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LEAVES IN THE WIND

BY

VIRNA SHEARD

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LEAVES IN THE WIND

In the Abbey

Not far from the Chapel of Henry VII in Westminster Abbey, and near the tombs of the three Queens, Mary, her half-sister Elizabeth, and Mary Queen of Scots, there is thought to have been buried long ago the body of a little girl. Above it is this inscription only

"Jane Lister, dear childe"

How came you here—tell me how came you here
With these of England's garnered great to lie?
In this vast tomb of Kings, cool and austere,
Why should you sleep while centuries go by
Lost and alone—Jane Lister, childe so dear?

Who brought you down this dim and storied way,
Where mighty names are carved on wall and floor;
Who carried you that far forgotten day
In through the Abbey's heavy, darkened door—
—You, who belonged to Morning, and the May.

Poets and Queens, and Ministers of State,—
These are your neighbors in this house of peace.
You are ringed round with weary men and great,
Who each one here at last found long release
From weight of grandeur, pain of love, and hate.

Here Gloriana's restless heart is still,
And Mary Queen of Scots is free of grief;
Here the Crusader's armour rusts at will
And never summer shine or swinging leaf
Brighten these alcoves that the shadows fill.

For here the night and day are both as one,
And folded hands have laid their treasures down;
Here are no battles fought,—no races run;
No man wears other than a carven crown,
In this grey quietness, bereft of sun.

They should have found for you a pleasant place,
Small one,—where daisies grew and grass was green,
And shadows from tall trees made lovely lace,
And in young April little lambs were seen,—
Or the high moon looked down with smiling face.

O! much I wonder why they brought you here,—
Where Kings and Queens and glorious warriors lie,
With one lone unknown soldier on his bier.
Strange ghosts, methinks, you are companioned by,
Little Jane Lister—childe forever dear.

Troubadour

Cities he knew of wide and devious ways,
 Cities of fresh veneer, and towers that held no past,
On treeless roads he went through toilsome days
 And sleepless nights, with chains of light o'ercast.

Cities he knew of old, mysterious walls,
 And little twisted streets and hollowed stairs;
Here he would rest awhile, or in grey halls
 Or quiet byways, give the world his wares.

And all his wares were but a lot of songs,
 Worn songs and new, caught up by land or sea,—
Love songs and lullabys—ballads of dead wrongs,
 Haunting and tender—touched with fantasy.

In old Verona and sometimes in Rome
 At carnival he went in motley hues,
And sang his songs beside St. Peter's dome,
 In colored coat, and gay rosetted shoes.

Cities he knew, and with his bright guitar
 He wove upon the moonlit nights a spell;—
Casements flew open, when as from a star
 His rain of music on the darkness fell.

But no place held him long. He came and went
 With a light pack, and free as Summer air;
Yet always he returned when years were spent
 To one still city—for his heart was there.

Rain

Long have we waited for the lovely rain—
And now the brittle grass is growing brown;
A stillness holds the silver weather-vane—
And like a bloom, dust lies upon the town;—
But O! I heard a peacock call at noon
"Rain! Rain is coming! Rain is coming soon!"

Out in the fields the anxious cattle lowed—
And drooping clover seemed to lift and stir;—
A far-off whistle travelled down the road
Stinging the silence—and with sudden whirr
A covey of young partridges went by
And vanished as blown leaves against the sky.

But on the trees the leaves are all acurl,
And motionless as things beneath a spell;—
The morning-glory buds will not uncurl
Although the morning goes, they know full well.
Out in the quiet and the clinging heat
I think that I can hear the Earth's heart beat.

The little swallows swing close to the eves,
An old grey dog lies panting in the shade;
A pigeon flutters up and softly grieves;—
A small disconsolate duck seems half-afraid,
For shadows fall as at the edge of night
And some great hand turns down the sun's hot light.

Upon the wind that comes with beating wings
The dreadful brooding stillness blows away—
The rain! The lovely rain comes down, and sings,
In this strange twilight that is sweet as day!
And o'er the lake where whitened waves roll in
The storm god hurls his glittering javelin.

Garnered

I have forgotten many things—
But not the song the river sings
 Where reeds are growing;
And in some dim and pagan way
I hear the little tune today
 Pan once was blowing!
I have forgotten many things—
But not the strange perfume that clings
 To beads of amber;
Nor scent of honey in the comb—
Honey the wild bees carry home
 Where grape-vines clamber.
I have forgotten many things—
The names of Pharaohs and of Kings
 And Knights long-sleeping;
But there are names carved on my heart
So they may never more depart
 From out my keeping.
I have forgotten many things—
But not the lovers Shakespeare brings
 Across his pages;
Though out of dreams he made them all,
They do not pass beyond recall,
 With Queens and sages.
I have forgotten many things—
Old griefs and bitterness found wings
 Wherewith to vanish;

But though the years go by—one night
Touched by the moon to silver white,
 No time can banish.
And laid in rosemary and rue
I keep some letters, tied with blue,
 To still all aching;
These are the things—oh, well I know
By land and sea—where'er I go—
 I will be taking!

Within This Silver Box

Within this silver box, sea-cool and shining
 Set with hot blue of turquoise—blue as tropic skies—
Locked out of sight upon the satin lining
 A faded tear-stained old love letter lies.

And she who gently laid it there for keeping—
 Long ere the furrowing years had taken toll,
Before her spring had gone to summer's reaping—
 Left with it, locked away, her heart and soul.

And now that she is grey and often lonely,
 Now that the long deserted house is still
And echoes to her little footsteps only
 That unregarded, go which way they will.

She takes the silver box in trembling fingers
 And sometimes—sometimes even turns the key—
To see upon the satin, where rose perfume lingers,
 The old love letter as it used to be,—

Unchanged—unchanged—with youth forever flaming!
 The burning words shine from the yellowing page
Herself and all her beauty ever claiming,
 Bidding defiance to both death and age.

Gossip in a Flower Market

The rough roots of roses look a little sad to me;
(I can never grow roses, though I keep on trying,)
Those kitten-faced pansies have just caught a honey-bee—
O the wild-flowers in bunches make me feel like crying!

I mustn't buy narcissus; they cost more than anything;
(Exquisite and moon-white! Half-startled and surprised;—)
The daffodils are always, so insistently Spring,—

And the parrot-tulip's costume, for carnival devised.

