in this happy hush-time  
My darling waits for me.

Go—go before me, thoughts of mine,  
Nor wait for wordy gowns;  
My Love can speak that olden tongue  
Which is forgot in towns.  
Be quick, my thoughts, and when you find  
My dear one in her nest,  
Be softness on her shoulder  
And passion at her breast.

Miles are many between us yet,  
And many the hills and dales,  
But they shall be as a smooth sea,  
And I a boat with sails;  
The forest trees may swing and sing  
And curdle their green foam,  
But a spread sail and a fair wind  
And I shall soon be home.

T H O U G H T S

When night would drown us in a gloomy pond  
And stars, like silver lilies, float above,  
My thoughts are shooting stems that seek beyond  
Some sunny air of laughter and of love.

And when, bewildered by his burning blows,  
We droop beneath the sun's fierce battery,  
My thoughts are spreading leaves that interpose  
A cool, green shield betwixt his might and me.

T H E A T R E

By night a purple heaven spread  
With silver spangles overhead;  
By day a scatter of pink stars seen  
Upon a lower heaven of green:  
'Twixt that and this, 'twixt near and far,  
What stabbing hurts and blisses are!



THE WHITE GUM-TREE

Through tossings of her green hair  
The sunlight daps and dims  
As the White Gum sweeps her mantle  
From her shapely limbs;

And, with a sound of rustling  
Mysteriously sweet,  
Flings it upon the grass here  
At my halted feet.

MY SLIM GREEN LOVE

In the thick, thick dark  
Of the summer night  
Hangs a shimmery garment  
Of netted light,  
Where my dear Love whispers  
And trembles and weaves  
A robe of starshine  
About her leaves.

All day she flutters  
Her kirtle green;  
At night draws round her  
This soft star-sheen;  
And I would that the wisdom  
Of earth could teach  
What she whispers now  
In her leafy speech!

D I R G E   F O R   A   D U M B   C O M R A D E

Turn the sod gently,  
And not so deep  
But the sounds of the Bush  
May soothe him  
To sleep!

If courage and a great love  
Be virtues beyond all,  
This body, once their garment,  
Should have due burial.  
    Devoutly, then, lay him  
    Not ever-deep;  
    That the scents of the Bush  
    May come to him  
    In sleep.

His last unspoken message  
Lies wet upon my face;  
The Grey Gum stoops to scatter  
Leaves o'er his resting-place—  
    So  
    Cover him softly,  
    And not too deep,  
    That my thoughts  
    May sometimes find him  
    Here  
    Asleep!

P E T E R ' S   W I F E

I.

There are two spots, unlike,  
Yet like in loneliness:—  
Where shadows hide in Slum-Land,  
And where they haunt the Trees.

Lonely are city lanes,  
Lonely for all the dim  
And draggled wretches cast there  
By the rough ocean, Life;

And lonely forest-aisles  
When dark comes creeping in  
Under the tangled branches  
Ere yet the day is dead.

Ah! hungry hearts grow sick,  
And young hearts desperate,  
'Mid ragged ghosts of Slum-Land  
Or leafy ghosts of trees.

II.

When Peter came to town  
To marry a young wife,  
The women's tongues wagged shrewdly,  
And old men shook their beards.

"Youth will be heard," they said,  
"Calling to youth again;  
"And forest-ways are lonely. . . ."  
So went the gossip round.

But Bessie laughed in scorn  
At their grim presages;  
For Peter was her own man,  
And a maid's life is dull.

Blithely she went with him  
To sing about his home,  
All spring-time and all summer,  
Until the winter came;

Until the winter came,  
And they sat in o' nights—  
They two, mute, by the fireside—  
In the bleak winter-time,

When dark comes early in  
With regiments of rain,  
To sit in horrid triumph  
Upon the corpse of day;

When, hid in a pale lamp,  
The spectre of daylight  
Shakes with the creaking branches,  
Leaps when a dead tree falls.

III.

'Twas in the pricking air  
Of a late July morn,  
At spring's first baby-whimper,  
That Bessie sang again.

Shy buds were in the green,  
And quavers in birds' throats—  
She could not choose but tremble  
To loveliness and song.

But Peter . . . Peter had  
No answer for the spring;  
The frost of a hard winter  
Was white upon his head.

