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Title: In Divers Tones

Author: Charles G. D. Roberts

Release Date: November 2004 [EBook #6956]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on February 17, 2003]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: Latin 1

***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IN DIVERS TONES BY ROBERTS *****

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IN DIVERS TONES

BY

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

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ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF
KING'S COLLEGE, WINDSOR, N. S.

To My Friend,
EDMUND COLLINS.

In divers tones I sing,
And pray you, Friend, give ear!
My medley of song I bring
You, who can rightly hear.

Themes gathered far and near,
Thoughts from my heart that spring,
In divers tones I sing,
And pray you. Friend, give ear!

Here's many a serious thing--
You'll know if it's sincere.
Where the light laughters ring
You may detect a tear.
In divers tones I sing,
And pray you, Friend, give ear!

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COLLECT FOR DOMINION DAY.

Father of nations! Help of the feeble hand!
Strength of the strong! to whom the nations kneel!
Stay and destroyer, at whose just command
Earth's kingdoms tremble and her empires reel!
Who dost the low uplift, the small make great,
And dost abase the ignorantly proud,
Of our scant people mould a mighty state,
To the strong, stern,--to Thee in meekness bowed!
Father of unity, make this people one!
Weld, interfuse them in the patriot's flame,--
Whose forging on thine anvil was begun
In blood late shed to purge the common shame;
That so our hearts, the fever of faction done,
Banish old feud in our young nation's name.

CANADA.

O Child of Nations, giant-limbed,
Who stand'st among the nations now
Unheeded, unadored, unhymned,
With unanointed brow,--

How long the ignoble sloth, how long
The trust in greatness not thine own?
Surely the lion's brood is strong
To front the world alone!

How long the indolence, ere thou dare
Achieve thy destiny, seize thy fame--
Ere our proud eyes behold thee bear
A nation's franchise, nation's name?

The Saxon force, the Celtic fire,
These are thy manhood's heritage!
Why rest with babes and slaves? Seek higher
The place of race and age.

I see to every wind unfurled
The flag that bears the Maple-Wreath;
Thy swift keels furrow round the world
Its blood-red folds beneath;

Thy swift keels cleave the furthest seas;
Thy white sails swell with alien gales;

To stream on each remotest breeze
The black smoke of thy pipes exhales.

O Falterer, let thy past convince
Thy future,--all the growth, the gain,
The fame since Cartier knew thee, since
Thy shores beheld Champlain!

Montcalm and Wolfe! Wolfe and Montcalm!
Quebec, thy storied citadel
Attest in burning song and psalm
How here thy heroes fell!

O Thou that bor'st the battle's brunt
At Queenston, and at Lundy's Lane,--
On whose scant ranks but iron front
The battle broke in vain!--

Whose was the danger, whose the day,
From whose triumphant throats the cheers,
At Chrysler's Farm, at Chateauguay,
Storming like clarion-bursts our ears?

On soft Pacific slopes,--beside
Strange floods that northward rave and fall,--
Where chafes Acadia's chainless tide--
Thy sons await thy call.

They wait; but some in exile, some
With strangers housed, in stranger lands;--
And some Canadian lips are dumb
Beneath Egyptian sands.

O mystic Nile! Thy secret yields
Before us; thy most ancient dreams
Are mixed with far Canadian fields
And murmur of Canadian streams.

But thou, my Country, dream not thou!
Wake, and behold how night is done,--
How on thy breast, and o'er thy brow,
Bursts the uprising sun!

ACTAEON.

A WOMAN OF PLATAEA SPEAKS.

I have lived long, and watched out many days,
And seen the showers fall and the light shine down
Equally on the vile and righteous head.

I have lived long, and served the gods, and drawn
Small joy and liberal sorrow,--scorned the gods,
And drawn no less my little meed of good,
Suffered my ill in no more grievous measure.
I have been glad--alas, my foolish people,
I have been glad with you! And ye are glad,
Seeing the gods in all things, praising them
In yon their lucid heaven, this green world,
The moving inexorable sea, and wide
Delight of noonday,--till in ignorance
Ye err, your feet transgress, and the bolt falls!
Ay, have I sung, and dreamed that they would hear;
And worshipped, and made offerings;--it may be
They heard, and did perceive, and were well pleased,--
A little music in their ears; perchance,
A grain more savor to their nostrils, sweet
Tho' scarce accounted of. But when for me
The mists of Acheron have striven up,
And horror was shed round me; when my knees
Relaxed, my tongue clave speechless, they forgot.
And when my sharp cry cut the moveless night,
And days and nights my wailings clamored up
And beat about their golden homes, perchance
They shut their ears. No happy music this,
Eddying through their nectar cups and calm!
Then I cried out against them, and died not;
And rose, and set me to my daily tasks.
So all day long, with bare, uplift right arm,
Drew out the strong thread from the carded wool,
Or wrought strange figures, lotus-buds and serpents,
In Purple on the himation's saffron fold;
Nor uttered praise with the slim-wristed girls
To any god, nor uttered any prayer,
Nor poured out bowls of wine and smooth bright oil,
Nor brake and gave small cakes of beaten meal
And honey, as this time, or such a god
Required; nor offered apples summer-flushed,
Scarlet pomegranates, poppy-bells, or doves.
All this with scorn, and waiting all day long,
And night long with dim fear, afraid of sleep,--
Seeing I took no hurt of all these things,
And seeing mine eyes were dried of their tears
So that once more the light grew sweet for me,
Once more grew fair the fields and valley streams,
I thought with how small profit men take heed
To worship with bowed heads, and suppliant hands,
And sacrifice, the everlasting gods,
Who take small thought of them to curse or bless,
Girt with their purples of perpetual peace!
Thus blindly deemed I of them;--yet--and yet--
Have late well learned their hate is swift as fire,
Be one so wretched to encounter it;
Ay, have I seen a multitude of good deeds

Fly up in the pan like husks, like husks blown dry.
Hereafter let none question the high gods!
I questioned; but these watching eyes have seen
Actaeon, thewed and sinewed like a god,
Godlike for sweet speech and great deeds, hurled down
To hideous death,--scarce suffered space to breathe
Ere the wild heart in his changed quivering side
Burst with mad terror, and the stag's wide eyes
Stared one sick moment 'mid the dogs' hot jaws.

* * * * *

Cithaeron, mother mount, set steadfastly
Deep in Boeotia, past the utmost roar
Of seas, beyond Corinthian waves withdrawn,
Girt with green vales awake with brooks or still,
Towers up mid lesser-browed Boeotian hills--
These couched like herds secure beneath its ken--
And watches earth's green corners. At mid-noon
We of Plataea mark the sun make pause
Right over it, and top its crest with pride.
Men of Eleusis look toward north at dawn
To see the long white fleeces upward roll,
Smitten aslant with saffron, fade like smoke,
And leave the gray-green dripping glens all bare,
The drenched slopes open sunward; slopes wherein
What gods, what godlike men to match with gods,
Have roamed, and grown up mighty, and waxed wise
Under the law of him whom gods and men
Reverence, and call Cheiron! He, made wise
With knowledge of all wisdom, had made wise
Actaeon, till there moved none cunninger
To drive with might the javelin forth, or bend
The corded ebony, save Leto's son.

But him the Centaur shall behold no more
With long stride making down the beechy glade,
Clear-eyed, with firm lips laughing,--at his heels
The clamor of his fifty deep-tongued hounds;
Him the wise Centaur shall behold no more.

I have lived long, and watched out many days,
And am well sick of watching. Three days since,
I had gone out upon the slopes for herbs,
Snake-root, and subtle gums; and when the light
Fell slantwise through the upper glens, and missed
The sunk ravines, I came where all the hills
Circle the valley of Gargaphian streams.
Reach beyond reach all down the valley gleamed,--
Thick branches ringed them. Scarce a bowshot past
My platan, thro' the woven leaves low-hung,
Trembling in meshes of the woven sun,
A yellow-sanded pool, shallow and clear,

Lay sparkling, brown about the further bank
From scarlet-berried ash-trees hanging over.
But suddenly the shallows brake awake
With laughter and light voices, and I saw
Where Artemis, white goddess incorrupt,
Bane of swift beasts, and deadly for straight shaft
Unswerving, from a coppice not far off
Came to the pool from the hither bank to bathe.
Amid her maiden company she moved,
Their cross-thonged yellow buskins scattered off,
Unloosed their knotted hair; and thus the pool
Received them stepping, shrinking, down to it.

Here they flocked white, and splashed the water-drops
On rounded breast and shoulder snowier
Than the washed clouds athwart the morning's blue,--
Fresher than river grasses which the herds
Pluck from the river in the burning noons.
Their tresses on the summer wind they flung;
And some a shining yellow fleece let fall
For the sun's envy; others with white hands
Lifted a glooming wealth of locks more dark
Than deepest wells, but purple in the sun.
And She, their mistress, of the heart unstormed,
Stood taller than they all, supreme, and still,
Perfectly fair like day, and crowned with hair
The color of nipt beech-leaves: Ay, such hair
Was mine in years when I was such as these.
I let it fall to cover me, or coiled
Its soft thick coils about my throat and arms;
Its color like nipt beech-leaves, tawny brown,
But in the sun a fountain of live gold.

