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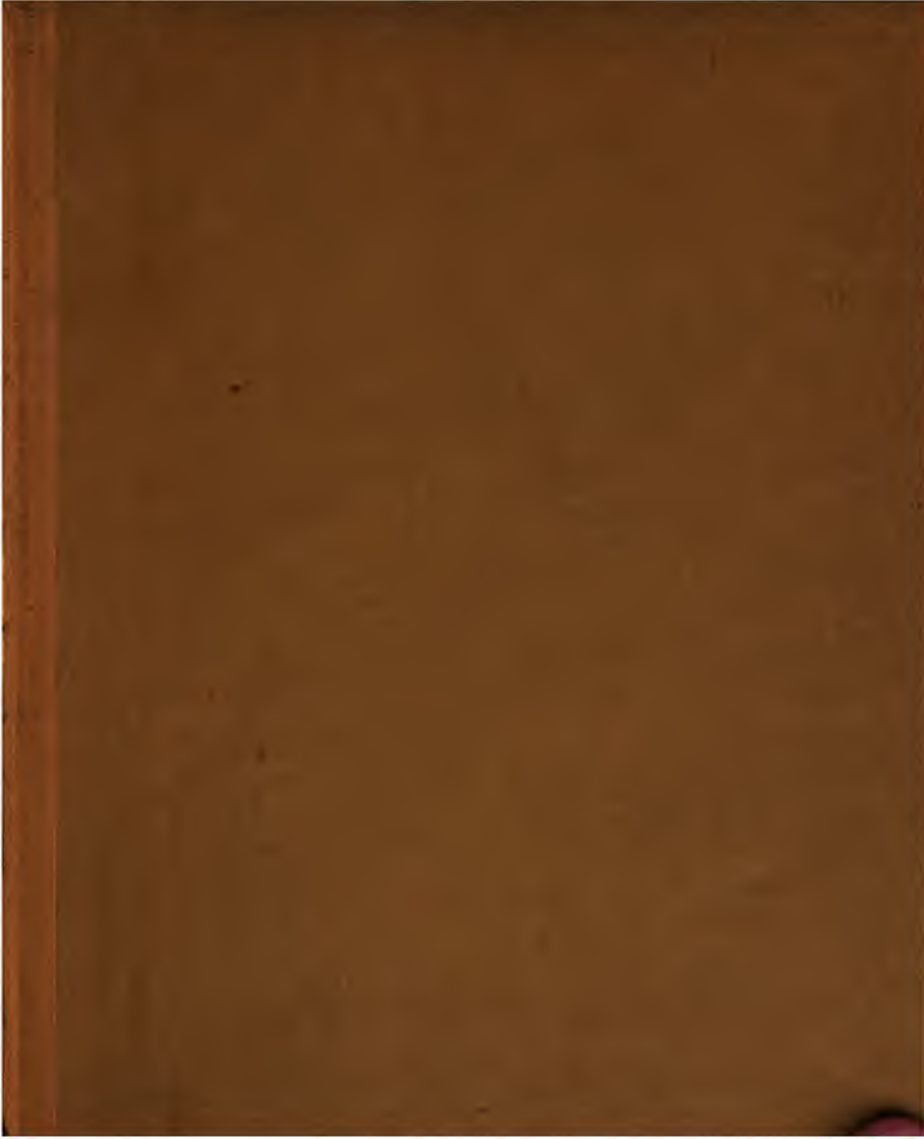