I wish I could find a box of wild thyme growing;
(Wild thyme—that grew upon a bank so long ago;)
There's a shower of laburnam, for now it is blowing;—
It should really have a grey fence behind it, you know.

Don't you like that queer grey moss they plant on rockeries
With its tiny coral bells the fairies must adore?
And that man sells immortelles—brittle white mockeries
And waxy wreaths of dark leaves;—I don't know what they're for.

O Jack-in-the-pulpit! And only that one, I see,—
We must take him home to be our week-end guest;
In a golden-brown pool he learned all his theology—
But I think he is the parson that I like the best.

In that old cracked pitcher! See! The first mignonette,
Once someone said that mignonette was just like myself,—
A sweet illusion;—but for that, you know, I buy it yet—
And put it in a blue jar and set it on a shelf.

The Haunted Day

Silver frost at daybreak shines on my window sill,
Silver lines against the sky are grey geese awing;
Blue smoke of burning leaves lies on the air as still
As incense from the censers that acolytes swing.

Berries deck the briar where grew the sweetest rose
And from old fence corners comes calling of the quail;
Silkweed and thistle-down and dandelion blows
Drift along like little fleets—fairy ships asail!—

In the flowerless garden some long belated bees
Make the silence deeper with a dim summer sound;
Now a beaten pathway runs under painted trees
And on to a river bank, where dreams may be found.

The hours are rapt and spellbound,—for when the dark comes down
(Hark to the echo of the far cathedral bell!)
They say the dead—the dead—pass by through country and town,
Dear Christ—if it were true—this ancient tale they tell!

Grey Lace

Under the storm-swept violet sky

The old trees bend, and they swing and sigh,
As the last little leaves go fluttering by.

The harlequin leaves so pied and gay,
The wind is blowing them all away—
They will soon be as lost as yesterday.

"Summer is over—beauty is gone—
The blue days went with the last bird song,"
So mourn the old trees, deep-rooted and strong.

They do not dream of beauty they hold—
Strange beauty of branches, warped and old,
With their grey lace etched on sunsets of gold.

Poets

Poets are where you find them.
I found one sweeping the street, as for God's sake
Beyond my door.
He wore white garments—we'll call them white—
Had a brown broom, and pushed a cart.
Probably he didn't know he was a poet.
Or what poets are for.
He touched his somewhat white cap and said,
"Hey, lady! Ease sideways a little!
There's a sorta crazy beetle there
By yer shoe."
"O—there?" I asked.
"Yes," he pointed, "there!
It has rainbow colors on its back."
"So it has," I agreed, peering.
"Ay," he nodded, "bugs are comin' out these days.
Reckon maybe I oughta sweep 'em up,
But somehow it don't seem fair.
One a them little lady-bugs lit on my hand—
The old-fashioned kind, y' know."
"I know," I assented.
"Had two black spots on its red wings," he explained.
"My land!
It took me back to when I was a kid. I says
'Lady-bird! Lady-bird! Fly away home,' I says.
But I stopped there, fer, lady, why add
'Yer house is afire—yer children alone,'
An' worry a little fairy thing like that?"
"Why indeed?" I echoed.
"One acquires merit, as said the old Lama of Kim—
By considering the lowly."
He seemed momentarily puzzled, then continued.
"The wild geese is wingin' north, lady,

I saw a great 'V' of them against the moon
Last night.
Makes a man kinda hanker to go along—
His ancient face lit up—
"Wings," he said gently, "wings is a nice idea;—
Wings and a song—that means a bird,—
Ay—wings an' a song,—
Well, good day, lady, I've this yer street to sweep."
He waved, and pushed the cart on.
I looked after him, mistily.
Poets—poets also are where you find them.

Desire

Dull not the edge of memory,
O swift years,
Nor drug with draught of days the thing called pain;
Let not my eyes forget they once knew tears,
For one beloved, who comes not home again.

Bring me these gifts when shines
The Christmas tide;—
The echo of his voice across the snow;—
The echo of his footsteps at my side;—
The essence of a joy of long ago.

And should they speak no more
The radiant name,
That sun and rain and wind read on a stone,
Still let it burn within my heart as flame,
Though only I remember it, alone.

Prayer

If aught be mine, Good Master of all fate,
I pray Thee for two blessings from above,
To carry with me to the last, lone gate,—
A little laughter—and a little love.

I would go light of pack along the way;
Glad of the rain, and happy with the sun;
Give me a little laughter with the day,
Give me a little love, when day is done.

Blind

It is the patience of the blind that hurts those who can see;
Dear Christ, their patience—this we cannot bear;
Here in this storm of Life, their strange tranquility
 Beats on the heart as drums beat on the air.

In the unbroken darkness, may they have thoughts that shine;
 Let beauty so betide them with its dream,
That they may drink of it as of some magic wine,
 And in their midnight see God's bright stars gleam.

A Song of Summer Days

As pearls slip off a silken string and fall into the sea,
These rounded summer days fall back into eternity.

Into the deep from whence they came; into the mystery—
At the set of sun each one slips back as pearls into the sea.

They are so sweet—so warm and sweet—Love fain would hold them fast:
He weeps when through his finger-tips they slip away at last.

The Heart Courageous

Who hath a heart courageous
 Will fight with right good cheer;
For well may he his foes out-face
 Who owns no foe called Fear!

Who hath a heart courageous
 Will fight as knight of old
For that which he doth count his own—
 Against the world to hold.

Who hath a heart courageous
 Will fight both night and day,
Against the Host Invisible—
 That holds his soul at bay.

Who hath a heart courageous
 Rests with tranquillity,
For Time he counts not as his foe,
 Nor Death his enemy.

A Southern Lullaby

Little honey baby, shet yo' eyes up tight;—
(Shadow-man is comin' from de moon!)—
You's as sweet as roses if dey is so pink an white;
(Shadow-man'll get here mighty soon.)

Little honey baby, keep yo' footses still!—
(Rocky-bye, oh, rocky, rocky-bye!)
Hush yo' now, an listen to dat lonesome whip-po-will;
Don't yo' fix yo' lip an start to cry.