Even as thus they played, and some lithe maids
Upreached white arms to grasp the berried ash,
And, plucking the bright bunches, shed them wide
By red ripe handfuls, not far off I saw
With long stride making down the beechy glade,
Clear-eyed, with firm lips laughing, at his heels
The clamor of his fifty deep-tongued hounds,
Actaeon. I beheld him not far off,
But unto bath and bathers hid from view,
Being beyond that mighty rock whereon
His wont was to be stretched at dip of eve,
When frogs are loud amid the tall-plumed sedge
In marshy spots about Asopus' bank,--
Deeming his life was very sweet, his day
A pleasant one, the peopled breadths of earth
Most fair, and fair the shining tracts of sea;
Green solitudes, and broad low-lying plains
Made brown with frequent labors of men's hands,
And salt, blue, fruitless waters. But this mount,
Cithaeron, bosomed deep in soundless hills,

Its fountained vales, its nights of starry calm,
Its high chill dawns, its long-drawn golden days,--
Was dearest to him. Here he dreamed high dreams,
And felt within his sinews strength to strive
Where strife was sorest and to overcome,
And in his heart the thought to do great deeds,
With power in all ways to accomplish them.
For had not he done well to men, and done
Well to the gods? Therefore he stood secure.

But him,--for him--Ah that these eyes should see!--
Approached a sudden stumbling in his ways!
Not yet, not yet he knew a god's fierce wrath,
Nor wist of that swift vengeance lying in wait.

And now he came upon a slope of sward
Against the pool. With startled cry the maids
Shrank clamoring round their mistress, or made flight
To covert in the hazel thickets. She
Stirred not; but pitiless anger paled her eyes,
Intent with deadly purpose. He, amazed,
Stood with his head thrust forward, while his curls
Sun-lit lay glorious on his mighty neck,--
Let fall his bow and clanging spear, and gazed
Dilate with ecstasy; nor marked the dogs
Hush their deep tongues, draw close, and ring him round,
And fix upon him strange, red, hungry eyes,
And crouch to spring. This for a moment. Then
It seemed his strong knees faltered, and he sank.
Then I cried out,--for straight a shuddering stag
Sprang one wild leap over the dogs; but they
Fastened upon his flanks with a long yell,
And reached his throat; and that proud head went down
Beneath their wet, red fangs and reeking jaws.

I have lived long, and watched out many days,
Yet have not seen that ought is sweet save life,
Nor learned that life hath other end than death.
Thick horror like a cloud had veiled my sight,
That for a space I saw not, and my ears
Were shut from hearing; but when sense grew clear
Once more, I only saw the vacant pool
Unrippled,--only saw the dreadful sward.
Where dogs lay gorged, or moved in fretful search,
Questing uneasily; and some far up
The slope, and some at the low water's edge,
With snouts set high in air and straining throats
Uttered keen howls that smote the echoing hills.
They missed their master's form, nor understood
Where was the voice they loved, the hand that reared;--
And some lay watching by the spear and bow
Flung down.

And now upon the homeless pack
And paling stream arose a noiseless wind
Out of the yellow west awhile, and stirred
The branches down the valley; then blew off
To eastward toward the long gray straits, and died
Into the dark, beyond the utmost verge.

IN THE AFTERNOON.

Wind of the summer afternoon,
Hush, for my heart is out of tune!

Hush, for thou movest restlessly
The too light sleeper, Memory!

Whate'er thou hast to tell me, yet
'Twere something sweeter to forget,--

Sweeter than all thy breath of balm
An hour of unremembering calm!

Blowing over the roofs, and down
The bright streets of this inland town,

These busy crowds, these rocking trees--
What strange note hast thou caught from these?

A note of waves and rushing tides,
Where past the dikes the red flood glides,

To brim the shining channels far
Up the green plains of Tantramar.

Once more I snuff the salt, I stand
On the long dikes of Westmoreland;

I watch the narrowing flats, the strip
Of red clay at the water's lip;

Far off the net-reels, brown and high,
And boat-masts slim against the sky;

Along the ridges of the dikes
Wind-beaten scant sea-grass, and spikes

Of last year's mullein; down the slopes
To landward, in the sun, thick ropes

Of blue vetch, and convolvulus,
And matted roses glorious.

The liberal blooms o'erbrim my hands;
I walk the level, wide marsh-lands;

Waist-deep in dusty-blossomed grass
I watch the swooping breezes pass

In sudden, long, pale lines, that flee
Up the deep breast of this green sea.

I listen to the bird that stirs
The purple tops, and grasshoppers

Whose summer din, before my feet
Subsiding, wakes on my retreat.

Again the droning bees hum by;
Still-winged, the gray hawk wheels on high;

I drink again the wild perfumes,
And roll, and crush the grassy blooms.

Blown back to olden days, I fain
Would quaff the olden joys again;

But all the olden sweetness not
The old unmindful peace hath brought.

Wind of this summer afternoon,
Thou hast recalled my childhood's June;

My heart--still is it satisfied
By all the golden summer-tide?

Hast thou one eager yearning filled,
Or any restless throbbing stilled,

Or hast thou any power to bear
Even a little of my care?--

Ever so little of this weight
Of weariness canst thou abate?

Ah, poor thy gift indeed, unless
Thou bring the old child-heartedness,--

And such a gift to bring is given,
Alas, to no wind under heaven!

Wind of the summer afternoon,
Be still; my heart is not in tune.

Sweet is thy voice; but yet, but yet--

Of all 'twere sweetest to forget!

FREDERICTON, N. B.

THE PIPES OF PAN.

Ringed with the flocking of hills, within shepherding watch of Olympus,
Tempe, vale of the gods, lies in green quiet withdrawn;
Tempe, vale of the gods, deep-couched amid woodland and woodland,
Threaded with amber of brooks, mirrored in azure of pools,
All day drowsed with the sun, charm-drunken with moonlight at midnight,
Walled from the world forever under a vapor of dreams,--
Hid by the shadows of dreams, not found by the curious footstep,
Sacred and secret forever, Tempe, vale of the gods.
How, through the cleft of its bosom, goes sweetly the water Pen^ous!
How by Pen^ous the sward breaks into saffron and blue!
How the long slope-floored beech-glades mount to the wind-wakened uplands,
Where, through flame-berried ash, troop the hoofed Centaurs at morn!
Nowhere greens a copse but the eye-beams of Artemis pierce it.
Breathes no laurel her balm but Phoebus' fingers caress.
Springs no bed of wild blossom but limbs of dryad have pressed it.
Sparkle the nymphs, and the brooks chime with shy laughter and calls.

Here is a nook. Two rivulets fall to mix with Pen^ous,
Loiter a space, and sleep, checked and choked by the reeds.
Long grass waves in the windless water, strown with the lote-leaf;
Twist thro' dripping soil great alder roots, and the air
Glooms with the dripping tangle of leaf-thick branches, and stillness
Keeps in the strange-coiled stems, ferns, and wet-loving weeds.
Hither comes Pan, to this pregnant earthy spot, when his piping
Flags; and his pipes outworn breaking and casting away,
Fits new reeds to his mouth with the weird earth-melody in them,
Piercing, alive with a life able to mix with the god's.
Then, as he blows, and the searching sequence delights him, the goat-feet
Furtive withdraw; and a bird stirs and flutes in the gloom
Answering. Float with the stream the outworn pipes, with a whisper,--
"What the god breathes on, the god never can wholly evade!"
God-breath lurks in each fragment forever. Dispersed by Pen^ous
Wandering, caught in the ripples, wind-blown hither and there,
Over the whole green earth and globe of sea they are scattered,
Coming to secret spots, where in a visible form
Comes not the god; though he come declared in his workings. And mortals
Straying in cool of morn, or bodeful hasting at eve,
Or in the depths of noonday plunged to shadiest coverts,
Spy them, and set to their lips; blow, and fling them away!

Ay, they fling them away,--but never wholly! Thereafter
Creeps strange fire in their veins, murmur strange tongues in their brain,
Sweetly evasive; a secret madness takes them,--a charm-struck
Passion for woods and wild life, the solitude of the hills.

Therefore they fly the heedless throngs and traffic of cities,
Haunt mossed caverns, and wells bubbling ice-cool; and their souls
Gather a magical gleam of the secret of life, and the god's voice
Calls to them, not from afar, teaching them wonderful things.

BEFORE THE BREATH OF STORM.