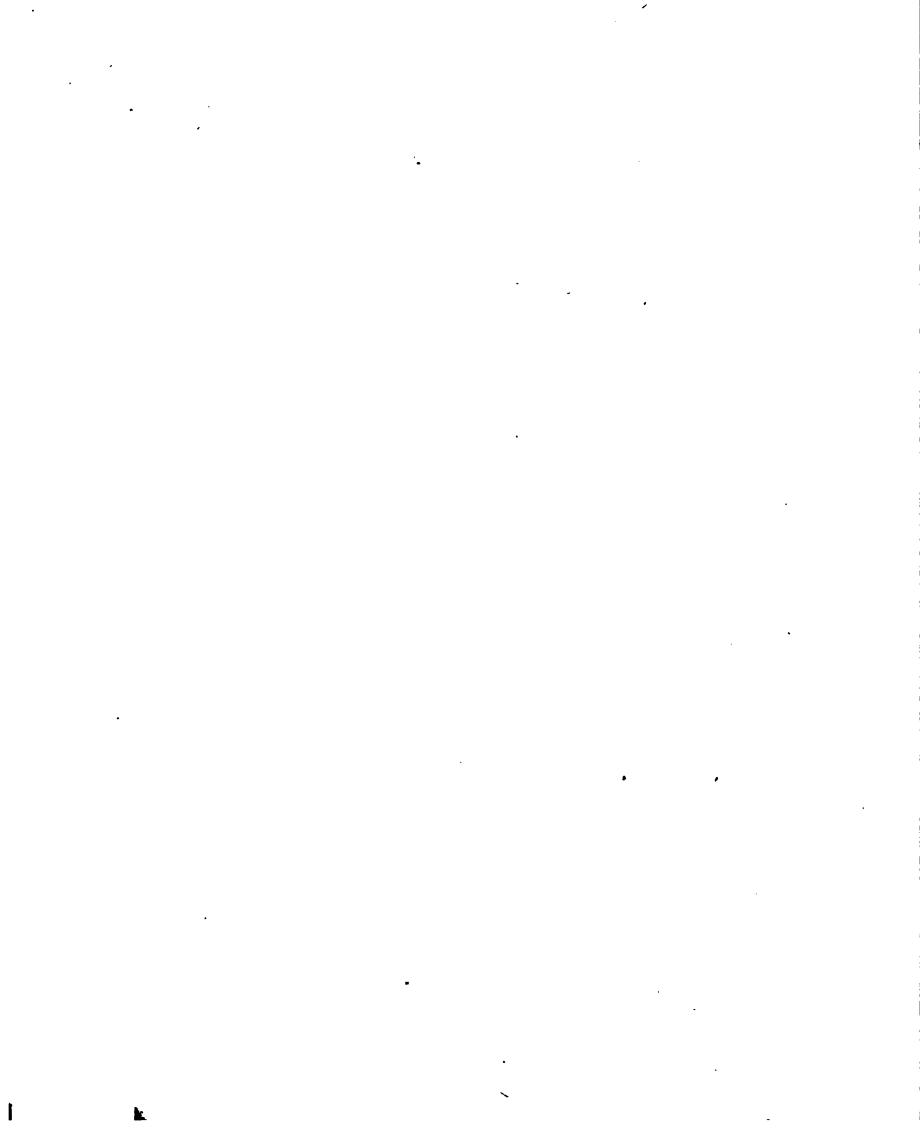
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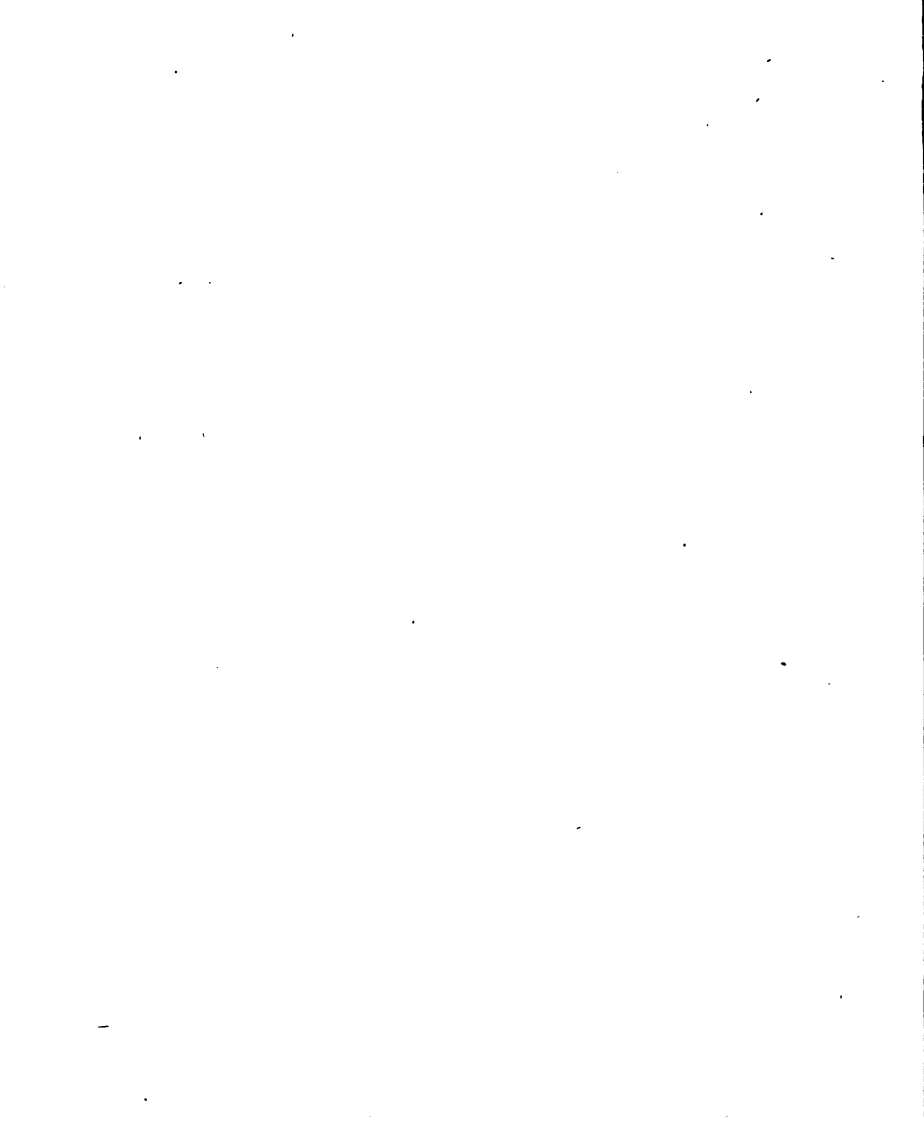


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**THE QUEEN'S VIGIL**



OF the verse in this book, "King Hermaunce," "Tivoli," "Wayfaring," and "The Singers" were first printed in the late *Northern Counties' Magazine*, *The Saturday Review*, *The Week's Survey*, and *McClure's Magazine* respectively.

THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

AND OTHER SONG

BY

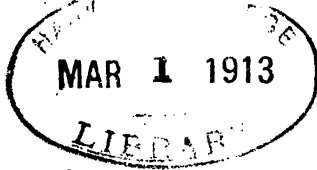
WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