Little honey baby, stop dat winkin' quick!
(Hear de hoot-owl in de cotton-wood!)
Yess—I sees yo' eyes adoin' dat dere triflin' trick—
(He gets chillun if dey isn't good.)

Little honey baby, what yo' think yo' see?—
(Sister keep on climbin' to de sky—)
Dat's a June bug—it aint got no stinger, lak a bee—
(Reach de glory city by an by.)

Little honey baby, what yo' skeery at?—
(Go down, Moses—down to Phar-e-oh,)—
No—dat isn't nuffin but a furry fly-round bat;—
(Say, he'd betta let dose people go.)

Little honey baby, yo is all ma own,—
Deed yo' is.—Yes,—dat's a fia-fly;—
If I didn't hab yo'—reckon I'd be all alone;
(Rocky-bye—oh, rocky, rocky-bye.)

Little honey baby, shet yo' eyes up tight;—
(Shadow man is comin' from de moon,)
You's as sweet as roses, if dey is so pink and white;
(Shadow-man 'll get here mighty soon.)

NOTE: The lines in brackets are supposed to be sung or chanted. The Southern "Mammy" seldom sang a song through, but interlaced it with comments.—V. S.

The Slumber Angel

When day is ended, and grey twilight flies
On silent wings across the tired land,
The slumber angel cometh from the skies—
The slumber angel of the peaceful eyes,
And with the scarlet poppies in his hand.

His robes are dappled like the moonlit seas,
His hair in waves of silver floats afar;

He weareth lotus-bloom and sweet heartsease,
With tassels of the rustling green fir trees,
As down the dusk he steps from star to star.

Above the world he swings his curfew bell,
And sleep falls soft on golden heads and white;
The daisies curl their leaves beneath his spell,
The prisoner who wearies in his cell
Forgets awhile, and dreams throughout the night.

Even so, in peace, comes that great Lord of rest
Who crowneth men with amaranthine flowers;
Who telleth them the truths they have but guessed,
Who giveth them the things they love the best,
Beyond this restless, rocking world of ours.

The Unknowing

If the bird knew how through the wintry weather
An empty nest would swing by day and night,
It would not weave the strands so close together
Or sing for such delight.

And if the rosebud dreamed ere its awaking,
How soon its perfumed leaves would drift apart,
Perchance 'twould fold them close to still the aching
Within its golden heart.

If the brown brook that hurries through the grasses
Knew of drowned sailors—and of storms to be—
Methinks 'twould wait a little ere it passes
To meet the old grey sea.

If youth could understand the tears and sorrow,
The sombre days that age and knowledge bring,
It would not be so eager for the morrow
Or spendthrift of the spring.

If love but learned how soon life treads its measure,
How short and swift its hours when all is told,
Each kiss and tender word 'twould count and treasure,
As misers count their gold.

Hunter's Moon

In the North they tell of a young hunter who used to appear only with the hunter's moon. He followed in the wake of those sportsmen who shot, but did not always kill their game.

Where are you, mighty hunter? Your golden moon is high,
And the leaves like little harlequins go lightly blowing by
As though to keep a rendezvous with joy, before they die.

Where are you, O young hunter, now that the woods are still?
You who so loved the long pursuit—the following, not the kill—
You who would take the dangerous trail wishing no creature ill.

Unknown and silent hunter—you heed but one white creed,
To play the game in fairness;—to take but for a need,
To leave no bird with broken wing to die by sedge or reed.

Yet death you dealt and swiftly, on upland and on low;—
You sent the blind wolf into rest—you stilled the wounded doe,
And for the broken red fox, you made an end of woe.

Not of your setting were the snares from which you gave release;—
You sprang the trap at day dawn and gave the brown bear peace—
To maddened beasts in agony, you brought a long surcease.

O strange and mighty hunter—again the wild geese fly,—
Upon the scented forest-floor, the new pine-needles lie.
Where are you—O where are you—? The hunter's moon is high!

The Rover

Though I follow a trail to north or south,
 Though I travel east or west,
There's a little house on a quiet road
 That my hidden heart loves best;
And when my journeys are over and done,
 'Tis there I will go to rest.

The snows have bleached it this many a year;
 The sun has painted it grey;
The vines hold it close in their clinging arms;
 The shadows creep there to stay;
And the wind goes calling through empty rooms
 For those who have gone away.

But the roses against the window-pane
 Are the roses I used to know;
And the rain on the roof still sings the song
 It sang in the long ago,
When I lay me down to sleep in a bed
 Little and white and low.

It is long since I bid it all good-bye,
 With young light-hearted disdain;
I remember who stood at the door that day:
 Her tears fell fast as the rain;

And I whistled a tune and waved my hand,
But never went back again.

Toll I have paid at the gates of the world,
The sand I know and the sea;
I have taken the wide and open road,
With steps unhindered and free;
Yet, like a bell ringing down in my heart,
My home is calling to me.

In Solitude

He is not desolate whose ship is sailing
Over the mystery of an unknown sea,
For some great love with faithfulness unfailing
Will light the stars to bear him company.

Out in the silence of the mountain passes,
The heart makes peace and liberty its own—
The wind that blows across the scented grasses
Bringing the balm of sleep—comes not alone.

Beneath the vast illimitable spaces
Where God has set His jewels in array,
A man may pitch his tent in desert places
Yet know that heaven is not so far away.

But in the city—in the lighted city—
Where gilded spires point toward the sky,
And fluttering rags and hunger ask for pity,
Grey Loneliness in cloth-of-gold, goes by.

At Midnight

Turn Thou the key upon our thoughts, dear Lord,
And let us sleep;
Give us our portion of forgetfulness,
Silent and deep.

Lay Thou Thy quiet hand upon our eyes
To close their sight;
Shut out the shining of the moon and stars
And candle-light.

Keep back the phantoms and the visions sad,
The shades of grey,
The fancies that so haunt the little hours

Before the day.

Quiet the time-worn questions that are all
Unanswered yet;
Take from the spent and troubled souls of us
Their vain regret;

And lead us far into Thy silent land,
That we may go
Like children out across the field o' dreams
Where poppies blow.

So all Thy saints—and all Thy sinners, too—
Wilt Thou not keep,
Since not alone unto Thy well-beloved
Thou givest sleep?