Before the breath of storm.
While yet the long, bright afternoons are warm,
Under this stainless arch of azure sky
The air is filled with gathering wings for flight;
Yet with the shrill mirth and the loud delight
Comes the foreboding sorrow of this cry--
"Till the storm scatter and the gloom dispel,
Farewell! Farewell!
Farewell!"

Why will ye go so soon,
In these soft hours, this sweeter month than June?
The liquid air floats over field and tree
A veil of dreams;--where do ye find the sting?
A gold enchantment sleeps upon the sea
And purple hills;--why have ye taken wing?
But faint, far-heard, the answers fall and swell--
"Farewell! Farewell!
Farewell!"

OUT OF POMPEII.

Save what the night-wind woke of sweet
And solemn sound, I heard alone
The sleepless ocean's ceaseless beat,
The surge's monotone.

Low down the south a dreary gleam
Of white light smote the sullen swells,
Evasive as a blissful dream,
Or wind-borne notes of bells.

The water's lapping whispers stole
Into my brain, and there effaced
All human memories from my soul,--
An atom in a shifting waste.

Weird fingers, groping, strove to raise
Some numbing horror from my mind;
And ever, as it met my gaze,

The sharp truth struck me blind.

The keen edged breath of the salt sea
Stung, but a faint, swift, sulphurous smell
Blew past, and I reeled dizzily
As from the blink of hell,

One moment; then the swan-necked prow
Sustained me, and once more I scanned
The unfenced flood, against my brow
Arching my lifted hand.

O'er all the unstable vague expanse
I towered the lord supreme, and smiled;
And marked the hard, white sparkles glance,
The dark vault wide and wild.

Again that faint wind swept my face--
With hideous menace swept my eyes.
I cowered back in my straitened place
And groped with dim surmise,

Not knowing yet. Not knowing why,
I turned, as one asleep might turn,
And noted with half curious eye
The figure crouched astern.

On heaped-up leopard skins she crouched,
Asleep, and soft skins covered her,
And scarlet stuffs where she was couched,
Sodden with sea-water,

Burned lurid with black stains, and smote
My thought with waking pangs; I saw
The white arm drooping from the boat,
Round-moulded, pure from flaw;

The yellow sandals even-thonged;
The fair face, wan with haunting pain;--
Then sudden, crowding memories thronged
Like unpent sudden rain.

Clear-stamped, as by white lightning when
The swift flame rends the night, wide-eyed
I saw dim streets, and fleeing men,
And walls from side to side

Reeling, and great rocks fallen; a pall
Above us, an encumbering shroud
About our feet, and over all
The awful Form that bowed

Our hearts, the fiery scourge that smote

The city,--the red Mount. Clear, clear
I saw it,--and this lonely boat,
And us two drifting here!

With one sharp cry I sprang and hid
My face among the skins beside
Her feet, and held her safe, and chid
The tumult till it died.

And crouched thus at her rescued feet
Save her low breath, I heard alone
The sleepless ocean's ceaseless beat,
The surge's monotone.

TO FREDERICTON IN MAY-TIME.

This morning, full of breezes and perfume,
Brimful of promise of midsummer weather,
When bees and birds and I are glad together,
Breathes of the full-leaved season, when soft gloom
Chequers thy streets, and thy close elms assume
Round roof and spire the semblance of green billows;
Yet now thy glory is the yellow willows,
The yellow willows, full of bees and bloom.

Under their dusty blossoms blackbirds meet,
And robins pipe amid the cedars nigher.
Thro' the still elms I hear the ferry's beat.
The swallows chirp about the towering spire;
The whole air pulses with its weight of sweet,
Yet not quite satisfied is my desire!

IN SEPTEMBER.

This windy, bright September afternoon
My heart is wide awake, yet full of dreams.
The air, alive with hushed confusion, teems
With scent of grain-fields, and a mystic rune,
Foreboding of the fall of Summer soon,
Keeps swelling and subsiding, till there seems
O'er all the world of valleys, hills, and streams,
Only the wind's inexplicable tune.

My heart is full of dreams, yet wide awake.
I lie and watch the topmost tossing boughs
Of tall elms, pale against the vaulted blue;

But even now some yellowing branches shake,
Some hue of death the living green endows:--
If beauty flies, fain would I vanish too.

CONCERNING CUTHBERT THE MONK.

Cuthbert, open! Let me in!
Cease your praying for a minute!
Here the darkness seems to grin,
Holds a thousand horrors in it;
Down the stony corridor
Footsteps pace the stony floor.

Here they foot it, pacing slow,
Monk-like, one behind another!--
Don't you hear me? Don't you know
I'm a little nervous, Brother?
Won't you speak? Then, by your leave,
Here's a guest for Christmas Eve!

Shrive me, but I got a fright!
Monks of centuries ago
Wander back to see to-night
How the old place looks.--Hello!
This the kind of watch you keep!
Come to pray--and go to sleep!

Ah, this mortal flesh is weak!
Who is saintly there's no saying.
Here are tears upon his cheek,
And he sleeps that should be praying;--
Sleeps, and dreams, and murmurs. Nay,
I'll not wake you.--Sleep away!

Holy saints, the night is keen!
How the nipping wind does drive
Through yon tree-tops, bare and lean,
Till their shadow seems alive,--
Patters through the bars, and falls,
Shivering, on the floor and walls!

How yon patch of freezing sky
Echoes back their bell-ringsings!
Down in the gray city, nigh
Severn, every steeple swings.
All the busy streets are bright.
Many folk are out to-night.

--What's that, Brother? Did you speak?--
Christ save them that talk in sleep!

Smile they howsoever meek,
Somewhat in their hearts they keep.
We, good souls, what shifts we make
To keep talking whilst awake!

Christ be praised, that fetched me in
Early, yet a youngling, while
All unlearned in life and sin,
Love and travail, grief and guile!
For your world of two-score years,
Cuthbert, all you have is tears.

Dreaming, still he hears the bells
As he heard them years ago,
Ere he sought our quiet cells
Iron-mouthed and wrenched with woe,
Out of what dread storms who knows--
Faithfulest of friends and foes!

Faithful was he, aye, I ween,
Pitiful, and kind, and wise;
But in mindful moods I've seen
Flame enough in those sunk eyes!
Praised be Christ, whose timely Hand
Plucked from out the fire this brand!

Now in dreams he's many miles
Hence, he's back in Ireland.
Ah, how tenderly he smiles,
Stretching a caressing hand!
Backward now his memory glides
To old happy Christmas-tides.

Now once more a loving wife
Holds him; now he sees his boys,
Smiles at all their playful strife,
All their childish mirth and noise;
Softly now she strokes his hair.--
Ah, their world is very fair!

--Waking, all your loss shall be
Unforgotten evermore!
Sleep alone holds these for thee.
Sleep then, Brother!--To restore
All your heaven that has died
Heaven and Hell may be too wide!

Sleep, and dream, and be awhile
Happy, Cuthbert, once again!
Soon you'll wake, and cease to smile,
And your heart will sink with pain.
You will hear the merry town,--
And a weight will press you down.

Hungry-hearted, you will see
Only the thin shadows fall
From yon bleak-topped poplar-tree,--
Icy fingers on the wall.
You will watch them come and go,
Telling o'er your count of woe.

--Nay, now, hear me, how I prate!
I, a foolish monk, and old,
Maundering o'er a life and fate
To me unknown, by you untold!
Yet I know you're like to weep
Soon, so, Brother, this night sleep.

IMPULSE.

A hollow on the verge of May.
Thick strewn with drift of leaves. Beneath
The densest drift a thrusting sheath
Of sharp green striving toward the day!
I mused--"So dull Obstruction sets
A bar to even violets,
When these would go their nobler way!"

My feet again, some days gone by.
The self-same spot sought idly. There,
Obstruction foiled, the adoring air
Caressed a blossom woven of sky
And dew, whose misty petals blue,
With bliss of being thrilled athrough,
Dilated like a timorous eye.

Reck well this rede, my soul! The good
The blossom craved was near, tho' hid.
Fret not that thou must doubt, but rid
Thy sky-path of obstructions strewed
By winds of folly. Then, do thou
The Godward impulse room allow
To reach its perfect air and food!

THE ISLES--AN ODE.

I.

Faithful reports of them have reached me oft!
Many their embassy to mortal court,

By golden pomp, and breathless-heard consort
Of music soft--
By fragrances accredited, and dreams.
Many their speeding herald, whose light feet
Make pause at wayside brooks, and fords of streams,
Leaving transfigured by an effluence fleet
Those wayfarers they meet.

II.

No wind from out the solemn wells of night
But hath its burden of strange messages,
Tormenting for interpreter; nor less
The wizard light
That steals from noon-stilled waters, woven in shade,
Beckons somewhither, with cool fingers slim.
No dawn but hath some subtle word conveyed
In rose ineffable at sunrise rim,
Or character dim.

III.