LONDON

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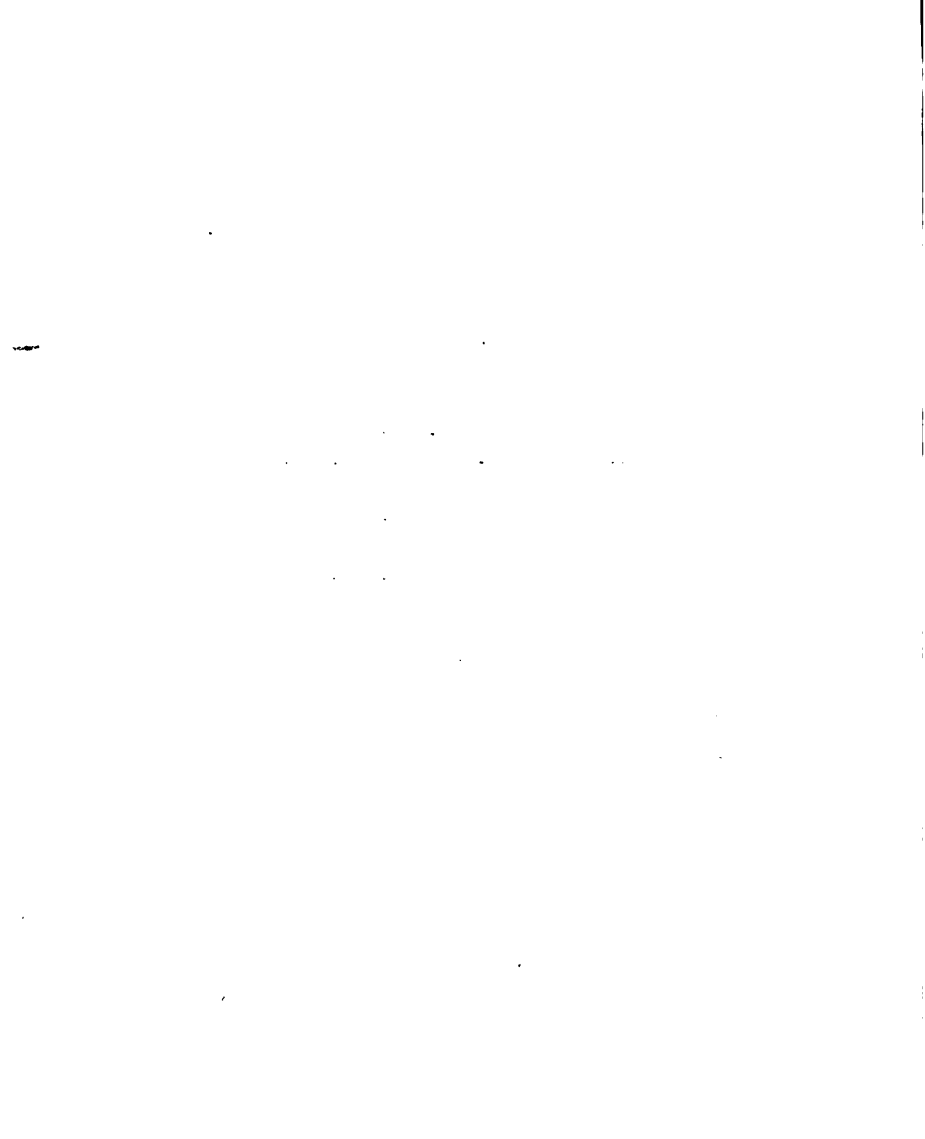


*Five money.*

To E. G.

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## The Queen's Vigil

### I

AMONG her singing maids, within  
The garden of the trellised vine,  
At angelus Queen Armelin  
Drank the rose-fragrant air like wine :  
She heard the knell of labour rung ;  
She saw the golden sunset-fires  
Turn all to soaring flame the spires,  
With golden clouds above them hung ;  
About her roses idly swung—  
Dew-laden censers in the air ;  
And weary-hearted maidens sung

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Old melodies of Love's despair  
Full-mournfully at day's decline.

She looked across the ridged sea  
Of basking gables, red and steep ;  
The hooded houses tranquilly  
Drowsed in a golden haze of sleep ;  
No clamour stirred throughout the town,  
No murmur from the unseen street  
That rang no more to mailed feet :  
She saw the white roads winding down  
From the high cornlands, glooming brown  
With unreaped harvest over-ripe,  
Where summer slept with tarnished crown ;  
And but some wandering goatherd's pipe  
Shrilled, eddying in the silence deep.

Thus she had watched with longing sore,  
When armies climbing to the plain,

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Unto the never-ending war,  
Had travelled, ere the winter's wane,  
With banners blue and harness bright,  
That glittered in the frosty sun  
Until the valley's crest was won ;  
When, fading from her yearning sight,  
The blaze of arms in sparks of light  
Had perished in horizon grey.  
O weary, since, the listening night,  
And wearier the watch by day  
For banners coming not again !

The while she gazed, the maidens' song  
Died on their lips ; and each one breathed  
A name, which but a name, too long  
With ever-flowering memories wreathed,  
In Love's hid chamber of the heart  
Had hung : upon the silence came  
To Armelin the kingly name



## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Of Pellinore ; and, like a dart  
That cleft the evening calm apart,  
New anguish pierced her. " Pellinore ! "  
She cried ; yet no fresh tears might start  
From eyes wept tearless, though no more  
Her lord should come with war-blade sheathed.

Low-bowed as one who, silent, grieves  
For some impending woe unknown,  
She leant among the trellised leaves,  
Crushing the clusters yet ungrown ;  
The grapes, unswollen yet and green,  
Nor ripened for the gurgling press,  
As bitter wine of her distress  
Were spilt, beneath her woe, unseen.  
The maidens moved not round the queen,  
Nor looked on her with pitying eyes ;  
For separate sorrows stood between,  
Deep-ranged, as serried shades that rise

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Round Love that ever mourns alone.

Then shivered pale the sunset glow ;  
And dimly through dew-falling gloom  
That veiled the slumbering town below,  
She saw the vast cathedral loom,  
Grey-pinnacled with shadows cold  
Where late had flamed the golden spires.  
The glow-worm's emerald signal-fires  
Lighted the cool, green dusk, and bold  
The bats about the ramparts old  
Fluttered with silence-weaving flight :  
While drowsily above the mould  
The roses swung, and on the night  
Unloosed their petalled wealth of bloom.

## II

In sorrow sped the darkling hours ;

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

In sorrow dawned the flashing morn,  
Awaking bright, belated flowers  
To keen, brief days of sunshine born ;  
Beneath a cold, star-gleaming sky  
To perish, by the swift frost slain ;  
Or droop through days of autumn rain :  
In sorrow noonday drifted by,  
Blue-winged, unclouded, heavily  
Over the unreaped harvest-lands :  
Once more the bells' clear melody  
Rang sweet release to weary hands  
That toiled, unmated and forlorn.

No voice within the garden stirred ;  
Nor throbbing lute nor quivering lyre,  
Nor any song of maid or bird ;  
Only the shrill and reedy choir  
Of frogs that ever-piping wake  
In golden lily-cups afloat

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Upon the dark, unrippling moat,  
When, in the deep and grassy brake,  
Unseen the armoured crickets shake  
Their whirring wings with soothing din.  
While each maid mourned for far love's sake,  
Alone, untended, Armelin  
Stole out, unknown, in veiled attire.

