First Poems

Ruth Pitter



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THE CONSUMMATION

FIRST POEMS

BY

RUTH PITTER

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F I R S T
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C O P Y
R I G H T

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FAIRY-GOLD

I have a brother cleped Fairy-Gold,
Who dwelleth not in housen nor with men,
But in the dim wood and the forest hold;
Full fair is he in form: full young, full old;
Of all the wild things in the grot and glen,
Of many a brown shy wood-bird am I told,
Of every leaf and blade on fell and fen,
I have a brother cleped Fairy-Gold.

And all that e'er was made in nature's mould,
And everything of beauty she doth own
Is but a part of gentle Fairy-Gold,
Whose murmured tale to those who hear is told,
Whose varied beauty to the wind is thrown,
Whose eyes smile forth from copses dark and old—
Or are they flowers in wind-swept riot grown?
Both flowers, and eyes of laughing Fairy-Gold.

The kind earth to her bosom doth him fold,
Her light swift hands, the breezes, stroke his hair,
Which glow of yellow wheat doth catch and hold,
And down in rich and heavy locks is rolled:
He is for mortal eyes but all too fair,
He hath not age: I in his haunts am told
By myriad voices whispering in the air,
I have a brother cleped Fairy-Gold.

1912.

THE GOD

What eyes look thus upon the earth,
What eyes, which lack the smart of tears?
Even the eyes of the god's soul.
O wisdom, sweet of many lives,
O love of many thousand years!

Whose mind hath not the biting woe,
Whose mind is all unstirred of fears?
Even the mind of the tried god.
O knowledge of thy many lives,
O calm of many thousand years!

Who knoweth the lore of all the stars,
Who hath the eyes of all the seers?

Even the god who passeth all,
O thought and light of many lives,
Perfect from many thousand years!

1913.

THE SWAN

With his red beak and marble plume,
Uttering his wild, his pulsant cry,
The Swan into the wild did fly.
Into the fiery dawn rode he,
And many burning cherubim
That know the face of the Most High,
In godlike flight did go with him.

1913.

THE OAK

O blessed and thrice blessed evermore
To grow old in the chaste immutable silence,
Thinking thine own thoughts! At the golden door
Of thine own glade the quiet sunbeams pour,
And thou look'st out across the hazy plain
From the cool greenness of thine ancient throne:
Where is the biting winter? neither pain
Nor vain regrets in thy deep heart remain,
Nor dost thou count the weary drooping years
In slow and miserly cycle one by one.

1913.

SONG

Grieve no more for the silent dead;
They have fled from the earth—
Yea, have fled!
Nay, never grieve more.
All our crystal and golden lore,
What does it boot to grief or mirth?

These but leaves of the autumn are,
Gone far from our ken—
Yea, gone far!
Past, and too soon forgot:
Dry thy tears and grieve thou not,
Think no more upon troubled men.

1912.

EXILE

The pine wood ceased on the crest of the down;
Flames of heather and furze had died
With the vanished light of the burning day,
And all was still; but far away
Glimmered the roofs of a fairy town.

The exile climbed from the sombre trees
To the open hill; and the rags he bore,
Fluttering out along the sky,
Black as all else that passed thereby,
Waved like slashed trappings in the breeze.

He paused: that happy and halcyon land
Wavered with colour like the sea,
Trembled with hues we cannot know,
Gleamed with many a spire of snow
Fashioned from air by an airy hand.

He watched it there with his half-shut eyes
Till the rapt glow in heaven did fade,
And every roof all gemmed and bright
Melted into the sapphire night,
And the wan mists did all arise.

The wind awoke, and with mighty tone
Ran on the hill and into the dark,
Calling well to his playmates there,
Stirring the draping rags and hair,
And saying with deep voice, Begone.

1913.

HARMONY

I heard a child upon an instrument
Make broken melody,
And sighed for all the glory that might be
Could that clear soul with cunning art be blent:
But never man did see
So high perfection in simplicity,
And my hope went.

1912.

THE BOOK

When one looketh in a well
He in the shining surface sees
The sky's face and the clustered trees
Reflected in the dark roundel,
And clouds that in the heaven dwell,
But tenderer, and passing clear;
Such are the words that wanton here.

1914.

THE ELFIN HEART

They that have the elfin heart
Cannot weep;
In the desert they would sleep
While the lion watched apart;
And when tears of mortals start
Silence keep.

They have eyen dark and deep,
And their look
As a pool in forest brook,
As a tarn on mountain steep,
As a spell, doth calmness keep,
Sealéd book!

Who are they? O brethren, tell!
Do ye know
Why the winter's folding snow
And the wild wolves' hungry yell
Fright them not, and where they go
Sans farewell?

All their ways with flowers strow,
For they see
What to us is mystery,
Far forgotten, long ago;
Neither have they friend nor foe;
Elfin heart I may not know
Pity me!

1914.