One moment throbs the hearing, yearns the sight.
But tho' not far, yet strangely hid--the way,
And our sense slow; nor long for us delay
The guides their flight!
The breath goes by; the word, the light, elude;
And we stay wondering. But there comes an hour
Of fitness perfect and unfettered mood,
When splits her husk the finer sense with power,
And--yon their palm-trees tower!

IV.

Here Homer came, and Milton came, tho' blind.
Omar's deep doubts still found them nigh and nigher,
And learned them fashioned to the heart's desire.
The supreme mind
Of Shakspeare took their sovereignty, and smiled.
Those passionate Israelitish lips that poured
The Song of Songs attained them; and the wild
Child-heart of Shelley, here from strife restored,
Remembers not life's sword.

A SERENADE.

Love hath given the day for longing,
And for joy the night.
Dearest, to thy distant chamber
Wings my soul its flight.

Though unfathomed seas divide us,
And the lingering year,
'Tis the hour when absence parts not,--
Memory hath no tear.

O'er the charmed and silent river
Drifts my lonely boat;
From the haunted shores and islands
Tender murmurs float,

Tender breaths of glade and forest,
Breezes of perfume;--
Surely, surely thou canst hear me
In thy quiet room!

Unto shore, and sky, and silence,
Low I pour my song.
All the spell, the summer sweetness,--
These to thee belong.

Thou art love, the trance and rapture
Of the midnight clear!
Sweet, tho' world on world withhold thee,
I can clasp thee here.

OFF PELORUS.

Crimson swims the sunset over far Pelorus;
Burning crimson tops its frowning crest of pine.
Purple sleeps the shore and floats the wave before us,
Eachwhere from the oar-stroke eddying warm like wine.

Soundless foams the creamy violet wake behind us;
We but see the creaking of the labored oar;
We have stopped our ears,--mad were we not to blind us,
Lest our eyes behold our Ithaca no more.

See the purple splendor o'er the island streaming,
O'er the prostrate sails and equal-sided ship!
Windless hangs the vine, and warm the sands lie gleaming;
Droop the great grape-clusters melting for the lip.

Sweet the golden calm, the glowing light elysian.
Sweet were red-mouthed plenty mindless grown of pain.
Sweeter yet behold--a sore-bewildering vision!
Idly took we thought, and stopped our ears in vain.

Idly took we thought, for still our eyes betray us.
Lo, the white-limbed maids, with love-soft eyes aglow,

Gleaming bosoms bare, loosed hair, sweet hands to slay us,
Warm lips wild with song, and softer throats than snow!

See the King! he hearkens,--hears their song,--strains forward,--
As some mountain snake attends the shepherd's reed.
Now with urgent hand he bids us turn us shoreward,--
Bend the groaning oar now; give the King no heed!

Mark the luring music by his eyes' wild yearning,
Eager lips, and mighty straining at the cords!
Well we guess the song, the subtle words and burning,
Sung to him, the subtle king of burning words.

"Much-enduring Wanderer, wondrous-tongued, come nigher!
Sage of princes, bane of Ilion's lofty walls!
Whatsoe'er in all the populous earth befalls
We will teach thee, to thine uttermost desire."

So, we rise up twain, and make his bonds securer.
Seethes the startled sea now from the surging blade.
Leaps the dark ship forth, as we, with hearts grown surer,
Eyes averse, and war-worn faces made afraid,

O'er the waste warm reaches drive our prow, sea-cleaving,
Past the luring death, into the folding night.
Home shall hold us yet, and cease our wives from grieving,--
Safe from storm, and toil, and flame, and clanging fight.

A BALLADE OF CALYPSO.

The loud black flight of the storm diverges
Over a spot in the loud-mouthed main,
Where, crowned with summer and sun, emerges
An isle unbeaten of wind or rain.
And here, of its sweet queen grown full fain,--
By whose kisses the whole broad earth seems poor,--
Tarrys the wave-worn prince, Troy's bane,
In the green Ogygian Isle secure.

To her voice our sweetest songs are dirges.
She gives him all things, counting it gain.
Ringed with the rocks and ancient surges,
How could Fate dissever these twain?
But him no loves nor delights retain;
New knowledge, new lands, new loves allure;
Forgotten the perils, and toils, and pain,
In the green Ogygian Isle secure.

So he spurns her kisses and gifts, and urges
His weak skiff over the wind-vext plain,

Till the gray of the sky in the gray sea merges,
And nights reel round, and waver, and wane.
He sits once more in his own domain.
No more the remote sea-walls immure.--
But ah, for the love he shall clasp not again
In the green Ogygian Isle secure!

L'ENVOI.

Princes, and ye whose delights remain,
To the one good gift of the gods hold sure,
Lest ye too mourn, in vain, in vain,
Your green Ogygian Isle secure!

RAIN.

Sharp drives the rain, sharp drives the endless rain.
The rain-winds wake and wander, lift and blow.
The slow smoke-wreaths of vapor to and fro
Wave, and unweave, and gather and build again.
Over the far gray reaches of the plain--
Gray miles on miles my passionate thought must go,--
I strain my sight, grown dim with gazing so,
Pressing my face against the streaming pane.

How the rain beats! Ah God, if love had power
To voice its utmost yearning, even tho'
Thro' time and bitter distance, not in vain,
Surely Her heart would hear me at this hour,
Look thro' the years, and see! But would She know
The white face pressed against the streaming pane?

MIST.

Its hand compassionate guards our restless sight
Against how many a harshness, many an ill!
Tender as sleep, its shadowy palms distil
Weird vapors that ensnare our eyes with light.
Rash eyes, kept ignorant in their own despite,
It lets not see the unsightliness they will,
But paints each scanty fairness fairer still,
And still deludes us to our own delight.

It fades, regathers, never quite dissolves.
And ah that life, ah that the heart and brain
Might keep their mist and glamour, not to know
So soon the disenchantment and the pain!
But one by one our dear illusions go,

Now to the broad, lit marsh, now to the dusk of the dike.
Soon, thro' their dew-wet frames, in the live keen freshness of morning,
Out of the teeth of the dawn blows back the awakening wind.

Then, as the blue day mounts, and the low-shot shafts of the sunlight
Glance from the tide to the shore, gossamers jewelled with dew
Sparkle and wave, where late sea-spoiling fathoms of drift-net
Myriad-meshed, uploomed sombrely over the land.

Well I remember it all. The salt raw scent of the margin;
While, with men at the windlass, groaned each reel, and the net,
Surging in ponderous lengths, uprose and coiled in its station;
Then each man to his home,--well I remember it all!

Yet, as I sit and watch, this present peace of the landscape,--
Stranded boats, these reels empty and idle, the hush,
One gray hawk slow-wheeling above yon cluster of haystacks,--
More than the old-time stir this stillness welcomes me home.

Ah the old-time stir, how once it stung me with rapture,--
Old-time sweetness, the winds freighted with honey and salt!
Yet will I stay my steps and not go down to the marsh-land,--
Muse and recall far off, rather remember than see,--
Lest on too close sight I miss the darling illusion,
Spy at their task even here the hands of chance and change.

THE SLAVE WOMAN.

Shedding cool drops upon the sun-baked clay,
The dripping jar, brimful, she rests a space
On the well's dry white brink, and leans her face,
Heavy with tears and many a heartsick day,
Down to the water's lip, whence slips away
A rivulet thro' the hot, bright square apace,
And lo! her brow casts off each servile trace--
The wave's cool breath hath won her thoughts astray.

Ah desolate heart! Thy fate thou hast forgot
One moment; the dull pain hath left those eyes
Whose yearning pierces time, and space, and tears.
Thou seest what was once, but now is not,--
By Niger thy bright home, thy Paradise,
Unscathed of flame, and foe, and hostile spears.

THE MARVELLOUS WORK.

"Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me"--Whitman

Not yet, for all their quest of it, have men
Cast wholly by the ignoble dread of truth!
Each of God's laws, if but so late discerned
Their faiths upgrew unsuckled in it, fills
Their hearts with angry fears, perchance lest God
Be dwarfed behind his own decrees, or made
Superfluous through his perfectness of deed!
But large increase of knowledge in these days
Is come about us, fraught with ill for them
Whose creeds are cut too straight to hold new growth,
Whose faiths are clamped against access of wisdom;
Fraught with some sadness, too, for those just souls
Who, clothed in rigid teachings found too scant,
Are fain to piece the dear accustomed garb,
Till here a liberal, there a literal fragment,
Here new, there old, here bright, there dark, disclose
Their vestiture a strange discordant motley.
But O rare motley,--starred with thirst of truth,
Patched with desire of wisdom, zoned about
With passion for fresh knowledge, and the quest
Of right! Such motley may be made at last,
Through grave sincerity, a dawn-clear garment!