Her white face hid, her head low-bowed,  
She passed the gateway guard unseen:  
A wavering, grey, uncertain cloud,  
She moved the heavy shades between;  
Down through the unheeding town she passed,  
Threading with eager haste the maze  
Of narrow streets and darkening ways;  
Till with tumultuous heart at last,  
And straining pulses beating fast,  
She came to where in sunlight soared  
Exultant, pinnacled and vast,

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Unto the glory of the Lord  
The house of Heaven's eternal Queen.

Still through the glittering blue air  
The swallows clipped with flashing wings;  
And still the evening light shone fair  
On sculptured saints and carven kings;  
While, pausing in the golden glow,  
She saw how wondering Beauty sprung  
From chaos when the stars were young,  
Then drooped again to labouring woe;  
And how the wind-sown weed may grow  
To wreath the crown of stone with green,  
And martins build their nest below  
The braided head of some proud queen,  
Whose fame no wandering harper sings.

Resplendent, through the open door,  
She saw the southern rose of glass,

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Agleam as if the summer's store  
Of cornland flowers that flame and pass—  
The poppy red, the cockle blue,  
And yellow charlock—gathered there  
By angel-hand with tender care,  
In fresh, unfading beauty grew,  
Imperishably bright and new,  
Though now no wind of morning strayed  
‘ Mid opening petals, and the dew  
That evening dropped with dreamful shade  
Fell only in unflowering grass.

Slow-passing through the portal, soon  
She rested in the pillared cool:  
As oft 'neath arching boughs at noon,  
By some fern-shadowed forest pool,  
Her heart had drunk the breathing calm  
Of solitude, so now, alone  
Among the soaring groves of stone,

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

The silence filled her soul like balm.  
No longer chant or surging psalm  
Waked echoes round the dusky shrine  
Of those who bear the martyr's palm,  
Which burgeoned in the hands divine  
That meekly drove the humble tool.

Above her burned the northern rose  
Wherein, enthroned for evermore,  
Our Lady of the Seven Woes,  
Who earth's grey wreath of sorrows bore,  
Reigns; while, with plumage never dim,  
The four white doves, with pinions spread,  
Enaureoled, hover round her head;  
And angel-hosts and cherubim  
Before her bow; and seraphim  
With radiant many-folded wings  
Eternally her glory hymn;  
And patriarchs and crownèd kings

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Through everlasting day adore.

Slowly the clustering shadows crept  
Round Armelin, so still and white:  
And slowly, flowing darkly, swept  
Through choir and nave the tide of night;  
Till, looking upward, she could see  
The branchèd vault no longer clear,  
As though each mighty, soaring pier  
Pillared unknown eternity;  
Whence, dropping ever-silently,  
Peace fell upon her woe like dew,  
And in dark, mournful ecstasy  
She dreamed, and comfort filled anew  
Her soul long-parched in ruthless light.

Arising, with slow steps she sought  
The place where tapers starred the gloom,  
Clear and unwavering fires, uncaught



## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Within the censers' fitful fume—  
Where man's undying worship, ere  
The ages out of darkness came,  
Had burned a druid-kindled flame.  
Thither came Armelin, and there  
She kneeled. Upon the wings of prayer  
Her faithful spirit fluttering soared,  
Lest dawn should bring some fresh despair,  
In lonely vigil for her lord  
Who strove against embattled doom.

Her white hands folded o'er her breast,  
She prayed, and in the dusk they seemed  
Like snowy plumes of doves at rest;  
While on her hair the gold light gleamed,  
Unhindered by her loosened veil,  
From countless votive flames that kept  
A vigil bright for maids who slept,  
For love's lone watchnight all too frail;

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

And over her in moonlit mail,  
With blue wings crossed, a seraph shone:  
As ever o'er the darkest dale  
Burns one clear star when day is gone,  
Within the night his glory streamed.

### III.

She prayed until the midnight hour  
Unceasing, though in weariness  
Her head sank, like a drooping flower,  
Upon her shadow-broidered dress:  
When, clanging loudly through the night,  
Full-wide the western door was flung;  
And shrill the startled portal rung  
With mailed tramp, and quivered bright  
With glint of steel and torches' light,  
That leapt in flaming tongues of red  
O'er war-stained casques and faces white,

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

The gold smoke moving overhead,  
A glowing cloud above the press.  
Slow-wavering through the pillared aisle,  
The shadows shrank before the glare,  
As if to shelter yet awhile  
The queen with her lone sorrow there ;  
She rose and looked with pale surprise,  
For unto her the pageant seemed  
Some strange, bewildering vision dreamed  
At midnight, which her waking eyes  
Would scatter, as the light that dies  
On the low edge of some dark shower,  
Or as the gleaming bow that flies  
The sun's increasing gold of power  
O'er blue seas glittering mile on mile.  
  
But suddenly a new despair  
Laid icy clutch upon her heart,  
And moved cold fingers through her hair ;

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Within her quivering breast a dart  
Of dread more swiftly, keenly stung :  
She knew not whence it came nor why,  
Only it seemed that she must die ;  
Her life for one dark moment hung  
Upon a slender thread that swung  
Over the still abyss of death ;  
Then life's returning tempest wrung  
Her bosom, and with sobbing breath  
She watched, in silence and apart :

When slowly through the open door  
She saw in long procession come  
War-weary knights who silent bore  
A shrouded form, in sorrow dumb,  
On lance-locked shields, that 'neath the weight  
Of death's sad burden bended not ;  
The fitful torches, flickering, shot  
Red gleams about the sombre state

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Of him who shelter sought so late  
Within the shadowy house of God  
From random-flying shafts of fate,  
That ever strew the kindred sod  
With shattered splendours, pale and numb.

Through all the echoing nave, unstayed,  
They moved with solemn pacing slow ;  
Before the altar-steps they laid  
Their purple-shrouded burden low ;  
Then, one by one, about it kneeled—  
In silence of heart-breathèd prayer  
That struggled blind with blind despair—  
Each mailèd knight with head on shield,  
Subdued at last in sorrow's field ;  
And, sadly, spake a voice forlorn :—  
“ Him only unto God we yield.  
Here we may watch with him, till morn  
Awake the slumbering town to woe.”