IV.

When Alain came the spring  
Was rampant, riotous  
In sappy tree, in every  
Young creature's beating blood.

In the green spring they met,  
Alain and young Bessie;  
Her face was like the pink heath . . .  
Alain's was like the white.

He could not speak, for words  
That crowded to his throat;  
Crushed her delicate fingers;  
Then fled, brutal, abrupt. . . .

And her sweet voice took on  
A new deliciousness,  
Like the grey thrush's piping  
At the pink of the morn.

V.

'Tis said unsailed ships,  
Adrift in a wide sea,  
Will draw closer and closer  
Until they meet at last.

And these two met again  
Late in the summer-time,  
When the air was like honey,  
Sweet as a marriage-kiss.

As Alain came to her  
Dark-flushed—'twas she grew pale—  
At the first word he uttered  
She fell into his arms,

Into his cruel arms;  
Yielded her cheek, her lips,  
Sobbing out "Peter! . . . Peter! , , ,"  
He loosed her; and was gone.

VI.

Alain and Peter went  
Walking into the green,  
Two in the green together . . .  
But only one came back.

She met him at the gate:—  
“Where is he? Where?” she cried;  
And Alain, “Peter? . . . Peter  
“Will not come home . . . to-night!”

Her wide eyes questioned his  
Plainly as speech, “To-morrow?”  
His answered, “Not to-morrow . . .  
“Nor any morrow more!”

He would have gone to her,  
But she lifted her hand  
And held his eyes with her eyes;  
Then, “Come to-night!” she said.

VII.

From far off Alain saw  
Her window all ablaze  
With many lights. He wondered . . .  
The blind was not drawn. Why?

Though there were none to mark,  
He shunned the lighted way,  
Till he came to the window,  
And stood there long . . . long . . .

In the full blaze he stood,  
Purged of all thought but this:—  
“White as a cloud she lies there,  
“White as a cloud . . . but still. . . !

“No movement save the shadows  
“The flickering candles make. . . .”  
For at her head were candles,  
And candles at her feet.

VIII.

Lonely are forest nights  
At the fall of the year,  
When the first words of winter  
Are heard among the boughs;

Eerie the forest ways,  
Filled with strange whisperings,  
With goings and with comings  
Of leafy ghosts of trees. . . .

And Alain's heart dropped dead—  
Fell like a rotten bough—  
As he stood waiting . . . waiting  
For Those he knew would come.



T H E   B A R R I E R

I lay face-downward on the grass  
Listening for the Earth's heart-beats;  
And I heard  
The broken echoes of my own—  
And, in my own, of all men's.

I came upon a water-pool  
At the foot of a leaning gum-tree;  
The sky was in it,  
And the motionless branches of the gum-tree.

With steadying hand upon the bole  
I, too, leaned over;  
And there in the still water I saw  
The hates and loves of the unquiet souls  
Of all men,  
And the pool was become unrestful,  
Though not a whiff of air had ruffled it.

I drew back shamefastly,  
And, from a little distance, saw  
The mother-quiet nestle down again.  
For so it is—always!  
The consciousness of being  
Is like a barrier round about us,  
A barrier we may neither breach nor overpass.

T H E   B R A N C H E S

As I walked one day under the branches  
I met an odd creature;  
Odd was his tattered coat, his speech,  
Odd every feature:  
And he had grown to be like the branches,  
Crooked as they;  
And the rags of him were mould-green,  
And he was grey.

By day he wandered under the branches,  
At night would lie,  
Ever afraid of the clear spaces  
Where heaven is high;  
For God, he told me, lives in the branches  
Of the green trees,  
And he had heard Him talking there  
Like a loud breeze.

Poor soul! For all his vagrancy  
'Neath forest eaves,  
For all his music was but rain  
Pattering on leaves,  
And his soul's garment like the rags  
Itself wore,  
I would walk with him under the branches  
Once—once more.

But I shall meet him under the branches  
Never again:  
He fell asleep in a bough's elbow  
In a storm of rain,  
Fell asleep with the great gum-trees  
Weeping around him—  
He had been looking for God in the branches  
And, so, found Him.