But, for the enfranchised spirit, this expanse
Immeasurable of broad-horizoned view,--
What rapt, considerate awe it summons forth,
What adoration of the Eternal Cause!
His days unmeasured ages, His designs
Unfold through age-long silences, through surge
Of world upheaval, coming to their aim
As swerveless in fit time as tho' His finger
But yesterday ordained, and wrought to-day.
How the Eternal's unconcern of time,--
Omnipotence that hath not dreamed of haste,--
Is graven in granite-moulding aeons' gloom;
Is told in stony record of the roar
Of long Silurian storms, and tempests huge
Scourging the circuit of Devonian seas;
Is whispered in the noiseless mists, the gray
Soft drip of clouds about rank fern-forests,
Through dateless terms that stored the layered coal;
Is uttered hoarse in strange Triassic forms
Of monstrous life; or stamped in ice-blue gleams
Athwart the death-still years of glacial sleep!

Down the stupendous sequence, age on age,
Thro' storm and peace, thro' shine and gloom, thro' warm
And pregnant periods of teeming birth,
And seething realms of thunderous overthrow,--
In the obscure and formless dawn of life,
In gradual march from simple to complex,
From lower to higher forms, and last to Man

Through faint prophetic fashions,--stands declared
The God of order and unchanging purpose.
Creation, which He covers, Him contains,
Even to the least up-groping atom. His
The impulse and the quickening germ, whereby
All things strive upward, reach toward greater good;
Till craving brute, informed with soul, grows Man,
And Man turns homeward, yearning back to God.

A SONG OF DEPENDENCE.

Love, what were fame,
And thou not in it,
That I should hold it worth
Much toil to win it?

What were success
Didst thou not share it?
As Spring can spare the snows
I well could spare it!

Love, what were love
But of thy giving
That it should much prevail
To sweeten living?

Nay, what were life,
Save thou inspire it,
That I should bid my soul
Greatly desire it?

ON THE CREEK.

Dear Heart, the noisy strife
And bitter carpings cease.
Here is the lap of life,
Here are the lips of peace.

Afar from stir of streets,
The city's dust and din,
What healing silence meets
And greets us gliding in!

Our light birch silent floats;
Soundless the paddle dips.
Yon sunbeam thick with motes
Athro' the leafage slips,

To light the iris wings
Of dragon-flies alit
On lily-leaves, and things
Of gauze that float and flit.

Above the water's brink
Hush'd winds make summer riot;
Our thirsty spirits drink
Deep, deep, the summer quiet.

We slip the world's gray husk,
Emerge, and spread new plumes;
In sunbeam-fretted dusk,
Thro' populous golden glooms,

Like thistledown we slide,
Two disembodied dreams,--
With spirits alert, wide-eyed,
Explore the perfume-streams.

For scents of various grass
Stream down the veering breeze;
Warm puffs of honey pass
From flowering linden-trees;

And fragrant gusts of gum,
From clammy balm-tree buds,
With fern-brake odors, come
From intricate solitudes.

The elm-tops are astir
With flirt of idle wings.
Hark to the grackles' chirr
Whene'er an elm-bough swings!

From off yon ash-limb sere
Out-thrust amid green branches,
Keen like an azure spear
A kingfisher down launches.

Far up the creek his calls
And lessening laugh retreat;
Again the silence falls,
And soft the green hours fleet.

They fleet with drowsy hum
Of insects on the wing;--
We sigh--the end must come!
We taste our pleasure's sting.

No more, then, need we try
The rapture to regain.

We feel our day slip by,
And cling to it in vain.

But, Dear, keep thou in mind
These moments swift and sweet!
Their memory thou shall find
Illume the common street;

And thro' the dust and din,
Smiling, thy heart shall hear
Quiet waters lapsing thin,
And locusts shrilling clear.

LOTOS.

Wherefore awake so long,
Wide-eyed, laden with care?
Not all battle is life,
But a little respite and peace
May fold us round as a fleece
Soft-woven for all men's wear.
Sleep, then, mindless of strife;
Slumber, dreamless of wrong;--
Hearken my slumber-song,
Falling asleep.

Drowsily all noon long
The warm winds rustle the grass
Hush'dly, lulling thy brain,--
Burthened with murmur of bees
And numberless whispers, and ease.
Dream-clouds gather and pass
Of painless remembrance of pain.
Havened from rumor of wrong,
Dreams are thy slumber-song,
Fallen asleep.

THE SOWER.

A brown sad-colored hillside, where the soil,
Fresh from the frequent harrow, deep and fine,
Lies bare; no break in the remote sky-line,
Save where a flock of pigeons streams aloft,
Startled from feed in some low-lying croft,
Or far-off spires with yellow of sunset shine;
And here the Sower, unwittingly divine,
Exerts the silent forethought of his toil.

Alone he treads the glebe, his measured stride
Dumb in the yielding soil; and tho' small joy
Dwell in his heavy face, as spreads the blind
Pale grain from his dispensing palm aside,
This plodding churl grows great in his employ;--
Godlike, he makes provision for mankind.

THE POTATO HARVEST.

A high bare field, brown from the plough, and borne
Aslant from sunset; amber wastes of sky
Washing the ridge, a clamor of crows that fly
In from the wide flats where the spent tides mourn
To yon their rocking roosts in pines wind-torn;
A line of gray snake-fence, that zigzags by
A pond, and cattle, from the homestead nigh
The long deep summonings of the supper horn.

Black, on the ridge, against that lonely flush,
A cart, and stoop-necked oxen; ranged beside,
Some barrels, and the day-worn harvest folk,
Here emptying their baskets, jar the hush
With hollow thunders; down the dusk hillside
Lumbers the wain; and day fades out like smoke.

AFLOAT.

Afloat!--
Ah Love, on the mirror of waters
All the world seems with us afloat,--
All the wide, bright world of the night;
But the mad world of men is remote,
And the prating of tongues is afar.
We have fled from the crowd in our flight,
And beyond the gray rim of the waters
All the turmoil has sunk from our sight.
Turn your head, Love, a little, and note
Low down in the south a pale star.
The mists of the horizon-line drench it,
The beams of the moon all but quench it,
Yet it shines thro' this flood-tide of light.
Love, under that star is the world
Of the day, of our life, and our sorrow,
Where defamers and envious are.
Here, here is our peace, our delight,--
To our closest love-converse no bar.

Yet, as even in the moonbeam's despite
Still is seen the pale beam of the star,
So the light of our rapture this hour
Cannot quench the remembrance of morrow.
Though the wings of all winds are upfurled
And a limitless silence hath power,
Still the envious strife we forget not;
For the future is skilful to mar,
And the past we have banished not quite.

But this hour--Ah Love, if it might
With this splendor, this shining moon, set not!
If only forever as now
In this silence of silver adrift,
In this reeling, slow, luminous sphere,
This hollow great round of the night,
We might drift with the tide-flow, and lift
With the infinite pulse of the waters,
See each but the other, and hear
Our own language alone, I and thou,
I here at the stern, at the prow
The one woman, God's costliest gift!
So only to see you, to hear you,
To speak with you, Love, to be near you,--
I should reckon this life, well content.

But this dream is in vain, is in vain;
I will dream you one other. Suppose
This one hour some nepenthe were lent,
So pain, nor remembrance of pain,
Nor remembrance nor knowledge of care,
Nor distrust, nor fear, nor despair,--
For these, and more also, God knows
We have known and endured them, full share,--
Should have power to approach us! Suppose
To us drifting and dreaming afloat
On this shadowless shining of waters,
This mirror of tide without stain,
It were possible just for one hour
To forebode, or remember, or fear,
Nothing; of one thing aware
And one only, that we two are here,
And together, unhindered: then, Dear,
This one hour were our life,--all the past
But the ignorant sleep before birth,
All the future a trance, that should last
Till we turn us again to our earth!

And this dream, hadst thou courage to hear
Me interpret, were dreamed not in vain.
For this hour, O Love, was not meant,
With its rapture of peace, to endure,
Intense, calm, passionate, pure,--

My spirit with thy spirit blent
As the odor of flower and flower,
Of hyacinth blossom and rose.
Heart, spirit, and body, and brain,
Thou art utterly mine, as I thine;
But the love of the flesh, tho' at first
When I saw you and loved you it burst
With the love of the spirit one flame,
Neither greater nor less, but the same,
Is yet finite, attains not the height
Of the spirit enfranchised, and must
With the body slip back into dust.
Our soul-passion is deathless, divine.

So, we strike now the perfectest note
That man's heart is attuned to, attain
The white light of the zenith supreme,
Pierce the seventh and innermost sphere;
We are gods! Let us cast us adrift
From the world of the flesh and its power!
It is only a plunge, a quick roll
Of our skiff--I will gather and fold
You close, for the waters are cold,--
A few sobs, and we rise one soul,
Undissevered for ever and ever.

RECKONING.