April

April! April! April!
With a mist of green on the trees—
And a scent of the warm brown broken earth
On every wandering breeze;
What, though thou be changeful,
Though thy gold turns to grey again,
There's a robin out yonder singing,
Singing in the rain.

April! April! April!
'Tis the Northland hath longed for thee,
She hath gazed toward the South with aching eyes
Full long and patiently.
Come now—tell us, sweeting,
Thou laggard so lovely and late,
Do you know there's no joy like the joy that comes
When hearts have learned to wait?

Gulls

When the mist drives past and the wind blows high,
And the harbour lights are dim—
See where they circle, and dip and fly,
The grey free-lances of wind and sky,
To the water's distant rim!

Like spirits possessed of a fierce delight,
A courage that cannot fail,

They face the breakers—they face the night—
The mad storm-horses are silvery white,
They ride through the bitter gale!

They seem like the souls of the long, long lost,
Who breasted the ocean-main—
Vikings whose vessels were tempest-tossed,
Voyagers who sailed, whatever the cost,
And never came home again.

Or stranger and wilder fancy—it seems
As I hear their wind-torn cry,
No birds fly there through the sun's last gleams,
But the wraiths of hopes—the ghosts of dreams
That the old sea-gods saw die.

When the mist drives past and the wind blows high,
And the harbour lights are dim—
See where they circle, and dip and fly,
The grey free-lances of wind and sky,
To the far horizon's rim.

The Shepherd Wind

When hills and plains are powdered white,
And bitter cold the north wind blows,
Upon my window in the night
A fairy-garden grows.

Here poppies that no hand hath sown
Bloom white as foam upon the sea,
And elfin bells to earth unknown
Hold frost-bound melody.

And here are blossoms like to stars
Tangled in nets of silver lace—
My very breath their beauty mars,
Or stirs them from their place.

Perchance the echoes of old songs
Found here a resting place at last
With drifting perfume that belongs
To roses of the past.

Or all the moonbeams that were lost
On summer nights the world forgets
May here be prisoned by the frost
With souls of violets.

The wind doth shepherd many things—
And when the nights are long and cold,

Who knows how strange a flock he brings
All safely to the fold.

The Whistler

Throughout the sunny day he whistled on his way—
Oh high and low, and gay and sweet,
The melody rang down the street,
Till all the weary, old, and grey,
Smiled at their work, or stopped to say,
"Now God be thanked that youth is fair,
And light of heart, and free from care."

What time the wind blew high, he whistled and went by—
Then clarion clear on every side
The song was scattered far and wide;
Like birds above a storm that fly
The silver notes soared to the sky,
"O soul, whose courage does not fail
But with a song can meet the gale."

And when the rain fell fast, he whistled as he passed—
A little tune the whole world knew,
A song of love, of love most true;
On through the mist it came at last
To one by sorrow overcast,
"Dear Christ," she said, "by night and day
They serve who praise, as well as pray."

Though the great world was white, he whistled in the night—
The sky was spangled all with gold,
The bitter wind was keen and cold,
Yet, gay musician, out of sight,
You still put wintry thoughts to flight,
For summer follows where you fare,
O whistler, so debonair."

And when the fog hung grey, he whistled on his way—
The little children in his train
With rosy lips caught up the strain.
Then I, to hear what he might say,
Followed with them, that sombre day.
"Is it for joy of life," quoth I,
"Good sir, you go a-whistling by?"
He smiled, and sighed, and shook his head,
"I cheer my own sad heart," he said.

A Song of Poppies

I love red poppies! Imperial red poppies!
Sun-worshippers are they;
Gladly as trees live through a hundred summers
They live one little day.

I love red poppies! Impassioned scarlet poppies!
Ever their strange perfume
Seems like an essence brewed by fairy people
From an immortal bloom.

I love red poppies! Red, silken, swaying poppies!
Deep in their hearts they keep
A magic cure for woe—a draught of Lethe—
A lotus-gift of sleep.

I love red poppies! Soft silver-stemmed, red poppies,
That from the rain and sun
Gather a balm to heal some earth-born sorrow,
When their glad day is done.

The Fairy

I'd love to find a fairy!
A pink and pearly fairy
All light and bright and airy—
Wouldn't you? Now wouldn't you?
I'd catch her very gently,
And hold her tight—but gently,
For fairies evidently
Don't care to be on view.

I've looked beneath the hedges,
And by the rivers' edges
Where rustling reeds and sedges
And ribbon-grasses grow;
I've crept through ferny places
Where cobwebs hung like laces,
And I think I've found the traces
Of tiny feet—you know!

On beds of thyme or tansy,
Or on a purple pansy,
(Especially a pansy!)
I might find one asleep—
Then, if I didn't wake it
Or frighten it, or break it,
Why I might softly take it
And bring it home to keep!

But if it got down-hearted
To find that it was parted
From all its friends, and started
To sadly wail and cry—
I know I could not stand it!
I'd feel just like a bandit,
And so I would unhand it,
And say, "Go home, then!—Fly!"

The Yak

For hours the princess would not play or sleep
Or take the air;
Her red mouth wore a look it meant to keep
Unmelted there;
(Each tired courtier longed to shriek, or weep,
But did not dare.)

Then one young duchess said: "I'll to the King,
And short and flat
I'll say, 'Her Highness will not play or sing
Or pet the cat;
Or feed the peacocks, or do anything—
And that is that.'"

So to the King she went, curtsied, and said,
(No whit confused):
"Your Majesty, I would go home! The court is dead.
Have me excused;
The little princess still declines,"—she tossed her head—
"To be amused."

Then to the princess stalked the King: "What ho!" he roared,
"What may you lack?
Why do you look, my love, so dull and bored
With all this pack
Of minions?" She answered, while he waved his sword:
"I want a yak."

"A yak!" he cried (each courtier cried, "Yak! Yak!" as at a blow)
"Is that a figure on the zodiac?
Or horse? Or crow?"
The princess sadly said to him: "Alack
I do not know."

"We'll send the vassals far and wide, my dear!"
Then quoth the King:
"They'll make a hunt for it, then come back here
And bring the thing;—
But warily,—lest it be wild, or queer,
Or have a sting."

So off the vassals went, and well they sought
On every track,
Till by and by in old Tibet they bought
An ancient yak.
Yet when the princess saw it, she said naught
But: "Take it back!"