THE DEAD FAY

At matins and evensong
Pray ye for a faery soul!
If the day be long
With grief and dole
May your hearts be strong;
Pray ye deep and well,
Yea, pray deep,
For low in the dell
Doth a dead fay sleep.

Light and shimmering dance;
Light danced he on moor and lea!
O'er the river's glance,
And the green sea:
And now lies still
By the bitter cress and brier,
By the slow and shallow rill,
That from out the thymy hill
Flows, from elfin forge and fire;
Pray aloud, and say,
"Farewell, O thou dancing fay!"

Canst thou, priest, for wandering sprite
Say a mass?
He dwelt not in house at night,
But, in light
Eager mazes swiftly going,
Danced on mountain and morass;
Give him, father, of thy prayer,
For he was most brightly fair:
Yet, priest, if thou will not pray,
Thou'lt not compass his undoing.

At matins and evensong,
With mass and requiem

Say, “For soul of errant fay,
For a leaf plucked from the stem,
For a spirit bright as day
Do we pray”:
And the brier and bitter cress
By his side
Both put on a sober dress;
In the tide
Of the slow and shallow rill
Every herb his tears doth spill:
Every herb that decks the dell
Scattereth all his gems, and saith,
“Weep we for a faery’s death!
Fay, farewell!”

THE CARELESS SPIRIT

The little bright fairy
Never singeth “Ave Mary,”
For in the wood both blithe and dim
What needs he of chant or hymn?
But every flower shall be his bed,
And he shall sing
A song of every living thing,
And on the moss shall fleetly tread;
But since thou be not fairy,
On thy knees sing “Ave Mary.”

The steadfast violet
Shall upon his brow be set,
Even though he faithless be
Ever to flit from tree to tree;
But he shall rest upon the one
That blossoms white,
The hawthorn, tree of dear delight,

And there shall sing unto the sun:
But shivering misers, thin and wary,
Needs must sing an “Ave Mary.”

1914.

FAREWELL

My portion has been joy, but woe
Will come full soon.
Serene as any winter moon
Have been my years, and coursing slow.
But all my vestment gold and blue
I must put off, and take to me
Your sad dull raiment void of hue,
O paradise, from thee I go,
And world so grievous, hail to thee!

O fools that never look with pain
On what has been!
My playmates all, with joyous mien,
Haste to their realm of mist and rain;
While I do grieve to pipe no more
Of all that glad and gay may be
And all that world of happy lore;
From sunny woods I am not fain
To voyage on the winter sea.

1914.

SEPTEMBER NIGHT

If that you ride by road or lane
In the September dark,
When there is neither mist nor rain,

And nothing can you mark
But a tall darkness for a tree,
And for the road a gleam of white,
And scent of leaves breathed heavily,
It is a fairy night.

Brief is the kingdom—nine hours long—
That the good people hold,
But it is full of whispered song,
In the crisp breezes cold.
And every dell, a darkling round
Of shadow, when the moon is none,
Holdeth a little chattering sound,
Which cometh, and is gone.

1914.

JUNE

Now from remotest hiding-place
Comes every fay, comes every flower's soul.
Lo by the brooks, how disks of moonlit lace
Veil all the waters' hidden, sleeping face:
And from the summer's long-forgotten store
Is given lavish dole:
June now doth scatter gold behind her and before.

The daisy, like a cherubim's countenance
Shining, and girt with rayed and shining wings,
And melilot, slender and yellow-haired,
And light-hung grasses in their airy dance,
And flowering reed that by the river sings,
And buttercups, in web of light ensnared,
And the chaste flower-de-luce so clear in hue,
Stand all like thoughtful sprites upon the mead,
Wondering at heaven, so smiling in their view;

Nor to the autumn give they any heed.

1914.

IN THE FIELD

If the dandelion tall
Hath a yellow and shining head,
It is because he hath lately seen
One who came, passed and fled
Swiftly under the side of the wall
In a gold crown and a robe of green.

And if the heather and green gorse dark
Can shine at will in colours fair,
It is because far Paradise floor
Hanging aloft in the evening air,
They have seen, and hasten to mark
Themselves its pavement and wall and door.

If there are small flowers blue and red,
Five-fold about their inner whorl,
And dight so well in leaf and blade,
It is that they have seen unfurl
High in the dark arch overhead,
Many a five-fold Star displayed.

And if the tree on the eastern hill
Looketh him forth so steadfastly
And silently doth ponder all,
It is because the spirits free
That the whole earth do make and fill,
In all his branches cry and call.

1914.

THE KNIGHTLY DAMOISEAU

There was a knightly damoiseau,
And Godfrey de la Tour he hight,
Who forth to range the wood did go,
Most brightly clad and bravely dight;
His surcoat silken, broad and white,
Embroidered was like hawthorn tree,
That blossometh in the yellow light
Pleasing the errant fly and bee.

And forth along the waters' marge,
With rushes set and fleurs-de-lys,
He rode with spear and leathern targe;
And well and manfully rode he
By flowering bush and budding tree,
Till the blue heaven 'gan to gloam,
Then turned him back and hied him home.