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Then from a neighbouring pillar's shade,  
Before the words in murmur died,  
Moved Armelin, and all dismayed  
The knights fell back on either side  
As from some midnight phantasy ;  
Half-turning in the flickering light,  
She stood before them frail and white,  
Saying : " Go rest, who faithfully  
Have borne my fallen lord to me ;  
To-morrow round the stricken throne  
Your subject grief may bend the knee ;  
To-night my heart would keep alone  
The vigil of the widowed bride."

### IV.

Unquestioning, they rose, and stole  
Into the starry night once more . . .  
To Armelin it seemed the whole

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Of life closed with the closing door,  
That shut without the breathing world.  
She only knew that, with sheathed sword,  
Before the altar lay her lord,  
The banner of his glory furled ;  
While yet, above him hovering, curled  
The fume of smouldering torches dim ;  
And, as she moved, the darkness swirled  
About her, till she came to him,  
And, bending, murmured " Pellinore ! "

She drew the mantle from his face,  
But naught to her the dusk revealed.  
With trembling hand she sought to trace  
The features hid ; the cold lips sealed  
Her fingers touching—swift she pressed  
Her own lips to them ; with hot breath  
She kissed, as though she strove with death  
From his embrace her lord to wrest.

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

Awhile, with breast to his cold breast,  
She lay, as though in slumber fair,  
With low, soft breathing, undistressed.  
Unloosened fell her showering hair,  
A dim gold cloud upon the shield.

How long in tranced dream she lay  
She knew not ; nor if time swift fled,  
Nor whether it were night or day.  
She only knew that he was dead,  
And waiting o'er : that, in the end,  
Because she cried upon his name,  
From out the 'wildering night he came  
Strife-worn to her, that she might bend  
With love o'er him and gently tend  
His body through the last calm hours ;  
Death waiting by her like a friend.  
She only knew that all her powers  
Drifted, with ebbing life, away.



## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

But as the waking-dream of dawn  
Fell, quivering, through the radiant glass,  
She rose, and, for a while withdrawn,  
She watched the mournful shadows pass  
From his white face. Then, with a smile,  
She drew his sword and swiftly pressed  
Sharp death to her unflinching breast ;  
And sank low by his side, the while  
Slowly through nave and choir and aisle  
The dimness moved, and wan light filled  
The dark ; grey pillars, file on file,  
Loomed out ; and, o'er the sleepers stilled,  
Spread the far roof's high, vaulted mass.

Then all the eastern windows flamed  
Triumphal with arising morn,  
And sunlight-stricken hues proclaimed  
The miracle of day new-born ;  
Again within the soaring choir,

## THE QUEEN'S VIGIL

With sapphire wings no longer dim,  
Flashed out the blazoned seraphim,  
Burning with sheer, celestial fire ;  
With silent harp and muted lyre,  
Young angels in clear-shining green  
Glowed fresh and bright as love's desire,  
Above the sleeping king and queen,  
By strife and sorrow overworn.

# King Hermaunce

## *A Chorus*

[Hermaunce, King of the Red City, whilst drinking from a spring in the forest after the heat of the chase, was stabbed by his two foster-sons. As he lay sore wounded, a knight rode by, who, seeing the dying king, bore him swiftly to the Red Ship, which rode at anchor in the bay, and laid him on his golden bed therein. With his last breath the King commanded the knight to pen a letter appealing to the knights of King Arthur's Court to avenge his murder. Then the Red Ship put out to sea, the dread missive folded in the hand of the slain King. The vessel came to shore in the mouth of the Humber, and Sir Palomides receiving the fateful summons at once set sail for the Red City, slew the usurpers, and freed the people from their thrall.]

KING Hermaunce puts out to sea ;

*The sea is grey beneath the wind.*

King Hermaunce of the Red City !

Mariners, mariners, where are your songs when  
the wind is filling the blood-red sails ?

King Hermaunce in his Ship of Red ;

*The sea is grey beneath the wind.*

## KING HERMAUNCE

King Hermaunce on his golden bed,  
'Tween the low grey sky and the wide grey sea,  
the moaning water and wind that wails !

Where are your kinsmen, King Hermaunce ?

*The sea is grey beneath the wind.*

Who swung the sword and who thrust the lance  
In splendid tourney and desperate fray, to win  
you honour and pride of name ?

Where is the crown that crowned your head ?

*The sea is grey beneath the wind.*

Why are your eyes so still and so dread ?

Why is your harness so dulled with blood, and  
who hath broken your sword of fame ?

Why did you lag in the greenwood chase ?

*The sea is grey beneath the wind.*

What is the shadow that covers your face ?

Why are your lips so cold and blue that leant  
so red to the spring-waters clear ?

## KING HERMAUNCE

Why did you leave your golden throne ?

*The sea is grey beneath the wind.*

Where are the sons you called your own ?

Who rules your kingdom and lords your house,  
and harries the heart of your people with  
fear ?

King Hermaunce puts out to sea ;

*The sea is grey beneath the wind.*

King Hermaunce of the Red City !

How shall the slayer escape the slain ? From  
the hand of the dead what cunning shall  
save ?

King Hermaunce in his Ship of Red ;

*The sea is grey beneath the wind.*

King Hermaunce on his golden bed !

The dead shall cry, and the just shall heed, and  
the Knight-Avenger shall cross the wave !

## The Wanderer

I know not what I follow; yet each morn  
My pack I lift, and take the road that leads  
I know not whither, through what wilds forlorn,  
By what drear waste of winter-flooded meads,  
Beyond what snow-bright peaks in lucent airs  
upborne.

By raven-haunted pinnacles of stone,  
Through vast, eternal solitudes I pass  
Where all day long across bleak ridges lone  
The keen wind shivers through the withering  
grass,  
Then dies down craggy aisles with low, cold,  
shuddering moan;

## THE WANDERER

Through valleys glooming black with leafless  
trees;

Across wild uplands, gleaming mile on mile  
With billowy drifts that under starlight freeze,  
Wave after wave, with no dark, cleaving isle—  
Like some untraversed world of unknown polar  
seas.