And what the courtiers thought they did not say
(Save soft and low),
For that is surely far the wisest way
As we all know;
While for the princess? She went back to play!

Tra-rill-a-la-lo!
Tra-rill-a-la-lo!
Tra-rill-a-la-lo!

The Point of View

Old William says the sun comes up
Out of the China Sea;
He says he's seen it rising there
And that's a certainty;
On this, he tells me, sailor-men
Entirely agree.

And William was a sailor-man
Though he's a fisherman now.
He says he'd be a farmer
But he cannot learn to plow;
So he fishes from his fishing-smack
And I sit in the bow.

He knows the seas where pirates sail
And do their horrid crimes;
He says he's met the worst of them
About a score of times,
And that they always call him "Bill"!
When they meet in foreign climes.

He has a mermaid on his arm
Tattooed by Lee Hong Wong;
And he often sings a chanty
Of thirty verses long;
"Blow the man down," is all I know,
But it is a charming song.

And we hardly ever argue
Except about the sun,
For I know less than William knows
When all is said and done—

So we usually fish in peace
And have a lot of fun.

And all goes very happily
Till William says to me
That every day the sun comes up
Out of the China Sea!—
Well—if it does, I know it sets
Behind our Maple Tree.

It doesn't set in China
But beyond our tree and shore!
I've seen it go a million times
Or a squillion times or more
Into the sea, and then roll on
Right through a golden door!—

So, after we have talked awhile
We let the subject drop,
And William lights his old clay pipe,
Or a fish comes up, 'Kerflop!'
"We argue noble," William says,
"But we both know when to stop."

With Appetite

My guinea-pigs are funny pigs!
I give them gingerbread and figs
And cough-drops sometimes. Now and then
I put these in their little pen;
(Though it is not a pen—but 'hutch'),
They like the cough-drops very much
For when I ask them, they say, "Oui!
Oui, oui, oui, oui, oui, oui, oui, oui!"
They make it sound so sweet and low—
And it is French for "Yes"—you know.
Of course I do not give them pie
Or they would all curl up and die!
It's better far to feed them cheese,
And ice cream that you cannot freeze.
They've no idea when dinner's done
But keep on dining just for fun—
Though one's a long-haired 'ristocrat
And fussy about this and that;
He won't take taffy; not a bit!
(He gets too tangled up in it.)
But he's the one that just loves figs—
O guinea-pigs are funny pigs!

Meditation

The world is full of interest
If a boy takes time to see
That all around him there are things
Of much variety.
He then observes a guinea-pig
Is nothing like a bee.

He sees the caterpillar
With its legs and fuzzy coat
Is altogether different
From a shaggy mountain goat;
And that a hop-toad sort of sings
While giraffes can't sing a note!

But when a boy thinks of the fish
That live where billows roll,—
The millions and the millions
That swim from pole to pole,
The small ones and the big ones
That eat the small ones whole.

Yes, when a boy thinks of the fish
That swim the sea today—
The round ones and the square ones
And the flat ones, like a tray—
He feels that he has thought enough—
And better go and play.

Exile

Ben-Arabie was the Camel,
 Belonging to the Zoo.
He lived there through a dozen years,
 With nothing much to do,
But chew, and chew, and chew, and chew,
 And chew, and chew, and chew.

He wondered when he might go home,—
 And what they kept him for;
Because he hated Zooish sounds
 And perfumes—more and more;—
Decidedly he hated them
 Much more, and more, and more.

And why the world turned white and cold
 He did not understand.
He only wanted lots of sun

And lots and lots of sand;
Just sand, and sand, and sand, and sand,
And sand, and sand, and sand.

He longed to see an Arab Sheik,
And Arab girls and boys;
The kind of noise he yearned for most
Was plain Arabian noise;
(The sound of little drums and flutes
And all that sort of noise.)

He leant against the wind to hear
The sound of harness bells;
He sniffed the air for scent of spice
The nomad merchant sells;
He dreamed of pleasant tinkling bells
Of spice, and tinkling bells.

The keepers said that he grew queer.
They wondered why he sighed;
They called him supercilious
And crabbed and sun-dried;
(Indeed he was quite crabbed and
Exceedingly sun-dried.)

But ere his woolly fur was gone
They put him on a train—
For a rich old Arab bought him
And sent him home again;—
O joyous day! He sent him home;
He sent him home again!

Penguins

No matter what the hour may be
Penguins are dressed to dine,
And have a gentle dignity,—
Stuffy—but yet benign,
As though their minds dwelt much on soup,
On walnuts, and on wine.

But really this is not the case;
The dinner Penguin's wish
At any time, in any place,
Is just entirely fish;
They do not even want it cooked
Or served upon a dish.

They have a quite misleading air,—
For when parading by
Each looks as though he ought to wear

An eye-glass in his eye,
And at the least an opera-hat
And a little white bow-tie.

But you can't judge by what you see,—
For the keeper at the Zoo
Says Penguins love simplicity
In everything they do,
And go to bed at four o'clock
Winter and summer, too!

He says a Penguin all day long
Very politely plays;
He does not fight—though he is strong—
Or let his temper blaze,
But lives up to his lovely clothes
In lots of different ways.

He says he calculates they own
An ancient family tree,
And down in the Antarctic zone
They never bend the knee.—
I'm glad they're friendly though they have
So long a pedigree.

Game

"Only the game-fish breast the sea,"
Said an old, old salty sailor to me.
All the others lean to the tide,
Or out on the back of the breakers ride.
Only the game-fish bold and brave
Pits his shining body against the wave;
And whether the spring be quick or slow
Up the rapids the salmon go!

Only the game-fish swim up-stream,
Where the golden spangles of sunlight gleam,
And cool brown ripples run and race,
All edged with a shaken, silver lace,
Where splintered shadows toss and fall,
And the loon and lonely whip-poor-will call,
His head to the current facing the spray,
The glittering game-fish takes his way!
"Only the game-fish breast the sea,"
Said an old, old salty sailor to me.