W I N T E R

When the last matron-month keeps to her bed,  
Forborne with mothering,  
And muffled days go tip-toe by,  
Into the long hush where scarcely motion is  
Nor any sound of breathing  
Comes One, a rebel, blustrous,  
Flinging wide his arms  
And shouting with great violence:

Hear ye!

I am Winter, the Male, the Invigorator,  
Frost is my spur,  
And the wind is the breath of my urging;  
I am Winter, the Rebel, the Male,  
And I will renew the time  
That is languid unto death!

Thus cometh Winter, the Male, the Rebel,  
Dark of countenance and habited in clouds,  
With a scourge of lightnings in his hand;  
And happy is he the frosty spur has pricked,  
Who has heard the voice of his urging;  
For riches are dirt and fame is a shadow  
And pleasure is the cunning bait of death,  
But the joys of Winter are clean joys  
Wherein is renewal of life.

Here are the joys of Winter  
For timid ones, dwellers in houses—  
The crackling wood-fire,  
Whence at every touch the sparks swarm out like bees;  
The warmth, the crowding to it,  
The jesting and the ghostly tale;  
And between whiles the delicious shudder  
Of comfortable discomfort  
When the wind cries in the chimney;  
For lonely ones the comradeship of books,  
The dreamland in the embers;  
And, haply, for all at last

The woolly cuddle of blankets—  
These are the joys of winter  
For timid souls, house-dwellers.

For those who wander abroad  
Shall not be lacking gentle joys by day or night—  
To look upon the heath in bloom,  
Acres of blushing ecstasy;  
To catch the breeze-borne fragrance  
Of early wattles;  
To watch for heath-pink skies at nightfall,  
Or, when the wind has blown them clear,  
To see the star-wrack littering the blue  
Like golden wattle-sprays.

But for the adventurous wilder joys—  
To burrow in the wind, grasping it by armfuls;  
To hear the tall cliffs ring like anvils  
When the sea smites them;  
Or, tuning one's spirit to the sharp pitch of Winter,  
To run, to leap  
And to dance by rivers  
To the reed-band's music.

Yet greatest of all these joys is his  
Who has quickened him to the spur,  
Who has leaped before the goad  
Till the stinging sweat brake out upon him;  
Who has taken the rain upon his face  
And plunged him into icy waters—  
He shall be lean and clean and ready for the Spring.

T H E   S T O R M

No sign of life! Between us here on earth  
And distant denizens of heaven above  
There's not a feathered atom flecks the blue;  
Yet every leaf on every tree is tense,  
And waits and trembles like a listening ear.

The silence is unbroken; save alone  
A rhythm more of feeling than of sound,  
A rhythm like the beating of a heart  
Where panting nature crouches to the earth  
And hunches up her shoulders, sick with dread.

And now above the horizon's sagging edge  
The sullen forehead of the Storm appears,  
His flashing eyes and windy-swollen cheeks,  
As, forcing through hot lips a sudden blast,  
The torrent hisses smoking o'er the lake.

A misty terror veils his near approach,  
And nature flinches when that awful voice  
Shakes even the solid ground beneath her.    Now  
The storm is passing, and his ruthless feet  
Trample the forest like a field of grass.

Yet ere he goes he flings upon the lake  
A handful of sharp-rustling hail, and, lo!  
A sudden crop of millions of white flowers,  
Each one a tiny murmurous ecstasy  
That springs and sings and blossoms—and is gone.

Now fills the air a pungency more sweet  
Than thyme or clove-carnation, and the soul  
Swims on a surgent flood of melody.  
So is it ever when the storm has passed  
And fear, surmounted, swings to leaping joy.

S E A - D R E A M

In waking dream I sank into the sea.  
Green velvet waters stroked me as I slid  
And bubbled by to make a shimmering lid  
Above that shut the face of heaven from me.  
Far down a measureless declivity,  
As though the treacherous wastes of ocean hid  
The slant side of a glassy pyramid,  
I fell through deeps of dim translucency  
Until the first impulse began to weaken  
And the compressed waters to grow rank,  
Wherein soft, slimy shapes, noisome and lank,  
Swayed threateningly, as arms of the foul kraken  
About the languid victim he hath taken. . . .  
Vile weeds . . . beneath whose loathly glooms I sank  
Down to a world, vaster than this we know,  
Whose teeming millions have no other law  
Than slay or be slain to glut the ravening maw  
Of hunger; where sun's light may never go  
And bulging, bladderly things flit to and fro  
With haunted eyes agleam; where snapping jaw  
Encounters tentacle, or claw meets claw,  
And swiftling slides from greater strength but slow:  
For in such viscid element they dwell,  
The fiercest seems deliberate when hurled  
In silence on his prey. . . . Oh! can there be  
Such nightmare-hive of horrors, even in Hell?  
Or is it Hell itself, that underworld  
Deep in the pulseless vitals of the Sea?