And I have fought the tempest on the height,  
The bitter, stinging snow that blinding swirls  
Over the moorlands, blotting out the light;  
Then, sweeping on, in wilder tumult whirls  
Across the further fells with desolating flight:

The while I heard Death moving through the  
blast

With dry, cold rustling of deep-drifting snow,  
And thought to look upon him and at last  
The end of all my wandering to know;  
But ever muffled close in cloudy robes he passed.

## THE WANDERER

Or by dark winter seas beneath the stars  
I strayed, and saw white-curdling waters lash  
Along black reefs, whereon grey ribs and spars  
Of wrecks forlorn for ever toss and crash  
On heaving waves among the jagged, seaworn  
scars.

Yet not all-songless lies the way before,  
And, though for me the southern-hearted bird  
May sing o'er moonlit waters nevermore,  
By misty northern firths at dawn I heard  
The long, cool-piping call of curlews by the  
shore.

And I have seen—when soft the west winds  
blow  
With kindlier breath, and plumed with dove-grey  
showers—  
Pale-glinting sunbeams light the perfect bow,



## THE WANDERER

Rekindling irised hopes of April hours,  
Above wet, glistening wastes of slowly-melting  
snow.

I know not what I follow; yet each day  
Eternal impulses more keenly urge  
My eager steps along the wandering way  
That runs unwearied ever on the verge  
Of far, gold-quivering dawns, beyond horizons  
grey.

From storm to storm, yet brighter from the  
stress  
Of scathing winds, in me the live flame leaps,  
That under laden boughs beneath the press  
Of summer hours, beside leaf-shadowed deeps,  
Slow sank and smouldered dim, grown dull with  
heaviness;

## THE WANDERER

While every dream that through the dusky  
maze

Of tangled branches fluttered on faint wings  
Scales now with eagle flight the windy ways;  
Each morn some more triumphal vision springs  
To quivering life, and soars with seraph wings  
ablaze.

Shall all this winter wandering naught avail—  
The perils in the wilderness; the sheer  
Snow-silent solitudes of hill and dale;  
The day-long strife with elements; the clear  
Unfaltering quest of faith along the unknown  
trail?

## Salve Regina !'

ABOVE the forest, fleece on fleece  
Of golden cloud and fire on fire  
Stream upward from the sinking sun.  
In breathless ecstasy of peace  
Day dies ; and, all day-labour done  
In harvest-field and barn and byre,  
The brown lay-brothers troop to prayer ;  
And slowly through the echoing choir  
Rises the hymn of Mary, where  
Rank upon rank, in white arrayed—  
Their long day's silence grown to song—  
Like spirit-forms the fathers throng,  
And, glimmering in the dimness, fade.

SALVE REGINA

Deep-throated through the air  
Their chanting surges loud and long :—

*Dulcis Virgo Maria,*

*Ora pro nobis,*

*Sancta Dei genetrix !*

Like poplars swaying in the gloom  
Beneath the wind of evening bowed,  
The white-robed monks in silence bend :  
Then, rising, through the dusk they loom,  
Unto the prayer's low-breathèd end  
Chanting yet louder and more loud—  
Each brawny, bearded brother strong  
With toiling under sun and cloud,  
Deep-voiced as wind, thick boughs among ;  
Till, as the angelus of rest  
Rings out unto the lonely star  
That hangs above the cloudy bar  
Of purple glowing in the West,

SALVE REGINA

Slow sinks at last the song,  
In echoes dying, strange and far :—

*Dulcis Virgo Maria,*

*Ora pro nobis,*

*Sancta Dei genatrix !*

*La Trappe, August, 1901.*

## Tivoli

ACROSS the vast Campagna, coloured still  
With shadows of the early flooding seas  
That flowed above it in the ancient days,  
To Tivoli, a city built in dreams  
Above the pillared streams  
Of waters falling through the leafy maze  
Of sea-green olive trees  
That shade with moving dusk her throning hill,  
We strayed one April morn.  
Behind us lay the legend of old Rome :  
The grey, o'erwhelming dome,  
Tombing dead empires sprung of deathless  
deeds  
To sheer disaster. From the storied gloom,

## TIVOLI

Earth-mounded triumphs and time-trampled  
state,

And memories forlorn  
Of battles bright with banners, and the wild  
Victorious youth of heroes born  
To mighty peril and star-trammelled fate,  
We wandered with eyes bright  
And hearts a-hunger for the shrill  
Cool piping of Italian reeds,  
That shook from olive-clouded vale and hill  
Ere Italy, clear-dreaming as a child,  
Arose and struggled with her splendid doom.

We climbed the hill and wandered through dim  
groves

Of olive trees with twisted roots upreared—  
Enchanted dryads striving to be free,  
Their yearning forms by fiery passion seared ;  
And every little leaf of every tree

## TIVOLI

Quivered with breath and murmured of old  
loves.

Bewildered by vague fears  
Of some lone wood-god stirred  
From darkling slumber in the deep of years ;  
Alert for sounds unheard ;  
And quaking at the flight  
Of every startled bird ;  
We fled across a striding bridge,  
And rested panting on a ridge  
In showering April light.

Then suddenly before our wondering eyes  
We saw, sun-trancèd, rise  
Fair Tivoli, a city built in dreams  
Unto the music of her falling streams,  
That thunder from her craggy steep  
And, flashing, plunge where groves of shadow  
sleep.



## TIVOLI

Through all the murmurous noon we lay,  
And watched the rainbow-coloured spray  
From snowy tumult leap,  
As if some caverned spirit strove to fling  
Some living drops on Vesta's pillared height,  
To waken once again that early spring  
When in her sacred house  
From maiden-gathered boughs  
The live flame burst to light eternity.

O temple of grey stone  
By roving winds o'erblown,  
Thine altars cold, thy secret places bare  
To every wandering air ;  
From northern hills to thee  
My spirit turns ;  
Thy long-forsaken fire  
New-lit within me burns

## TIVOLI

With all the keen desire  
Of all the virgin eyes that kindled to the light  
Through slow, unfaltering days,  
Or watched with steadfast gaze  
The clear flame leaping in the heart of night.