The Veil

How can I let you know that I am near—
I who am reckoned with the vanished dead?
The veil that falls between us now, most dear,
Is wrought of stuff through which no word is said.
But still I see your tears, and in the dark
Beyond your reach—I hear you call my name;
Your loveliness, where grief has set its mark
Burns my strange peace away, as with a flame.
Then, sometimes—sometimes when the sea-winds blow
I find release, and on their wings pass by.
How can I tell you? Will you never know
That it is not the wind alone—but I?
God does not send me far. He bids me wait
Until you come—though it be soon or late.

Larkspur

Blue Larkspur—you remind me of her eyes;
Long, long ago—oh, very long ago—
Ere I grew grave, and grey and worldly-wise,
In this enchanted place I told her so.

Ah, Larkspur! Your blue beauty is my bane,
For you conjure old summers from the deep,
And make the ghost of joy to walk again,
And taunt me with delight I could not keep.

Come, now—remind me of far other things:
Of lovely shining things all faintly cool;
The light on sapphires, and on peacocks' wings;
The noonday sky reflected in a pool.

Bring visions of the sun upon the sea,
And darker hues of rivers, deep and cold;
Bring shades of mellow ancient tapestry,
And blues that only Chinese porcelains hold.

Let me remember the Madonna's shawl,
In folds above her young, mysterious face;
Woven of colour He saw first of all—
The little Christ—there in His resting-place.

Blue Larkspur—teach me how to break your spell!
Bring me remembrance of tropic skies—
Or blue of ice, of which old sailors tell—
Or blue of anything—except her eyes.

Wild Bees

You drink from ivory goblets held in a jasper pool,
And dine from crimson moss-bells on the north side of a tree;
On globes of misted clover when the violet dawn is cool,
You swing in ecstasy.

You know the tiny honey-horns adrop from many a vine,
And the sweet of tasselled grasses no man may ever reap;
On lace of elderberry bloom of marvellous design
You sometimes deign to sleep.

You haunt the tangled water-weeds where purple iris grow
And greet the moth of silver-grey—, or the emerald dragon fly;
But the shadow only falls on you;—you only, dimly know
That summer passes by.

And so you store your amber sweets in a deep enchanted spot
And keep your immemorial Law whose source is from afar,
You fling no questions at the moon—but work and wonder not
That things are as they are.

When Indian summer winds her gauzy veil around the hill,
One day you drowse in some belated poppy's painted cup,
Then fold your iridescent wings, and lie exceeding still,
And never more wake up.

Postmen

I like postmen.
They are the winged Mercurys of our streets,
Though they may not realize it.
They only realize they carry letters—
Of different kinds.
Just letters. Letters.
But they know the different kinds,
By intuition,
Or something.

I like postmen. You don't have to explain to them.
They understand.
They are gifted that way. Dowered mysteriously.
If you are looking madly for a letter,
They know. Without being told.
If they don't bring it, their eyes say,
"Sorry";
And their husky voices (usually husky; it's the weather)
Say, "There's another mail from the East;
Or West"—as it may be, for they know—

"Today."

If they bring the letter—they smile in a priceless way.
It is as though one of the Fates smiled at you.

I like postmen.
They earn their stipend, or whatever it is.
They are the King's messengers,
And by the Crown they earn their stipend—
Or whatever it is.

If you doubt that, watch them.
On bitter days watch them. On rough days,
And when the silver runs away up.
All weather is God's weather to them.
They are always coming along, cheerily,
And on time.
No trips to the seaside for them.
Hardly any golf.
Baseball? O, yes. On holidays.

I like postmen; their unruffled spirit:
They make so few mistakes,
Even when the writing seems to have been done
With a whisk.
They are wise, these men of letters—
Graduates of the School of Humanity.
One I know has a limp;—
Hill 70.
He has four medals that he keeps in a box.

I like postmen,—
Their weather-beaten faces, when they grow old;
Their understanding eyes.
They just appear—and disappear—without any fuss.
Sometimes—like the Angels on the hill—they bring
Tidings of great joy,
Always they are the last link between ourselves
And our own who are away.
They are the winged Mercurys of the dull town,
Though they may not know it.
I like postmen.

Jockeys

Still there are Centaurs.
When the year rolls round to Spring, they return
From far away, different days.
Now they only ride upon a track;
A measured beaten track, bent to a circle.

They are no longer shy and furtive things

Fleeing across the plains from curious eyes;
Fear left them long ago.—
They have been melted in the crucible of time
And made over.
We call them "Jockeys." But when they ride
They are more.
They are Reincarnations!
Watch their young faces as they flash past,
And you will understand,
Perhaps.
All eyes not blinded by the greed of gold
Can see they ride for joy!
For joy!
An old-primeval joy!
In those fine breathless moments
They know a vast return to gay adventurings.
So they rode—somewhere—sometime—
In the abyss of vanished days.
O once again for them the world is new
And every tree has its own lovely dryad!
The little fauns still dance—and dance—
While from the hills the goat-foot pipes them on
With a strange tune.
So! To the post! To the post!
On to the winning post, swift little feet!
You beat an ancient music on the ground,
A light and thudding music as of drums!
A hundred thousand years has changed it
Not at all.
It dims the eyes with tears
For old departed gladness.
Who would not give a round of tedious hours
To know this short, bright glory of a race!
In truth they garner something priceless—
Something more than gold—The Jockeys—
The young and dauntless riders
Of the track!

Soliloquy

Patrick has a little farm with green hedges round it—
And a little grey cottage with a door that latches tight;
He says I have the heart of him—that I alone have found it,—
Faith—he said the same to Norah when the moon was bright!

Dennis has the high hand, though his words are sweet as honey;
And gold he has safe stored away, if all they say be true;
But his dogs and horses fear him—and money's only money,
It won't put bloom upon the cheek the white shows through.

My father's anvil rings all day,—and himself is often saying
"It's I that needs ye, Colleen—so just at home abide";—
And I'd rather rest beneath his roof—so there I'll be staying
If I cannot wed a sailor, who sailed with the morn's tide.

'Tis true he has no place for me where all the winds are blowing
The way they might be breaking up a ship however strong;—
It's little home a sailor has—and this I'm well knowing;
The grieving of his blue eyes said I could not go along.

They tell me there are other maids in other ports he's making;
The gossips say he sails from them—as he sailed from me;—
But there's no vow in all the Book my lips will be taking,
Until his ship comes home again, and brings him from the Sea!

Candle-Flame

(The Irish homesteader's wife talks to the air.)