What matter that the sad gray city sleeps,
Sodden with dull dreams, ill at ease, and snow
Still falling chokes the swollen drains! I know
That even with sun and summer not less creeps
My spirit thro' gloom, nor ever gains the steeps
Where Peace sits, inaccessible, yearned for so.
Well have I learned that from my breast my woe
Starts,--that as my own hand hath sown, it reaps.

I have had my measure of achievement, won
Most I have striven for; and at last remains
This one thing certain only, that who gains
Success hath gained it at too sore a cost,
If in his triumph hour his heart have lost
Youth, and have found its sorrow of age begun.

IN NOTRE DAME.

When first did I perceive you, when take heed

Of what is now so deep in heart and brain
That tears shall not efface it, nor the greed
Of time or fate destroy, nor scorn, nor pain?

Long summers back I trembled to the vision
Of your keen beauty,--a delirious sense
That he you loved might hold in like derision
Or Hell or Heaven, or sin or innocence.

This in my heart of hearts, while outwardly
Nor speech nor guarded glance my dream betrayed;
Till one day, so past thought you maddened me,
My dream escaped my lips, glad and afraid.

Afraid, where no fear was. For lo, the gift
(Worlds could not purchase it) was mine, was mine!
And oh, my Sweet, how swift we went adrift
On wild sweet waters, warmer-hued than wine!

My very eyes are dizzy with delight
At your recalled caresses. Peace, my heart!
She whom you beat so wild for lies to-night
From you too many bitter leagues apart.

Be calm, and I will talk to you of her;
And you shall listen, passionately still;
And as the pauses in my verse recur,
Think, heart, all this does fealty to your will!

All this,--a lithe and perfect-moulded form,
Instinct with subtle gesture, soft, intense.
Head small and queenlike, dainty feet that warm
Even the dull world's ways into rapturous sense.

Clear, broad, white forehead, crowned low down with hair
Darker than night, more soft than sleep or tears.
Nose neither small nor great, but straight, and fair.
Like naught but smooth sea-shells her delicate ears.

But how to tell about her mouth and eyes!
Her strange, sweet, maddening eyes, her subtle mouth!
Mouth in whose closure all love's sweetness lives,--
Eyes with the warm gleam of the lustrous south!

Fathomless dusk by night, the day lets in
Glimmer of emerald,--thus those eyes of hers!
Above the firm sweep of the moulded chin
The lips, than whose least kiss Heaven's gifts were worse.

Her bosom,--ah that now my head were laid!
Warm in that resting-place! But, heart, be still!
I will refrain, and break my dreams, afraid
To stir the yearning I can not fulfil.

Love, in the northern night of Brittany
Hear you no voice divide the night like flame?
In these gray walls the inmost soul of me
Is swooning with the music of your name.

NOCTURNE.

Soothe, soothe
The day-fall, soothe,
Till wrinkling winds and seas are smooth,--
Till yon low band
Of charm'd strand
Puff seaward dreams from the inner land,--
Till, lapped in mild half-lights, our dream-blown boat
Is felt to float, to fall, to float.

A sundown rose
Delays and glows
O'er yon spired peak's remoter snows.
Uprolling soon
A red-ripe moon
Lolls in the pines in drowsed half-swoon;
And thin moon-shades pace out to us, and shift
Our visions as we drift, and drift.

From night-wide blooms
In coppice glooms
Set outward voyaging spice perfumes.
The slow-pulsed seas,
The shadowed trees,--
The night-spell holds us one with these,
Till, Love, we scarce know life from sleep,--we seem
To smile a little, dream, and dream.

TIDES.

Through the still dusk how sighs the ebb-tide out,
Reluctant for the reed-beds! Down the sands
It washes. Hark! Beyond the wan gray strand's
Low limits how the winding channels grieve,
Aware the evasive waters soon will leave
Them void amid the waste of desolate lands,
Where shadowless to the sky the marsh expands,
And the noon-heats must scar them, and the drought.

Yet soon for them the solacing tide returns

To quench their thirst of longing. Ah, not so
Works the stern law oar tides of life obey!
Ebbing in the night-watches swift away,
Scarce known ere fled forever is the flow;
And in parched channel still the shrunk stream mourns.

CONSOLATION.

Dear Heart, between us can be no farewell.
We have so long to live, so much to endure,
What ills despair might work us who can tell,
Had we not help in that one trust secure!

Time cannot sever, nor space keep long apart,
Those whom Love's sleepless yearning would draw near.
Fate bends unto the indomitable heart
And firm-fixt will.--What room have we for fear!

DARK.

Now, for the night is hushed and blind with rain,
My soul desires communion, Dear, with thee.
But hour by hour my spirit gets not free,--
Hour by still hour my longing strives in vain.
The thick dark hems me, ev'n to the restless brain.
The wind's confusion vague encumbers me.
Ev'n passionate memory, grown too faint to see
Thy features, stirs not in her straitening chain.

And thou, dost thou too feel this strange divorce
Of will from power? The spell of night and wind,
Baffling desire and dream, dost thou too find?
Not distance parts us, Dear; but this dim force,
Intangible, holds us helpless, hushed with pain,
Dumb with the dark, blind with the gusts of rain!

THE FOOTPATH.

Path by Which her feet have gone,
Still you climb the windy hill,
Still the hillside fronts the dawn,
Fronts the clustering village still.

On the bare hill-summit waves

Still the lonely poplar-tree.
Where the blue lake-water raves,
Still the plover pipe and flee.

Still you climb from windy pier,
Where the white gull drops and screams,
Through the village grown so dear,
Till you reach my heaven of dreams.

Ah, the place we used to meet,
I and she,--where sharp you turn,
Shun the curious village street,
Lurk thro' hollows, hide in fern!

Then; the old house, ample-eaved,
Night-long quiet beneath the stars,--
How the maples, many-leaved,
Screened us at the orchard bars!

Path by which her feet have gone,
Still you climb the windy hill;
Still the hillside fronts the dawn,
Fronts the clustering village still;

But no longer she, my own,
Treads you, save as dreams allow.
And these eyes in dreams alone
Dare to look upon you now.

TOUT OU RIEN.

Love, if you love me, love with heart and soul!
I am not liberal as some lovers are,
Accepting small return, and scanty dole,
Gratefully glad to worship from afar.

Ah, love me passionately, or not at all!
For love that counts the cost I have small need.
My fingers would with laughing scorn let fall
That poor half-love so many lovers heed.

Then be mine wholly,--body, soul, and brain!
Your memory shall outlive kings. For Time
Forgets his cunning and assails in vain
Her whose name rings along the poet's rhyme.

SALT.

O breath of wind and sea,
Bitter and clear,
Now my faint soul springs free,
Blown clean from fear!

O hard sweet strife, O sting
Of buffeting salt!
Doubt and despair take wing,
Failure, and fault.

I dread not wrath or wrong,--
Smile, and am free;
Strong while the winds are strong,
The rocks, the sea.

Heart of my heart, tho' life
Front us with storm,
Love will outlast the strife,
More pure, more warm.

KHARTOUM.

Set in the fierce red desert for a sword,
Drawn and deep-driven implacably! The tide
Of scorching sand that chafes thy landward side
Storming thy palms; and past thy front outpoured
The Nile's vast dread and wonder! Late there roared
(While far off paused the long war, long defied)
Mad tumult thro' thy streets; and Gordon died,
Slaughtered amid the yelling rebel horde!

Yet, spite of shame and wrathful tears, Khartoum,
We owe thee certain thanks, for thou hast shown
How still the one a thousand crowds outweighs,--
Still one man's mood sways millions,--one man's doom
Smites nations;--and our burning spirits own
Not sordid these nor unheroic days!

LIBERTY.

[From the French of Louis Honore Frøchette]

A child, I set the thirsting of my mouth
To the gold chalices of loves that craze.
Surely, alas, I have found therein but drouth,

Surely has sorrow darkened o'er my days.
While worldlings chase each other madly round
Their giddy track of frivolous gayety,
Dreamer, my dream earth's utmost longings bound:
One love alone is mine, my love is Liberty.

I have sung them all;--youth's lightsomeness that fleets,
Pure friendship, my most fondly cherished dreams,
Wild blossoms and the winds that steal their sweets,
Wood odors, and the star that whitely gleams.
But our hearts change; the spirit dulls its edge
In the chill contact with reality;
These vanished like the foam-bells on the sedge:
I sing one burden now, my song is Liberty.

I drench my spirit in ecstasy, consoled,
And my gaze trembles toward the azure arc,
When in the wide world-records I behold
Flame like a meteor God's finger thro' the dark
But if, at times, bowed over the abyss
Wherein man crawls toward immortality,--
Beholding here how sore his suffering is,
I make my prayer with tears, it is for Liberty.

TO THE MEMORY OF SIDNEY LANIER.

Sullenly falls the rain,
Still hangs the dripping leaf,
And ah, the pain!--
The slow, dull ache of my grief,
That throbs--"In vain, in vain,--
You have garnered your sheaf!"