1914.

RONDEAU, TO THE LUTE

Sing sweet, my Lute, beside the way,
For thou and I must earn our bread.
Thou wilt be still when I am dead;
So, that thy singing with thee stay,

Sounding from morn to even gray,
Nor leave thee mourning music fled,
Sing sweet, my Lute, beside the way,
For thou and I must earn our bread.

Perchance some pensive slender fay,
Hearing us from his hidden bed,
Shall compass us with power dread,

That singing we shall fade away.

Sing sweet, my Lute, beside the way,
For thou and I must earn our bread.

1915.

ANDANTE

Now doth the heaviness of summer bloom
Die on the air, and from the neighbour wood
The brown earth good
Breathes sweeter incense, born of many leaves;
And every insect grieves
At coming frost, chill in the holly's gloom;
Flutters in paler light, then wraps her round
In her torn summer robe, and dies forlorn
Upon the dew-sprent ground.

The blue mist in the valley rises slow;
Rises till she attain the topmost tree
Of all that be
Upon the slopes of mead and stubble-field;
Then when the sun has wheeled
His round, now short and drooping very low,
Lies still and fills the vale from side to side,
And scents it with all sweets the heavens know
In any countryside.

1915.

MAN

Thy feet are set among the moss
That dwelleth on the clay,

Which is a cold uncomely dross;
Thine heart will ever stay
Among the flowers, two cubits high.
And thy majestic brow
Fronteth the awful arch of sky,
That is both high and low.

But thy most wonderful regard
Searcheth the universe;
Gold is, nor silver, cold and hard,
In this thy treasure-purse;
But a most puissant conquering love,
And royal air, whose state,
Mounting the whole of earth above,
Looks in at heaven's gate.

1915.

THE THORN

Down the dim wood, and in the dreaming ways,
High on the mountain mead and heathy hill,
Dwelleth the holy thorn beloved of fays,
Fit shelter for their frail eternal days.

And all his aspect is so wondrous still
That he might be a threaded tapestry
Wove part by ladies,' part by fairies' skill
To music of a slow and marish rill.

In his small blossoms greatest beauties be;
Five moonlight leaves, and tinct anon with red,
Likest in hue to syrens of the sea,
Whose limbs are rose, and polished ivory.

Perfumed is he, as fits a fairy's bed,

And honeyed for a fairy's sustenance.
All night he watches fays: when night is dead
Holy he keeps the ground whence they have fled.

Tend the tall thorn, and so avoid mischance,
High hedges and close bowers make ye of him,
That spirits may thy ghostly good enhance,
And fairy fend from thee the charging lance.

Within thy chapel walls, with incense dim,
Suffer his leaf and flowery stem to blow,
Upon the altar, and the carved font's rim,
So that wild fays may hear thy living hymn.

And when across the greenwood thou dost go
And seest his ruby fruit, bethink thee well,
"Even a spirit hath his proper woe,
Which I by these his heartës drops do know."

What is that woe is proof to woven spell?
What grief is never cured of singing lays?
Not to the mortal ear may spirits tell
That grief, which ringeth them eternal knell,
And makes of their wild eyes perpetual pain,
Which dieth not, as ours, and lives again,
But ever sighs upon the summer breeze,
And groaneth in the trees:
Still though thou be, verily thou art forlorn,
Beloved thorn!

1915.

THE REALM

England hath many an honest hand,
Or bare or silken gloved:

But what is there within the land
That she should be so well beloved?

And she hath many an haughty town
That liveth in her law,
But fairer is the linnet brown,
That singeth in the leafy shaw.

And she hath many a nobleman,
Ay, many, and to spare!
But better is the plowman Dan,
Though that he drive the earthy share:

For towns and noblemen are made
By silly fortune's dole,
But birds, and they who wield the spade,
They are green England's singing soul.

1915.

THE TOILER IN THE DARK

Beloved, cease thy slavery.
Dear and most godlike, never keep
Thine heart for sorrows less than thee.
Thou who by day wouldst cease to weep,
But who dost hug the dark, be free!

Thy countenance most kingly bends
Towards the earth; thy tressed hair
With tarnished gauds, unworthy, blends;
On shining shoulders dost thou bear
The woes and whelming tyrannies
Of this poor flesh that strives and dies:

Not knowing that all thy many bands

Are rotten through, and those grim shades
That ride thy back and bind thine hands,
Are of that realm that truth invades
And conquers with a heavenly might;
Lift up thine eyes: behold, the light!

1915.

THE KING

Never to rule with an iron stave,
Nor a sceptre of gold,
But with the skirt of his blue robe brave
To keep thee from the cold,
And for to hold thee from the grave
Within his vesture's fold,
Was made that sovereign that men have
These many summers told.