## Wayfaring

I CAME upon her where the poppies lighted  
League after league of green with flames of red.  
She looked across the windy morn clear-sighted,  
With gleaming throat and lily-lifted head,

Like some fresh-waking flower at dawn discovered  
Within a lone, wild place of quivering dew.  
About her eyes a fluttering laughter hovered,  
Then faded as a bird's flight in the blue.

I passed unknown, yet still my heart remembers  
Through wandering years—though other faces  
rise  
With passionate, burning eyes aglow like  
embers—  
The calm of blue winds folded in her eyes.

## The Singers

WHEN God had loosed the choral spheres  
To sweep through spacious night,  
One laggard star that, swerving, soared,  
He plucked from out the flight.

He brake its fire between His hands;  
It fell in shredded flame:  
On bridled winds across the void  
The sons of singing came,

To rule the world by right of song,  
To raze the forts of death,  
And hurl high-throned oblivion down  
With storm of chanting breath.

## The Eternal Way

O WHITHER goest Thou, little Child?

*From Bethlehem to Calvary.*

The way is peril-set and wild,  
Thy young feet stumble piteously;  
Turn Thou that I may shelter Thee.

O whither goest Thou, Son of Man?

*From Bethlehem to Calvary.*

What bitter doom of fate doth ban  
Thy body to the branchèd tree?  
Turn Thou that I may shelter Thee.

**THE ETERNAL WAY**

**O whither goest Thou, fair young God?**

*From Bethlehem to Calvary.*

**None follows where Thy feet have trod ;**

**In Thy lone immortality**

**No heart of man may shelter Thee.**

## Song

If once I could gather in song  
A flower from my garden of dreams—  
The dew from its petals unshaken,  
When starry and bright they awaken—  
All men to the wonder would throng.

Though ever at dawning I go  
By the marge of the life-giving streams  
That, shadowed by blossoms upspringing,  
Remember the hills in their singing,  
The fells of their birth in their flow;

Or early or late though I fare  
To gather my garden of dreams  
For the barren, forsaken and lonely;  
I bring from the shadow-world only  
Pale blossoms that perish in air.

## The Waters of Lethe

An unending procession of souls descends to the river ;  
Shadow-Spirits hover restlessly above the valley.

### *The Shadow-Spirits.*

HITHER they wander with bewildered eyes,  
Where no light falls from vague, unmoving  
skies ;

Where sun nor moon nor any starry gleam  
Pierces the flowing darkness of the stream :  
Hither they wander—faltering, crownless kings ;  
Queens pale with peril ; warriors battle-worn ;  
Strayed, wondering children, frail with earthly  
tears ;

Old men and lone, a-weary of wise years  
And labourings long ;  
Lovers forlorn  
From their bright passion torn ;



## THE WATERS OF LETHE

And poets rapt with dream,  
Whose lips yet quiver with the dying song,  
Whose fingers tremble yet among unsounding  
strings.

Hither they wander from the light of day  
Down to dark waters ; standing on the shore,  
They dream awhile of griefs grown old and grey  
And sorrows that will shake their hearts no  
more ;

Then leaning low  
To Lethe's dim, un murmuring flow,  
They drink oblivion, gliding far away,  
Whither our wavering flight  
May never hope to stray.  
For we on earth ne'er turned  
To any timeless star,  
But ever followed far  
Each meteor-flame that burned

## THE WATERS OF LETHE

Awhile within the night ;  
Till, yielding up our breath,  
We heard the voice of doom :—  
“ Ye shall not pass the gloom  
That lies 'twixt life and death ;  
But, pale, wind-hovering ghosts,  
Shall wander ever the sea  
Of darkness washing between  
The perilous, pinnacled coasts  
Of time and eternity.  
In the valley of death shall ye keep  
Your vigil, but never of sleep  
Shall ye drink, though your dry hearts yearn,  
And your grey lips wither and burn ;  
Never your sorrow shall lean  
To the cool-flowing waters and deep.”

*A Warrior.*

So swiftly have I travelled from the light

## THE WATERS OF LETHE

Into this silent vale of shadowy fears,  
Mine eyes yet throb with sun ; the din of fight  
Yet pulses in mine ears.  
Through the fell forest of the foeman-spears  
I rode exulting ; in the clash of swords  
I triumphed over battle-famous lords,  
And slew the pride of many a glittering knight ;  
Till, plunging ever deeper in the stress,  
I fell beneath a sure, unswerving blade  
Into this valley of forgetfulness,  
Wherein I wander, through vast groves of shade,  
Seeking the flower of love I cast aside  
For flash of swords and banners proud unfurled—  
The white flower-face that, in my dream of pride,  
Of conquered cities and a cowering world,  
I left forsaken.

Lo, before me flows  
A stream of deep sweet waters, and my lips,

## THE WATERS OF LETHE

Thirsting, drink restfulness ; a dull eclipse  
Shadows the sun of battle ; bright the rose  
Of love unfolds about me, and the gloom  
Quivers with opening glories ; darkness glows  
To one fire-hearted, splendour-petalled bloom !

### *Shadow-Spirits.*

Beyond the valley shade  
He looks with kindling eyes,  
Who ever unafraid  
Rode under earthly skies,  
Nor ever, daunted, turned  
From out the path of strife  
While yet within him burned  
The passionate fire of life.  
O that we too might stand  
Amid unrustling reeds,  
That banner with dark plumes the shadowy  
strand !

## THE WATERS OF LETHE

O that we too might lean,  
The willow boughs between,  
To gather in cupped hand  
The ever-flowing silence of the river  
That, songless, lightless, through the valley  
          speeds !

O that we too might glide,  
With eager eyes and happy lips a-quiver,  
Into the mist that veils the further side !

### *A Maiden.*

Ah, whither, whither hath his spirit fled ?  
In vain, in vain my fearful, faltering haste  
Through the lone hills, across the sunless waste,  
Down this deep valley, where I thought to see,  
Beyond the shade of each dark, drooping tree,  
His bright soul lighting as a flaming sword  
The dusky groves of death.  
Swift have I followed, but too fleet he sped ;

## THE WATERS OF LETHE

As e'er on earth amid the warrior-horde  
I followed in the triumph of my lord,  
Bright-eyed, with panting breath ;  
Until one day from the disastrous field  
I saw his body on a litter borne ;  
But loosened was the soul that would not yield—  
His eyes as forest pools of light forlorn ;  
And, gazing in their depths, I could not mourn  
The broken sword, the battle-riven shield.  
My life fell from me as a grief outworn,  
And, like a star that flies through perilous night,  
My spirit shaken free  
Followed his fleet-winged soul in its victorious  
flight.