The stillness that is in it has a way would make you grieve,
When you sit alone at shut of day and knit the soft grey socks;
Who'd iver think at home they're singing in the Noel Eve
With, "Shepherds watched their flocks"?

'Tis time to set a candle by the silver-frosted pane,
Now dusk has veiled the prairie and its floating feathery foam;
There sure must be a little shining path along the plain
To let him know he's home.

The timber-wolves are running! There came their hunger cry!
'Tis like the keening at a wake for a dreadful death, and wrong.
It's best I'd not be listening;—I'll kape the fire high,
For now he won't be long.

A white owl passed the window! I heard his muffled wings,
And glimpsed the golden eyes of him the snowshoe rabbits fear;
Oh, wirra! wirra!—Burrow deep, you little trembling things,
For sorrow's flying near!

His wolf-dog went beside him, and himself knows the trail,
But the whirling snow is able to make men daft or blind,
And the North wind never pities them ashore or asail,
And the dark is not kind.

The house is filled with panic! The sea is not more lone;—
No! No! 'Tis filled with joy! Hark his whistle! Hark my name!
"Come—draw the bolt!" he cries; "We lost—and found the trail, aroon!*"
We saw the candle-flame!"

* "Aroon"—An old Irish word meaning "my dear."

To a Blue Butterfly

You knew the jungles where the heat all day
Came quivering up through tangled lace of green;
Across old fever-swamps you used to play,
Your loveliness unseen.

Your loveliness unseen, except by eyes
That could not bear the dazzling gold of noon,
Yet watched through shadows, envious, old and wise,
Waiting the rising moon.

I think you are the bluest thing e'er made,
The sea and sky know many a changing hue,
But not your wings;—you died, but did not fade,
Oh miracle of blue!

It seems the Lord of Beauty is the Lord
Of all the lowliest, as the highest things.
Perhaps His Angel of the flaming sword
Had just such azure wings!

Rendezvous

To-night I passed the silent empty house
Where years ago we danced the hours away;—
Now nothing stirred—unless some little mouse
Fearing my footsteps—fled where shadows lay;
Even the garden gate is padlocked fast
As though to hold within the lovely past.

Still there are lilacs scenting all the air,
And in the moonlight ghostly weeds grow tall;
Wild musk and rosemary are everywhere;—
Through tangled grass the fireflies flash and fall;
The silver dogwood is in bloom again,
And lifts its stars up to your window pane.

It seems so little while since you were here
With all those joyous ones we used to know;—
Yet only I come back—my dear—my dear—
For you have gone where summer roses go;
And I come back as one who walks in sleep
A rendezvous with his young dreams to keep.

Newgate

Newgate—Newgate, the Queen's prison,
Gazed through its dark windows at St. Sepulchre's
And the prisoners heard the ancient church bells, chiming
Chiming—chiming—chiming
All that day.
For it was Easter; Easter and April.

When November fogs came rolling in,
Or when December winds blew bitterly,
Newgate was the very House of Misery;
But April was its added curse.
April! with sunlight or sudden sweet rain
Falling against iron bars.
April—with little new lambs again,
And apple-flowers in the orchards;
April with hawthorn abloom and primroses starring the lanes;
And all the old enchantments on the air.
Ah then! Then if a full moon silvered a grated door,
Or if a nightingale's song drifted in,—
They fastened the madmen to the floor
With double chains,
For on such nights they had double strength:
And on the death-cells they set a double watch,—
So strange a magic the moon made
At Newgate.
But to-day, it was a blue morning, shot with gold.
Even so, within the prison the light was grey.
Grey.
There the walls were always damp,
And the footworn flagstones were mottled with mould,
Of the colour of fear.
Ashen-grey, it showed, or ashen-blue, or ashen-violet.
A colour without a name.
Everything in Newgate was tinted with a shade of it:
The prisoners' faces, their hands and their hair.
Like an intangible pall it covered even their garments,
And could not be washed away.

Now, on this Easter Monday morning,
The pallid prisoners heard St. Sepulchre's bells;
Where they toiled they listened;
Where they lay ill and idle, they listened;
And where they waited for death.
"Easter!" the bells rang joyously, "It is Easter!
The Lord hath risen!
He hath risen from the dead!
Halleluiah!
There is no death, for He hath conquered!
No death!—No death!
No death!—
'Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And the King of Glory will come in!'

Easter! It is Easter!
April! April! April!
April!—'
So they seemed to say—ringing on madly,
The old bells,—
For it was their great festival and England's spring holiday.
The highwayman looked at the sky through his barred window,
And he listened with the rest.
Few prisoners could reach this window—try they ever so desperately,
But the highwayman was tall, and strong and young.
They had taken him red-handed on the London road,—
And this not for the first time:
Hitherto he had escaped his captors,
And now three officers of the law had been killed in his taking.
Therefore by reason of this, and that, and the other,—
Sonorously charged against him in Her Majesty's High Court of Justice,—
He had been swiftly tried, condemned, and sentenced
To be hung on the morrow, at daybreak,
On Tyburn Hill.

For his greater humiliation he would hang with a common sheep-stealer.
He! The boldest outlaw in the country!
Elizabeth Herself had been told of his taking.
The Court—then at Whitehall—had laughed over it;
He had been so defiant a fellow and so vastly successful!
There were stories told of him at every fireside.
Moreover he had been scornful of the gentry;
Scornful of the nobility also—if it came to that.
He had many times blithely jested as he took their purses,
Thus taking their dignity with their gold.
And his doubtlet, and hose and ruffled linen,—
His cordovan long-boots,—
His velvet cloak and feathered hat,
Had been finer than most gentlemen wore.
And he had boasted in taverns of having nine lives
Like a cat,—
But he had always made a mock of life, everywhere,
Saying that those who held it lightly held it longest.
"Egad! He was well taken," they swore at Court.
They wished him joy of his other eight lives
When this one went out on Tyburn.
"So perish all masked men o' the road,"
They said.
"God knew the good English law was slow in taking thieves,
But 'twas swift to act—once it had them,"
They said.
"A gibbet for every one of them, and a short shrift,"
They said.