And never with gems crowned to be,
Nor with sable invest,
But with a branch of the brier tree
To adorn head and breast;
Yea, with a rod of the red rose,
And a wreath of the white,
He shall the whole of thee enclose
For a passing delight.

1915.

ENCHANTED

Of wight waylaid of faery, and of enchantments enchainéd,
What singeth one unto the height of heaven?
"This one boldly hath battled and this refrainéd";

O easily maketh a little man
The lay of a lounging courtesan!
But for a bewitching and a spell must seemly song be given.

The long and lingering eventide
In the wood did gild the grass;
And she, like to a shining bride,
To a moveless flame did pass,
And dead leaves were fashioned brass.

Thou Perkin, as men called thee,
Fully well didst know thy doom;
As stilly and as silently
As eglantine doth hold her bloom
Goldenly upon a gloom:

And with foreknowledge didst go
To the castles of thy kin,
That for lessening of their woe
Have no soul and little sin;
Prithee keep thou safe within!

Free of murder and of malice
Flowereth the common weed;
From a featly fashioned chalice
Faery foxglove sows her seed,
And is a royal herb indeed:

Didst thou of her purple reap,
That thou mightest never turn
To a warmly thatchéd sleep
And the cottage hearths that burn
Peat and furze and forest fern?

Ay perchance; what is a fire
Made of turves, of heavy smoke,

Smouldering in a cabined byre,
To the fires of faery folk
That the husbandmen invoke?

Pacing down the alleys green
Thou didst go, and now art lost
The beeches and the briers between,
And the dewy ways are crossed
Only by thy gentle ghost.

The large-eyed cony followeth
Where do walk thy quiet feet,
And unfearing of her death
Culleth her accustomed meat
In the even passing sweet.

The cloud beside the hill doth stand;
Thou beyond them both dost dwell
In a far and fairy land;
And yet dost sit beside the well
Darkling in the dimpled dell.

Thou dost turn thy wildling look
Gravely on a passing face;
Never man, in any book,
That most still regard may trace;
Stay thou thus a little space
Blessing all the neighbour place.

1915.

THE SINGER

Amidst all grief shalt thou be void of woe,
And nevermore thy chanting shalt thou cease,
For thee I have ordained, that thou go

Most mightily, and heal with all my peace,
That the fair sum of me may well increase;
And when my children weep the bitter frost
Clad foolishly in rags, in lieu of fleece,
Sing to them that they be not wholly lost.

I make to me my ministers, and they
Charitably do walk in many a guise,
By many a leafy path and paved way,
With brooding peace enthroned in their eyes;
How the vast earth is clamorous with cries
Of all her creatures miserably tossed!
But these that I have signalled to arise
Sing to them that they be not wholly lost.

It is not seemly the elect should weep,
They have no heritage in agony.
Calmly thine heart in thy still bosom keep
And let importunate sorrow pass thee by;
More than thy brethren have, the very sky
Is thine, with many stars and clouds embossed;
Out of this wealth and all this majesty
Sing to them that they be not wholly lost.

Prince of the earth, when such as thee do die,
Laid in rich pall, with gentle hands there crossed,
All my clear sprites in Paradise that lie
Sing to them that they be not wholly lost.

1916.

ALONE

Along the west way of the wood,
When light doth gild its floor,
My spirit saith, “O solitude!”

And shuts her chamber door;

And doth a solemn silence keep.
I think that she doth pray,
But whether she doth smile or weep
I may not know nor say.

My body standeth still, mine eyes
About the hills do range;
I shall not know her mysteries,
For they are passing strange;

But the eve falleth, quiet as death,
Or as a faery's glance;
When from her door she issueth
She is all radiance.

1916.

A CITY CHURCHYARD

Why liest here, when there are lands
Filled with peace and beauties free?
"Since my sleep contenteth me,
Here do I fold my hands,
Here upon my quiet breast,
And here do rest."

But the long and sounding shore
Calleth from afar; O hear!
"I am void of any fear,
Healed are my troubles sore;
My feet sans motion are composed
And mine eyes are closed."

1916.

THE WATERS OF PARADISE.

In Paradise there is a sea
  Blue as the turkis stone,
And many passing wonders be
  Hid in its depths alone;
But seen of all the folk of neighbour land,
Whose quiet feet do walk the yellow strand.

And since that shore is void of man
  No sail about it flies,
But hundred-hued Leviathan
  Like a prone rainbow lies,
And looketh on the weaving waters wan
  With stilly emerald eyes.

And though no sail move on the deep
  As calm as any mere,
A radiant folk, who may not weep,
  Without a sail do steer,
And very pleasant ways and winding keep
  Above the solemn clear.

Par miracle, I once did go
  And stood upon the shore;
A gemmy archipelago
  The gemmy waters bore,
And all those sprites that are unchained of woe
  Do dwell there evermore.

Like to the summer leaves that make
  A little whispering,
These folk that dwellen in the lake
  Full fairly say and sing,
As waters blown at night, that wake
  With a sweet murmuring.

1916.