O darkling waters dumbly flowing,  
Hold ye the secret of his travelling feet ?  
Hath any sun of splendour glowing  
Troubled with glories fleet

## THE WATERS OF LETHE

Your swift, unrippling flood? Hath any leant  
Low in the reeds that shiver on the brink,  
Your brimming rapture of deep peace to drink?  
O willows, where your pendent branches trail  
Unwithering tresses in the flowing stream,  
I dip my hands, grown shadowlike and pale,  
To lift the waters, dropping without gleam,  
Unto my drinking lips. The shadows fail;  
Old sorrows scatter as a dream at waking:  
O flame of joy, the folded darkness shaking!  
O hills of peace that, dawning, calmly rise!  
Beneath your shelter, in a dreaming vale,  
He waits me with bright welcome in his eyes.

### *Shadow-Spirits.*

One moment pausing with uplifted hands,  
Aflame with love she stands;  
Then, clothed with love as with exultant light,  
She passes from our sight,

## THE WATERS OF LETHE

While deeper darkness closes round our woe,  
Our woe that never dies,  
Though shed in your swift night old sorrows  
drown.

O stream of Lethe, all the gathered tears  
Of all the travailing world ; grey age's labouring  
years ;  
The king's cold state ; the poet's burning crown ;  
The glittering woe that love's wild rapture weaves  
Fall, withering like September-frosted leaves,  
By winds unshaken, fluttering idly down,  
And mingle in your dark oblivious flow.

### *An Old Man.*

Sleep, sleep at last—untroubled, starless, deep,  
Eternal slumber flowing without dream !  
O Lethe, long by divers paths and steep  
My feet have sought the solace of your stream :  
Wearied my soul of straining for the light,



## THE WATERS OF LETHE

That never clove the mist with dawning gleam ;  
Mine eyes have searched the vast, aërial night,  
The glittering desolation of the stars,  
The white-ridged winter of the barren moon ;  
And looked upon the shadows of the sun.  
The mailèd earth no secret held for me ;  
I pierced the terror of her ancient scars,  
The hunger of her heart's devouring fires.  
I fathomed ocean's dim-lit mystery ;  
And through the glow of man's triumphal noon  
I saw the naked bones of his desires,  
And how his grief from early joy was wrought,  
His peace by passion spun.  
With labour keen I taught my feet to climb,  
Mine eyes to scan, unfaltering, without fear,  
The ice-bound pinnacles of space and time :  
Yet never from the peak my spirit caught  
The flame of wings celestial, or the clear  
Ethereal music of god-driven cars,

## THE WATERS OF LETHE

Nor unto bright, immortal rapture won.  
Now, now the false lights fail; vain rumours  
cease :

Unto sure rest, at last, forlorn I creep.  
I drink of your unfathomable deep,  
O flowing stream of peace !  
I sink, I sink in sleep.

### *The Shadow-Spirits.*

Sleep, sleep! O stream, do your dark waters  
hold  
None other solace for the eyes that weep?  
Shall they who sow in sorrow only reap  
Thy grey, unflowering, cold  
Harvest of shadows and eternal sleep ?

### *A Post.*

O valley, beautiful from time's dim birth,  
With feet of white souls passing! O deep  
groves,

## THE WATERS OF LETHE

Still tremulous with the gust of passionate flames

Of song-remembered loves,

And heroes whose bright names

Still kindle in the memory of the earth !

O Lethe flood,

At touch of whose swift waters the frail bud

Of earth-born beauty breaks into unwithering  
flower !

Amid your glooms I follow, follow still,

Beauty, whose wandering strays

My feet have ever sought through life's dream-  
haunted ways ;

Beauty that, earthward raining hour by hour,

Lights in a dewy shower

In some green dell, and flows

From flower to tree,

From tree to forest-covered vale and hill,

Flooding the earth with ecstasy, and glows

From valleys unto uplands peaked with snows ;

## THE WATERS OF LETHE

Then, streaming higher,  
Flushes her native skies with cloudy fire,  
That, falling, drowns in the all-gathering sea,  
To dawn a moon-pale spirit in the night.

O ever-flowing colour, changing form,  
Wind-flying flame, blue-soaring melody,  
The star of love's bright being and the light  
On sleeping children's faces,  
Bloom of the desert places, the wild gleam  
Cleaving the midnight fury of the storm—  
Beauty that, flying, taught my feet to follow  
Through winter waste, and summer-dreaming  
hollow :

Your torch hath lighted even death's still gloom,  
And led where shadows brim  
Dark Lethe's silent stream.

O waters dim  
With old heroic sorrow, starless grief,

## THE WATERS OF LETHE

That drank of you oblivion's dull relief,  
Steal not from me, with slumber-breathing fume,  
Or soul-dissolving dream,  
The gleaming wind, the flower, the flying star  
My life has followed through lone years and far.

Cool, cool the waters to my lips ; a veil  
Falls from mine eyes ; beyond the gloom I see,  
No longer faltering, frail,  
The sheer, divine imperishable might  
Of Beauty thronèd in eternity.

### *The Shadow-Spirits.*

O that our wings might tire  
And falter in their flight ;  
The wandering desire  
Die down within our breast  
The keen, devouring fire

**THE WATERS OF LETHE**

**Perish in your deep night !**

**We crave no rapture bright,**

**O stream, beyond your shore ;**

**Only for evermore**

**To drink, 'mid pale souls leaning, of your dark  
waters rest.**

## Elegy

UNLOOSE the eager boat ;  
Let her white sails unfurl  
Where amber islands float  
In sunset seas of pearl.

Too long her restless prow  
Has chafed on alien strands ;  
The night shall waft her now  
Beyond bleak, mortal lands.

Where azure deeps afar  
Break into golden foam,  
Will dawn the pilot star,  
To draw her glad sails home.

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