You have garnered your sheaf, with the tares
Therein, and unripe wheat,--
All that Death spares,
Who has come with too swift feet,
Not turning for any prayers
Nor all who entreat.

They entreated with tears. But I--
Ah me, all I can say
Is only a cry!
I had loved you many a day,
Yet never had fate drawn nigh
My way to your way.

My spirit made swift with love
Went forth to you in your place
Far off and above

Tho' we met not face to face,
My Elder Brother, yet love
Had pierced through space!

ON READING THE POEMS OF SIDNEY LANIER.

Poet and Flute-player, that flute of thine
To me must ever seem thy perfect sign!
Tho' strenuously with breath divine inspired,
To thy strait law is due thy deathless line.

TO BLISS CARMAN,

WITH A COPY OF LANG'S "HELEN OF TROY."

This antique song, new sung in fashion new,
From me, half silent fallen, with love to you,
O singer of unvexed scenes and virgin themes
In strait, quaint, ancient metres, thronged with dreams!

A BALLADE OF PHILOMELA.

From gab of jay and chatter of crake
The dusk wood covered me utterly.
And here the tongue of the thrush was awake.
Flame-floods out of the low bright sky
Lighted the gloom with gold-brown dye,
Before dark; and a manifold chorussing
Arose of thrushes remote and nigh,--
For the tongue of the singer needs must sing.

Midmost a close green covert of brake
A brown bird listening silently
Sat; and I thought--"She grieves for the sake
Of Itylus,--for the stains that lie
In her heritage of sad memory."
But the thrushes were hushed at evening.
Then I waited to hear the brown bird try,--
For the tongue of the singer needs must sing.

And I said--"The thought of the thrushes Will shake
With rapture remembered her heart; and her shy
Tongue of the dear times dead will take
To make her a living song, when sigh

The soft night winds disburthened by.
Hark now!"--for the upraised quivering wing,
The throat exultant, I could descry,--
And the tongue of the singer needs must sing!

L'ENVOI.

But the bird dropped dead with only a cry.
I found its tongue was withered, poor thing!
Then I no whit wondered, for well knew I
That the heart of the singer will break or sing.

A HERALD.

Ere the Spring comes near
O'er the smoking hills,
Stirring a million rills
To laughter low and clear
Till winds are hushed to hear,--

Ere the eaves at noon
Thaw and drip, there flies
A herald thro' the skies
With promise of a boon--
Of birds and blossoms soon.

Subtle though it be,
Yet sweetly sure that word;
E'en such my heart hath heard
(Over life's frosty lea)
Of Immortality.

WINTER GERANIUMS.

O What avails the storm,
When o'er my sense this Magian flower enweaves
His charm of slumbrous summer, green and warm,
And laps me in his luxury of leaves!

O where the frost that chills,
Whilst these rich blooms burn red about my face,
Luring me out across the irised hills
Where Autumn broods o'er purple deeps of space!

A BREATHING TIME.

Here is a breathing time, and rest for a little season.
Here have I drained deep draughts out of the springs of life.
Here, as of old, while still unacquainted with toil and faintness,
Stretched are my veins with strength, fearless my heart and at peace.
I have come back from the crowd, the blinding strife and the tumult,
Pain, and the shadow of pain, sorrow in silence endured;
Fighting, at last I have fallen, and sought the breast of the Mother,--
Quite cast down I have crept close to the broad sweet earth.
Lo, out of failure triumph! Renewed the wavering courage,
Tense the unstrung nerves, steadfast the faltering knees
Weary no more, nor faint, nor grieved at heart, nor despairing,
Hushed in the earth's green lap, lulled to slumber and dreams!

BIRCH AND PADDLE.

TO BLISS CARMAN.

Friend, those delights of ours
Under the sun and showers,--

Athrough the noonday blue
Sliding our light canoe,

Or floating, hushed, at eve,
When the dim pine-tops grieve!

What tonic days were they
Where shy streams dart and play,--

Where rivers brown and strong
As caribou bound along,

Break into angry parle
Where wildcat rapids snarl,

Subside, and like a snake
Wind to the quiet lake!

We've paddled furtively,
Where giant boughs hide the sky,--

Have stolen, and held our breath,
Thro' coverts still as death,--

Have left with wing unstirred
The brooding phoebe-bird,

And hardly caused a care

In the water-spider's lair.

For love of his clear pipe
We've flushed the zigzag snipe,--

Have chased in wilful mood
The wood-duck's flapping brood,--

Have spied the antlered moose
Cropping the young green spruce,

And watched him till betrayed
By the kingfisher's sharp tirade.

Quitting the bodeful shades
We've run thro' sunnier glades,

And dropping craft and heed
Have bid our paddles speed.

Where the mad rapids chafe
We've shouted, steering safe,--

With sinew tense, nerve keen,
Shot thro' the roar, and seen,

With spirit wild as theirs,
The white waves leap-like hares.

And then, with souls grown clear
In that sweet atmosphere,

With influences serene
Our blood and brain washed clean,

We've idled down the breast
Of broadening tides at rest,

And marked the winds, the birds,
The bees, the far-off herds,

Into a drowsy tune
Transmute the afternoon.

So, Friend, with ears and eyes
Which shy divinities

Have opened with their kiss,
We need no balm but this,--

A little space for dreams
On care-unsullied streams,--

'Mid task and toil, a space
To dream on Nature's face!

AN ODE FOR THE CANADIAN CONFEDERACY.

Awake, my country, the hour is great with change!
Under this gloom which yet obscures the land,
From ice-blue strait and stern Laurentian range
To where giant peaks our western bounds command,
A deep voice stirs, vibrating in men's ears
As if their own hearts throbbed that thunder forth,
A sound wherein who hearkens wisely hears
The voice of the desire of this strong North,--
 This North whose heart of fire
 Yet knows not its desire
Clearly, but dreams, and murmurs in the dream.
The hour of dreams is done. Lo, on the hills the gleam!

Awake, my country, the hour of dreams is done!
Doubt not, nor dread the greatness of thy fate.
Tho' faint souls fear the keen confronting sun,
And fain would bid the morn of splendor wait;
Tho' dreamers, rapt in starry visions, cry
 "Lo, yon thy future, yon thy faith, thy fame!"
And stretch vain hands to stars, thy fame is nigh,
Here in Canadian hearth, and home, and name;--
 This name which yet shall grow
 Till all the nations know
Us for a patriot people, heart and hand
Loyal to our native earth, our own Canadian land!

O strong hearts, guarding the birthright of our glory,
Worth your best blood this heritage that ye guard!
These mighty streams resplendent with our story,
These iron coasts by rage of seas unjarred,--
What fields of peace these bulwarks well secure!
What vales of plenty those calm floods supply!
Shall not our love this rough, sweet land make sure,
Her bounds preserve inviolate, though we die?
 O strong hearts of the North,
 Let flame your loyalty forth,
And put the craven and base to an open shame,
Till earth shall know the Child of Nations by her name!

THE QUELLING OF THE MOOSE.

A MELICETE LEGEND.

When tent was pitched, and supper done,
And forgotten were paddle, and rod, and gun,
And the low, bright planets, one by one,

Lit in the pine-tops their lamps of gold
To us by the fire, in our blankets rolled,
This was the story Sac̄bi told--

"In those days came the moose from the east,
A monster out of the white north-east,
And as leaves before him were man and beast.

"The dark rock-hills of Saguenay
Are strong,--they were but straw in his way.
He leapt the St. Lawrence as in play.

"His breath was a storm and a flame; his feet
In the mountains thundered, fierce and fleet,
Till men's hearts were as milk, and ceased to beat.

"But in those days dwelt Clote Scarp with men.
It is long to wait till he comes again,--
But a Friend was near and could hear us, then!

"In his wigwam, built by the Oolastook,
Where the ash-trees over the water look,
A voice of trouble the stillness shook.

"He rose, and took his bow from the wall,
And listened; he heard his people's call
Pierce up from the villages one and all.

"From village to village he passed with cheer;
And the people followed; but when drew near
The stride of the moose, they fled in fear.

"Like smoke in a wind they fled at the last
But he in a pass of the hills stood fast,
And down at his feet his bow he cast.

"That terrible forehead, maned with flame,
He smote with his open hand,--and tame
As a dog the raging beast became.

"He smote with his open hand; and lo!
As shrinks in the rains of spring the snow,
So shrank the monster beneath that blow,

"Till scarce the bulk of a bull he stood.
And Clote Scarp led him down to the wood,
And gave him the tender shoots for food."

He ceased; and a voice said, "Understand
How huge a peril will shrink like sand,
When stayed by a prompt and steady hand!"

A SONG OF REGRET.