THE QUIET THOUGHT.

Doth the loud world aye clamour in thine ears?
Nay, never weep; for the loud world doth pass.
Faint in the distance die her shrieking fears,
Leaving serenest silence, and the grass
Waveth her plumy ranks of tender spears
Above the green and blossoming morass.

Weary thy body; yea, and so thine heart,
But these be none of thee, for thou dost dwell
Unsullied in a clearer space apart,
In a great beauty words may never tell,
Nor any of the shifts of petty art;
And of this heritage bethink thee well.

Know thou art for the healing of mankind,
For his soul's health was made thy clarity,
And for the fearless faring of his mind,
By many a winding way to wenden free:
Sense to the dead, and vision to the blind,
Think on these riches, this nobility.

Through all the woe thou seest, calm abide,
(O worthless woe, that maketh men to weep!)
Since thou hast sanctuary. Beatified,
Ay, happy ever rests thy spirit deep,
Like the clear snow on silent pastures wide,
Joyful as love, and calm as sacred sleep.

1916.

TO RIGHTEOUSNESS OUTCAST AND

DISGUISED.

So, sweet, they have forsworn thee. Thou dost roam
Clad in foul motley, yea, in beggars' weeds,
Thou dear delight of angels in fair deeds,
Thou purity! Thou messenger from home,
The which is heaven, and all whose silent meads
Are peopled with thy children white as ocean foam.

As she might charm the waves to constancy
Singeth sad Philomel in woeful guise,
Still is she left forlorn; and so thine eyes
For all their godhead turn not men to thee:
And thou are like the weary dove that flies
Between the gray heaven and the desert gulfs of sea.

Think not upon us, lady, lest thou weep:
Since that we sully thee, hie hence away:
Spend not thine heart from day to weary day
On the salt shores from which thou mayest not reap;
Go to thy babes, thy little ones, and say,
"Sweetings, I grow your herbs and flowers while ye sleep."

1917.

SPRITE ALONE

Sad is thy voice as the thin cry of the plover
On the ridged loam
All the chill ghostly night: but when 'tis over
Thou shalt hie home.

Cease thou to roam
When the willow wavers with a whispered warning
That on the foam
Of his tossed streams doth shine the silver morning;

Then rest, rover,
And stay, feet.
The woe is over,
The day flies fleet;
The lands and the waters,
The dark and the morn
Full fairly do meet;
Heaven's sons and daughters
Themselves do adorn
To wander through the flowery woods, and the sloped
fields of corn.

1917.

PRAYER FOR A FAIR PEOPLE

We thy beloved are most poor,
That entertain not innocence.
We are not steadfast to endure;
Make thou the men, when we go hence,
With a great spirit of thee and sure,
Joy that shall need no penitence.

Make them than all their love more saint,
Make them than yellow gold more fair:
Now have I ended all my plaint,
Now have I made thee all my prayer;
And the last incense, thin and faint,
Smokes upward from mine altar stair.

1917.

THE PROMISED REST.

Yea, thou shalt have thy peace, thy calm delight,

Dim sanctuary, thy canopy of leaves;
The light web that the summer starlight weaves
And the wild wayfaring of waters bright,
And songs of husbandmen among the sheaves:
Thus may thou be with many glories dight,
Thus sit and sing under thy forest eaves.

1917.

THE EARTH AND THE HEAVEN IN THE EVENING

The Earth draws off her robe of broidered flowers,
  And in green kirtle standeth for a space
Ere she doth wrap her for the silent hours
  In her white shift of mist, and veils her face;
She standeth in her kirtle green, and saith
Her evening prayer, whose incense is her breath.

Here are no unquiet sounds and no alarms;
  Hence all that is not gentle doth depart.
She takes her weary children in her arms
  That she may warm them at her kindly heart;
Are any poor, knowing that they all lie
Lapped in her light embraces silently?

The Heaven doth wear upon her holy breast
  The argent moon, her badge; her livery,
That is a royal, rich and azure vest,
  Shows she doth serve a might majesty;
And a fair weed, purple and cinnamon,
She now above that silken vest doth on.

How might man image her in his own guise?
  As a crowned spirit quiet as forest lawns,
Void of all woe and of all sad surprise,

Facing eternal sunsets and bright dawns,
And brooding o'er him that he may not mark
The outer tempests and the empty dark.

1917.

MELILOTE

There is a lady queen that dwells
In the green midmost of the vales,
Under the faery fells:
She hath five singers, O fairer than asphodels!
And a teller of tales.

The five singers are passing young;
Harvests, and mists of magic years,
And the clear throstle's tongue
That in the same thicket for seven summers hath sung,
These are their only peers;

Mayhap with voices of the shore,
Embroidery of the sea's one sigh,
The listener weepeth sore,
For his estate, that lacketh tuneful lore,
As the song paceth by.