T O L L   O F   T H E   F O R E S T

Through leafy ways I wander questioning  
Why in this loose, disordered world of men  
Should prinked-out nothing strut and plume itself  
In the mild air of our complacency,  
Whilst manhood breaks unheeded every day?  
For so it is now, at the veiling-time,  
But shall be otherwise when dawn has drunk  
Up darkness and his thirsty tongue licked off  
All bubble-stars from the blue vault of heaven.

What, then, of him that's gone? 'Tis twenty years  
Since he, a slender stripling, pitched his tent  
Deep in the forest. Stout the tent-frame was,  
And like a bell his broad axe rang all day,  
Yet stouter was his heart; no buffeting  
Could turn the keen edge of his courage, though  
For twenty years he strove against such odds  
As you nor I would care to face for one.

The ranges, like a greedy hand outspread,  
Claimed all their fingers covered, and for long  
He fought their miser's grip unaided; then  
He took a wife to share his solitude.  
Brave girl! for it was solitude indeed:  
Her husband, steeped in silence to the bone,  
Spake seldom, though he loved her near; and she  
Out of the treasures of her woman's heart  
Gave him rich comfort at all times, and bare  
Him children—five—asking no other aid  
Than his rough, clumsy tenderness could give.

Thus, without stint or check he drew upon  
The sources of his strength, nor set aside  
That leaven, that saving overplus, whereby  
Man's forces are renewed. Youth squandered it,  
And slinking age that battens on excess  
Crept from his lair in life's dark undergrowth  
To pilfer what remained. None marked the thief;

There was no empty hour, no chink of time,  
'Twixt dulling toil and stark unconsciousness  
Where retrospection might slip in.

And now  
When twenty years or more had battered him  
(Still to all outward seeming unsubdued),  
Good fortune sought him out capriciously,  
Playing the midwife to his scanty flock,  
And filling the wheat's ear with sudden grain.  
Men came to him proffering gold, and fought  
Among themselves for what he had to sell;  
Nay, would have taken more a hundredfold  
Had he possessed it.

'Twas enough for him.  
From store to store about the little town  
He goes indifferently, as he believes  
A man of substance should, scattering wide  
Impossible orders, till behind his back  
The doubtful traders tap their brows and smile  
A wordless comment. So he swaggers on,  
Unconscious that the purchases he makes  
Are measured, not according to his purse,  
But rather by his dreams of long ago,  
Of all that he should win for her and for  
Her children when they came. Forgotten dreams . . . ?

That night he raved. His wife, a stricken thing,  
Humours him bravely, woos him to his bed;  
But at the yielding-point he breaks away,  
And she must coax again. The Waiting Hand  
Is kind to him, burning up twenty years  
Like gunpowder, as, with a lover's tongue  
Renewing their first vows, he gathers her  
Into his arms . . . nay, nay, his arms no more,  
This hull, this cast-off, empty of life! Nor hers,  
Poor shivering mortal, lip to lip with Death!



H O M E :   T H R O U G H   T H E   D A R K

A dusky ocean eddies through the streets;  
Blurred and stained with it the houses melt away,  
And the trees,  
Even the very earth itself;  
Nought remains  
But this small island in the lonely dark  
Whereon I stand.

I dare not move,  
For fear my steps o'erpass its boundary;  
And when I stretch my senses out  
Into the dark  
They come back filled with darkness—  
Nothing more!

At last I venture forth a hesitating foot.  
Something crunches beneath it,  
And a sharp, familiar scent  
Wraps me in a friendly embrace.

I draw it into my nostrils,  
I draw it down into my heart;  
For it has told me where—  
Within, at most, a long arm's-reach—  
Swings loose for me the little white gate  
Under the pink and pale green  
Of the pepper-tree.