In the southward sky
The late swallows fly,
The low red willows
In the river quiver;
From the beeches nigh
Russet leaves sail by,
The tawny billows
In the chill wind shiver;
The beech-burrs burst,
And the nuts down-patter;
The red squirrels chatter
O'er the wealth disperst.

Yon carmine glare
Would the west outdare;--
'Tis the Fall attire
Of the maples flaming.
In the keen late air
Is an impulse rare,
A sting like fire,
A desire past naming.
But the crisp mists rise
And my heart falls a-sighing,--
Sighing, sighing
That the sweet time dies!

THE DEPARTING OF CLOTE SCARP.

It is so long ago; and men well nigh
Forget what gladness was, and how the earth
Gave corn in plenty, and the rivers fish,
And the woods meat, before he went away.
His going was on this wise.

All the works
And words and ways of men and beasts became
Evil, and all their thoughts continually
Were but of evil. Then he made a feast.
Upon the shore that is beside the sea
That takes the setting sun, he ordered it,
And called the beasts thereto. Only the men

He called not, seeing them evil utterly.
He fed the panther's crafty brood, and filled
The lean wolf's hunger; from the hollow tree
His honey stayed the bear's terrific jaws;
And the brown rabbit couched at peace, within
The circling shadow of the eagle's wings.
And when the feast was done he told them all
That now, because their ways were evil grown,
On that same day he must depart from them,
And they should look upon his face no more.
Then all the beasts were very sorrowful.

It was near sunset, and the wind was still,
And down the yellow shore a thin wave washed
Slowly; and Clote Scarp launched his birch canoe,
And spread his yellow sail, and moved from shore,
Though no wind followed, streaming in the sail,
Or roughening the clear waters after him.
And all the beasts stood by the shore, and watched.
Then to the west appeared a long red trail
Over the wave; and Clote Scarp sailed and sang
Till the canoe grew little like a bird,
And black, and vanished in the shining trail.
And when the beasts could see his form no more,
They still could hear him, singing as he sailed,
And still they listened, hanging down their heads
In long row, where the thin wave washed and fled.
But when the sound of singing died, and when
They lifted up their voices in their grief,
Lo! on the mouth of every beast a strange
New tongue! Then rose they all and fled apart,
Nor met again in council from that day.

A BREAK.

Oh, the scent of the hyacinth blossom!
The joy of that night,
But the grievous awaking!
The speed of my flight
Thro' the dawn redly breaking!
Gray lay the still sea;
Naked hillside and lea;
And gray with night frost
The wide garden I crossed!
But the hyacinth beds were a-bloom.
I stooped and plucked one--
In an instant 'twas done,--
And I heard, not far off, a gun boom!
In my bosom
I thrust the crushed blossom;

And turned, and looked back
Where She stood at her pane
Waving sadly farewell once again;
Then down the dim track
Fled amain,
With the flower in my bosom.
Oh, the scent of the hyacinth blossom!

TO A LADY,

AFTER HEARING HER READ KEATS' "NIGHTINGALE."

This supreme song of him who dreamed
All beauty, and whose heart foreknew
The anguish of vain longing, seemed
To breathe new mystery, breathed by you.

As if the rapture of the night,
Moon-tranced, and passion-still, were stirred
To some undreamed divine delight
By sudden singing of a bird!

RONDEAU.

TO LOUIS HONORE FRÉCHETTE.

Laurels for song! And nobler bays,
In old Olympian golden days
Of clamor thro' the clear-eyed morn,
No bowed triumphant head hath borne,
Victorious in all Hellas' gaze!

They watched his glowing axles graze
The goal, and rent the heavens with praise;--
Yet the supreamer heads have worn
Laurels for song.

So thee, from no palaestra-plays
A conqueror, to the gods we raise,
Whose brows of all our singers born
The sacred fillets chief adorn,--
Who first of all our choir displays
Laurels for song.

A BIRTHDAY BALLADE.

All deserted to wind and to sun
You have left the dear, dusky canoe.
The amber cool currents still run,
But our paddle forgets to pursue.
Our river wears still the rare blue,
But its sparkle seems somehow less gay;
It confides me this greeting for you--
Many Happy Returns of the Day!

Where's the mirth that with morn was begun,
Nor dreaded the dark and the dew?
Some sweet thieves have made off with our fun!
Would our paddles were free to pursue!
Ah, could we but catch them anew,
Clip their wings, forbid them to stray,
Then more blithely we'd sing than we do--
Many Happy Returns of the Day!

Dear remembrances die, one by one,
So cunning Time's craft to undo!
But ours must be never undone.
Oft again must the paddle pursue,
Oft the treasured impression renew!
Then, return our Acadian way,
For our days of delight were too few--
Many Happy Returns of the Day!

L'ENVOI.

Now an easy enigma or two
This ballade is devised to convey.
Unto you, and us lonely ones too,
Many Happy Returns of the Day!

TO S---- M----.

The disciple of Master Herrick returneth thanks for the gift of a band
of pansies for his hat.

I.

Never poet
From Musaeus down,
Crowned with rose, or myrtle-wreath, or laurel,
Had of daintier hand
Dearer trophy!
Therefore (know it,
Castaly! and, Daphne's lover, quarrel!)
I for crown
Flout the bay and wear thy pansy-band,

Mistress Sophie.

II.

As these petals
Die not,
So the thought that settles
Softly in the purple petals
Fly not!
Half a memory, which a world of men
Can buy not,--
Half a prayer, that till we meet again
Thou sigh not!

LA BELLE TROMBONISTE.

How grave she sits and toots
In the glare!
From her dainty bits of boots
To her hair
Not the sign remotest shows
If she either cares or knows
How the beer-imbibing beaux
Sit and stare.

They're most prodigal with sighs,
Or they laugh;
Or they cast adoring eyes
As they quaff.
They exert their every wile
Her attention to beguile.
Do they ever win a smile?
Not by half!

She leans upon her chin
(Not a toot!),
While the leading violin
And the flute
Wail and plead in low duet
Till, it may be, eyes are wet.
She her trombone doth forget--
She is mute.

The music louder grows;
She's awake!
She applies her lips and blows--
Goodness sake!.....
To think that such a peal
From such throat and frame ideal,
From such tender lips could steal--

Takes the cake!

The dinning cymbals shrill
Kiss and clash.
Drum and kettle-drum at will
Roll and crash.
But that trombone over all
Toots unto my heart a call;--
Maid petite, and trombone tall--
It's a mash!

Yet, I hesitate--for lo,
What a pout!
She's poetic; and I know
I am stout.
In her little room would she
On her trombone, tenderly,
Sit and toot as thus to me?--
Ah, I doubt!

THE POET IS BIDDEN TO MANHATTAN ISLAND.

Dear Poet, quit your shady lanes
And come where more than lanes are shady.
Leave Phyllis to the rustic swains
And sing some Knickerbocker lady.
O hither haste, and here devise
Divine ballades before unuttered.
Your poet's eyes must recognize
The side on which your bread is buttered!

Dream not I tempt you to forswear
One pastoral joy, or rural frolic.
I call you to a city where
The most urbane are most bucolic.
'Twill charm your poet's eyes to find
Good husbandmen in brokers burly;--
Their stock is ever on their mind;
To water it they rise up early.

Things you have sung, but ah, not seen--
Things proper to the age of Saturn--
Shall greet you here; for we have been
Wrought quaintly, on the Arcadian pattern.
Your poet's lips will break in song
For joy, to see at last appearing
The bulls and bears, a peaceful throng,
While a lamb leads them--to the shearing!

And metamorphoses, of course,

You'll mark in plenty, à la Proteus:
A bear become a little horse--
Presumably from too much throat-use!
A thousandfold must go untold;
But, should you miss your farm-yard sunny,
And miss your ducks and drakes, behold
We'll make you ducks and drakes--of money!

Greengrocers here are fairly read.
And should you set your heart upon them,
We lack not beets--but some are dead,
While others have policemen on them.
And be the dewfall dear to you,
Possess your poet's soul in patience!
Your notes shall soon be falling dew,--
Most mystical of transformations!

Your heart, dear Poet, surely yields;
And soon you'll leave your uplands flowery,
Forsaking fresh and bowery fields,
For "pastures new"--upon the Bowery!
You've piped at home, where none could pay,
Till now, I trust, your wits are riper.
Make no delay, but come this way,
And pipe for them that pay the piper!

THE BLUE VIOLET.

Blossom that spread'st, as spring brings in
Her sudden flights of swallows,
Thy nets of blue, cool-meshed and thin,
In rain-wet pasture hollows,--

Thronging the dim grass everywhere
Amid thy heart-leaves tender,
Thy temperate fairness seems more fair
Even than August's splendor!

Yet do I hear complaints of thee,--
Men doubting of thy fragrance!
But, Dear, thou hast revealed to me
That shyest of perfume-vagrants.

Do ever so, my Flower discreet,
And all the world be fair to,
While men but guess that rarest sweet
Which one alone can swear to!

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