Yea, but the teller of tales is old.
Less fair is he, but comforteth.
When thou art sore acold
Sit by him on the hearth, to be made hot and bold,
And to laugh at thy death:

This is thy mortal fashioning.
Think ye the queen, hight Melilote,
Weepeth to hear them sing,
These five, and laugheth with an outworn thing

Clad in a greasy coat?

1917.

THY SONG IS LIKE A LEMON TREE

Thy song is like a lemon tree;
Lyon ly! the golden air!
Art thou not of Gascony?
It burgeoneth so merrily
And of blossom is not bare:
And it chaunteth, lyon ly,
Lyon ly, et lon lon laire.

Thy lay is like the flying swan;
Ly, lon lon, l'estrangère,
Thou are fair to look upon!
Where might man thy singing con,
So to kill his every care?
Lyon ly, et lon lon lon,
Lyon ly, et lon lon laire.

Thy song sounded right hardily;
Lyon ly, the lovely fair!
And thou lookest scornfully.
Art thou not of Gascony?
Certes not of other-where!
Well, farewell; et lyon ly,
Lyon ly, et lon lon laire.

1917.

SONG

The end of true love is to sit and mourn;

Heigh ho, the end of love!
Under the shadow of the naked thorn,
With his thin boughs above.

The end of true love is to lie and weep;
Heigh ho, to weep alone!
On the cold bosom of the mountain steep,
By a gray boulder stone.

The end of true love is to fare forth far;
Heigh ho, the empty ways!
To the bare places where the great winds are.
And there to spend his days.

The end of true love is a sorry end;
Heigh ho, the weary death!
Marvel it is that everyman should tend
Poor love which vanisheth.

Love's is a life not any leech may save;
So, since he's fair,
And thou must full soon lay him in his grave,
Be love thy care.

1917.

THE POOR POET

The voices from the bough
Do carol clear enow:
The eglantine in many a bush
Doth to the light her blossoms push;
While I sing diligently
And strive for my poor bread.

The bough to the birds all

Is a high heavenly hall,
And to the enamelled eglantine
The ceiling of her quiet shrine;
But I say sorrowfully,
Ah me, the homeless head!

The sparrow hath his mate
And is not desolate:
The flower, complete unto herself,
Never pursues a wraithy elf:
O black-eyed Melancholy,
I never shall be wed!

1917.

THE FRIENDS

For thee are chosen want and wayfaring
In place of goods and ease thou dost desire,
Nor shall thy days the meanest comfort bring.

Hidden from thee, that lookest on the mire,
Is every comeliness: thy very tears
Wake not a weeping string in heaven's quire;

But are distilled from all thy suffered years
As an ungracious and unwishéd rain,
When every hill a robe of torrent wears:

And not of anything art thou so fain
As of dull Death. So art thou justified,
For he shall bid thine angel sing again:

Shall set for thee his pleasant portals wide,
And thou that fleddest the rude breath of woe
Yet scaped him not, shalt see beatified

His direful children: smiling shalt thou go
And say, “Want, am I welcome, friend? And lo,
Sorrow my sister, Plague mine housefellow.”

1917.

WELL BELOVED

O well-beloved is the wood;
   It is a wonder to walk therein.
Peopled of spirits is every rood.
   And evil spirits are they or good?
Neither evil are they nor good,
   They know not any sin.

Fitfully do thy footsteps fall
   On echoing path or mossy lawn;
And if thine eyes behold, in all
The hoary thickets is festival;
The silent people hold festival,
   And thither are thou drawn.

Go near softly and eat with them.
   Take your fill of fairies’ meat.
Wear the wreathy diadem
Of the blossoming hawthorn stem,
Of the enchanted hawthorn stem
   That smelleth passing sweet.

Better are all these misty eyne
   That smile not, and do never weep,
Than those bright mortal eyes of thine
That with all joys and woes must shine,
That with full many tears must shine
   And then be closed in sleep:

Better these slender limbs and pale
  Than all thy lovely white and red.
Thrice ten years shall be thy tale
Till thy fairness all must fail,
Then two score; and thou must fail,
  And soon be vanishéd:

Vanish'd behind the mantle of morn,
  Lightly lost as a gossamer
That like a ghostly robe is borne
When autumn seemeth most forlorn,
In the ways of the woods forlorn
  A moment's passenger:

Profits me nought to look on thee,
  I will go to the other folk,
Neither sadly nor merrily
Dwelling beside the twisted tree;
Quiet-hued as any winter tree,
  Slight as a spire of smoke;

Heeding no heaven, no stately art,
  Silent they roam the leafy chace.
They die not, nor do they depart.
Fleet fly the sylvan hind and hart;
Gentle as hind, and swift as hart,
  They dwell in their own place.

THE LUTE

Sweet Voice, do thou begin
  With sorrow
Singing of the sour herb sin;
Fair-blossomed now and small, but on the morrow
Most harshly fruited
And deeply rooted:

Sigh thou, “O peace,
Parch up the evil herb and wither him.”
Nay, gentle Lute, hear there the Cherubim!
So; cease.