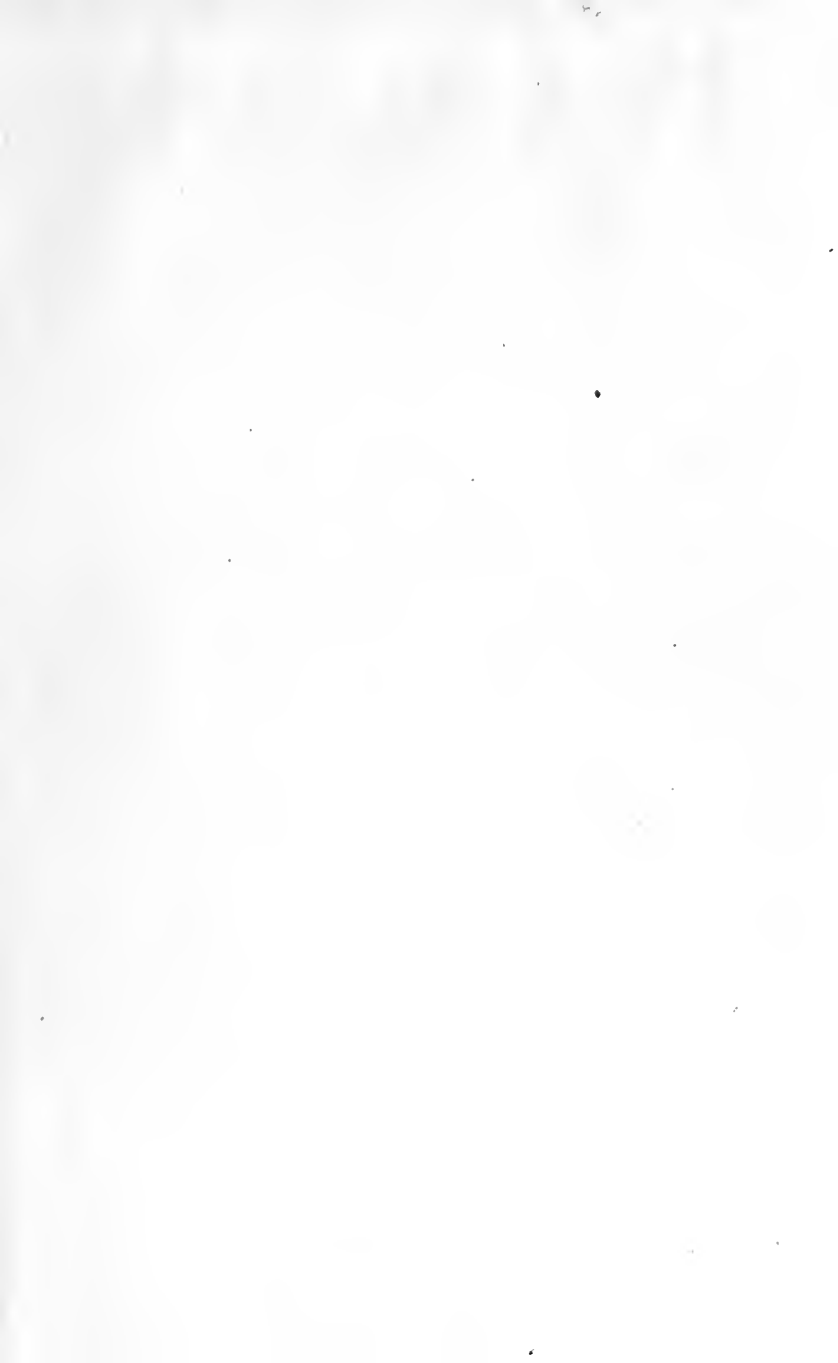
A L W A Y S

Thus in my dreams I see the lake, the little town,  
The hills, the river winding to the sea,  
From cloudy ramparts the slow forest marching down;  
Always the impenetrable blue above,  
And at my feet this green mortality  
Of life and death and love.

**M E M O R I E S**

My memories a grave, sweet music make  
As each one, stirring, bids the others wake;  
Deep tones which, like a long-drawn pedal-note,  
    persist  
Through all life's changing harmonies of shine and  
    mist.





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