Dost thou not mark the Air,
That Majesty,
That Paragon of grave and fair?
Keen exaltatiön and coron’d beauty:
Sweet melancholy
At length made wholly
The mate of peace;
Well dost thou say, “Impatient of my State,
Silent henceforth I stand at heaven’s gate:”
So; cease.

THE COMPANION OF YOUTH

Never is seen thy countenance
In the summer-burthened glades
Where no leaf hath power to dance;
In the bosom of the shades
The melancholy heat lies still,
And the one flower that burgeon will
Is a blossom born of bale,
The enchanter’s nightshade pale,
Darkly leaved, and wan of face,
With a grief-begotten grace;
Faint with thirst of the night dew
The leafy branches let not through;
Her aspect says thou art afar,
Where cold and fair retreated are.

When the earth with leaves is strown,
Thou shalt think on the high lane,
And upon these fields, thine own,

And swiftly shalt return again;
Where the loam is fret with moles,
Where the leaden beechen boles
Shine on the steep bank dight with red,
Down upon a hanging bough
Thou shalt lean thy radiant head
Resting on thy folded hands,
While a gentle sun and low
Shows thee all thy misty lands.
I come upon thee suddenly,
Clothed upon with mellow light,
And silence that is melody,
And coldness that is warm delight;
And upon thy kingdom look
Where the quiet woods are hung,
As it were a magic book
Written in a vanished tongue.

When spring first hath power to smile,
  And russet twigs are bright with gold,
Half veiling, for a dazzling mile,
  The airy distance blue and cold,
Out of the byways dost thou run,
  And in the royal path dost rove,
Saying unto a wandering one,
  "Go make me songs to praise my love;
Chant and chime, pipe and blow,
  Make what sounds shall seem thee good,
As the sea-wave smitten to snow,
  Or a fountain in a wood;
But silent shalt thou have no blame,
  She requireth not thy singing,
And thou knowest not her name,
  Though with her name the ways are ringing;
Yet soothly thou shalt find it graven
On the stones of thy last haven."

But thou art kindliest and quietest
When it is winter, and the white frost lies
Like heaven's hand upon the meadow's breast.
Serene and virginal the taper'd skies;
The naked trees, as sprites unchained of flesh,
Are thy denial of mortality,
With locks adorned of gems in every mesh.
Thou risest from the dark as I pass by,
And through the chaste airs measurest with mine
Thine unheard steps, and nothing sing'st nor sayest.
The galaxy full loftily doth shine:
Would these were all my days! Still mute thou stayest—
Depart not hence; go with me while thou mayest.

1917.

THE MAID'S BURIAL

No flower hath shed the sheath;
The wood is all brown.
When you have passed the heath.
Then lay her down.

There the beloved head
And the still breast,
When the last foot hath fled,
Sleep shall, and rest.

Freshly the spring wind
Bloweth for her sake;
Cold, but exceeding kind,
Ere any bud awake.

Chill is the thin breeze
That wafteth off the deep,
Yet marreth no man's ease

Nor drives him home to sleep:

Graciously doth it go,
And savour doth afford
Of early blossoms mixt with snow,
Though neither be abroad.

1918.

THE MISSAL

It is as though some babe, that loveth hues
Gay as a tincture here may be,
Took the strong noon unto the early dews
And fashioned wisdom fair and faithfully;
Lo, how above their gemmy vesture glances
The august look of steadfast countenances.

Like the pearled flower that opens on the prime,
Like a high city seen from far
Through leagues of virgin air, so they through time,
Pensively as through even looks the star,
Remote and wan: and every shining tress
Lieth in grave and ordered loveliness.

The entrailéd thorn, the dolphin and the pard,
The rose and royal unicorn,
Life and his labour, valour and his reward,
Plain in the venerable page are borne:
But that fair aspect most delighteth; when
Man may not see that innocence again.

1918.

SEEK THE WIDE SOLACE.

Seek the wide solace, never leave her shore.
Stretch not thine hands abroad in misery
To have them filled with woe for evermore.
Fold then thine hands; thy spirit tranquilly
This shall believe,
Pitiful of thine heart to see him grieve:

The silly strife, the dirge of ease and mirth,
The mournful murmur of unquiet sleep,
Like brawling brooks that scar the constant earth,
Shall fall on silence in the brooding deep;
Vanish, well lost
As changeling is into the faery host:

And all those swift and broken waters, fain
Of a full rest now that their rest looks fair,
Not as their own bright tears shall be the rain,
Nor climb in clouds the weary steeps of air,
But to and fro
As an assoiled sleeping heart shall go;

With such majestic air and simple state
That they shall look as one face to the sun,
And with one only voice shall sing their fate;
Graciously moving here and there, as one
Grave in his pace,
Whose way lies not in any market-place.

1918.

ELFESHILL

Fair is the gentle field that lies
Between the wood both great and old,
And the thin shaw whose saplings hold
All shy and secret harmonies;

There by that field they hear themselves
Sigh spells into the air, above
The place that hath an hill of elves
Standing in the midst thereof.

Round is the hill, and deep in flowers,
And soundeth, with a pleasant tone,
And many a burthen of his own,
The enchanted Tune of Seven Towers:
Upon his gracious head the eve
Quickens the coloured light, and still
When other hills are dark, doth leave
A glimmer to the elfeshill.

The dun cow
Standeth half seen;
The lily calf
Moveth on the magic green:
Which mayest thou love most,
Their eyes or their calm breath?
The wraith of all that thou hast lost
Here doth hasten to his death.

Yea, thus the ghost is fled,
Like imagin'd ivory
Over the hill's head;
Farewell his memory;
Faintly the leaves chill
Waft spells into the air, above
The field that hath an elfeshill
Standing in the midst thereof.

1918.

THE SORROW OF TRUTH.

Light aspens stand above the silken grass,
And send upon the twilight their wan look,
More wan for the long thought of what doth pass.
There in the stream, half river and half brook,
They gaze, entwining all their sister arms,
And pale to read the dream within his glass.
Together in the bank their feet are set,
While all the air low mourneth, and chill harms
Hover where the bright heads are closely met.

For they have seen that sprite of even go
By their light stems, that makes disconsolate
What is of earth, whether of mire or snow,
For that he showeth him his poor estate;
Innocent making sorrow with sweet mirth,
As on warped limbs the winds of heaven blow.
The slender trees stand fast in the cold clay,
That is their death and was their silent birth,
And the brave look abroad is cast away.

And the sprite passeth, coming to that place
Where the folk sit, and entereth thereto
To talk of byres, and grain that swells apace:
But in the ancient murmur something new
Strikes on their hearts, and they turn wondering
And with a fixed regard, to read his face.
He standeth in the shadow by the door,
And while his vesture is a radiant thing,
All that is rich of theirs is grievous poor.

Yea, poor and thin as leaves of the last year,
Made for woe's children by her starvéd hand,
Faint mottled with all livid hues and drear,
Like to dried blood and the pale thirsting sand:
And in the midst of these each countenance
Looketh upon the sprite, anon with fear,
Anon with hunger and great eagerness,

Yet with no understanding: woeful glance!
Thus the poor stones unwillingly might bless
With trembling love that is both faint and far
The light that they with their swart bodies mar,
The sun that sheweth their uncomeliness.

PAST

More than we know thou knewest
  Of all light and sweetness,
Thou that fairly grewest
  To thy brief completeness:
Hear how the hills mourn for thee!
  Thou hearest but thou heedest not.
Were the green hills born for thee
  Lightly thus to be forgot?

Knowing but small fairness,
  Seeing but the shadow
Even of earth's rareness
  In an earthly meadow,
Yet we live in thought thereof,
  And our deepest heart of being
Hath a garment wrought thereof,
  Meetly fair for heaven's seeing.

But thy vail is finer,
  More thou hadst: yet fleddest
To a thing diviner
  Than the light thou sheddest:
Vain is the sweet praise of thee,
  What we sing but poor thou deemest,
Alien from the ways of thee;
  But we thirst for what thou dreamest.

Haply now thou sendest

Down the airs of even,
Word of where thou wendest
In the ways of heaven;
But the quiet hath taken thee,
And though quick with longing calleth
Many a voice to waken thee,
Silence on thine answer falleth.

More than we know thou knewest
Of all light and sweetness,
Thou that fairly grewest
To thy brief completeness:
Hear how the hills mourn for thee!
Thou hearest but thou heedest not.
Were the green hills born for thee
Lightly thus to be forgot?

1918.

THINK THOU UPON THE BITTER STRAND

Think thou upon the bitter strand
Where the down sleeps leaning towards the sea,
And of the vanished fair who rode in the land
Swiftly and far and wide and merrily:

And again think on bright hair,
That was yellow, before it became dust,
As broom looketh that blows in the upland air,
But never think upon the hearts of the just:

For thou mayest pity the salt shore
And the dead fair, her gay locks vanished and gone,
But the just keep their hearts for evermore,
Nor art thou filled with thinking thereupon.

1918.

THE CONSUMMATION

Looks royal, songs for heaven meet,
  Thou wishest, thinking on his worth
Whose faintest image is more sweet
  Than all thy dearest loves on earth.

The royal look is marred with years,
  The song celestial is made
Into a litany of tears,
  Into a blossom of the shade.

Thou art fordone: thine heart is rent
  To praise who hath no fear nor shame.
Yet when thine utmost life is spent
  Thou hast not even said his name:

But peace, the triumph is not ripe.
  Canst thou not sleep a little space,
Or dream upon the oaten pipe
  Till there appear the wishéd face?

Then well sufficing shall arise
  From thy quiet heart that was so wrung,
A look in those translated eyes,
  A word in that diviner tongue.

1918.

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