Thus his name was bandied about Whitehall
A full half-hour.
And it was spoken in castles, and taverns,
And little wayside inns and cottages.
There were those who wept hidden tears at this news of him,

For he had many and motley friends.
And some went white and stared unspeaking—at nothing.
But these mostly were women.
Coachmen who often took the road to London, breathed more freely;
And some drank to his quick death on the morrow,
As though they themselves had taken him
Single-handed.

None of this disturbed the highwayman looking through his barred window
And harkening to the bells.
An old prison priest, a Franciscan friar, who had seen many men die,
Stood near, and watched him from out his brown hooded habit.
The bells went on and on,—more slowly now.
"Christ, the Lord, is risen to-day!" rang the ancient tune,
"Halleluiah!
Halleluiah!—" they quivered and were still.
A deep silence followed. A long silence.
Then the highwayman broke it, whistling softly.
It was the melody of a little new love song—the rage in London.
He smiled as he whistled.
Suddenly he stopped, turned to the priest; and looked hard at him.
"'Tis a right sweet world gone wrong, holy father," he said,
"Yet, by the Rood! I like not this leaving it.
The Heavens—or Hells—the Church provides for us,
Are damned uncertain places.
We may, or may not, find them.
But the green Earth is real.
We get a foothold on it, and 'tis all we know.
So, methinks, it be pity to leave it over soon.
This body o' mine is too strong to need long rest,
Should there be naught but—sleep.
And it is April,—the witching month, good friar.
Cast back in thy dolorous mind;
Canst not find a thing called 'Love' or that which was Youth?
I grant thou art but the shell of a man,
But something must once have lived in thee beside pity and prayer.
Something passing sweet, peradventure!
Nay then! Forgo thinking on't,—
I would not torture thee with memory.
Thou art a patient kindly soul, and the look in thine eyes
Doth trouble me.

What need hast thou to look so grief-stricken?
It is not thee they will hang.
But come close!—Closer.—
Harken!
Know you not some loop-hole hereabout—
Some hidden outlet a trapped thing might find?
Come!—You know the windings of Newgate,—
What way of escape will you show me—tonight, when dark falls,
For much gold?"

The brown friar trembled like a withered leaf in the wind.
"Ah! My son! My son!" he cried breathlessly, "count not on escape.

Racking might follow—an they caught thee!
Without thy cell, the guard hath been doubled,
And it is doubled on the prison walls.
'Tis but seldom they take thy kind—alive.
And thou hast cost them many lives, in this capture.
Newgate today is hedged about with guards who will be relieved by more
Till daybreak.
There is no way from the cell save by this iron door
And yonder archery window—too narrow for passing.
In truth most bitterly I grieve for thee—I scarce know why
For thou hast greatly merited punishment.—
Yet, were't possible, I would take thy place on Tyburn.
No prisoner hath so deeply stirred me to pity—and many were pitiful.
Thy face, or thy youth, or thy way of smiling,
Or what I know not,—
Gives me a new pity, a sorrow intolerable to bear.
If this be sin, then, Christ forgive me!
But I will not bring thee false hope,—earthly hope,
For there is none.
And I will not ask what turned thee to evil ways.
Perchance 'twas something evil done thee, in the first place;
Or of two roads you took the wrong one, by mischance,—
And in the dark.
Whatever it was, God will deal with that.
But, oh, I pray thee, confess thy sins!
Set thine own soul free!
Life is short, and Heaven long, Beloved,
So repent, as did the thief upon the cross.
Repent—and thou wilt be forgiven. Ay! So saith the Lord!
Repeat thy rosary but once, and I will go."

The highwayman glanced down at the bent figure, as though he scarcely
noted it,
Then at some thought, he laughed lightly.
The sound swept through the grated iron door, and out through the prison.
Never had Newgate echoed to so sweet a sound as far back as the
priest could remember.
"I laugh not at thee—old friar," the man said presently,—
But at myself.
I have fooled myself to the top o' my bent,—this time,
I—who fooled so many.
The end of the game is other than I counted on,
And was brought about by a careless move.
I was off guard for once.
Mind not my laughter. 'Tis my way to be merry;
Especially when things go amiss,—
And they have gone damnably amiss this time, as you perceive.
But the law is the law. I have no grudge against it.
'Twas my business to keep out of its drag-net.
And I have no grudge against life either,—I would fain have my full
three score and ten years of it.
Its sweetness makes up for its bitter,
So I have found.
Yet as for confession;—nathless the time is overshort

For that, father—even were I of the mind.
My sins be like the leaves of the trees in number.
All the uncomfortable Jewish laws I have broken
More or less—well, rather more than less peradventure.
The one regarding 'false witness' had a distaste for me
So I respected it.
But I have robbed outrageously—though I grant you,
Chiefly, like the outlaw of Sherwood Forest, from the rich.
In the taking of purses, and the like, men oft chanced to die.
This not by my desire, good father; but 'they rushed upon their fate,'
As some poet hath it,—
(Nay, count not this 'confession' as the Church calls it,
'Tis too general.)
But I tell thee, it is true, by reason o' me some died swiftly.
Ay, poor souls, so swiftly they said no prayer of any creed.
They could not even sign the Cross, for lack of time.
Now, I would have you believe I regret these dead men,
Cut off untimely, by reason of my adventuring.
So, say masses for their souls,
If thereby they may be released from whatever they feared—beyond death.
I leave to thee a vast deal of treasure, old friar, a vast deal,—
Seeing I cannot convey it hence.
And I will tell thee straightway where 'tis hidden.
Newgate hath ears! Step nearer!—
Nearer still. So!—So!—There thou hast the secret entire.
Lock it in thy memory. And give no one the key.
Thine is a face to be trusted, else had I not trusted thee.
Harbour no scruples. I know not to whom the guineas belong.
'Twas taken—a jewel here,—a purse there,—
A box o' gems going up to London to be re-set;
The flotson and jetson o' the highroad.
The jewels have been turned into gold. All, all into gold.
So spend it,—and trouble not whence it came.
Feed thy poor; cover them from the cold;
And burn candles and say prayers for the quickly slain.
As for me—old shaking priest—as for me—
Marry! I will depart with my pack o' sins on my back.
And the way I have lived is the way I will die.
Come?—Wouldst have me a hypocrite?—
Then! Hark thee!
Were I to live—Verily I would still take the road.
'Tis a merry life—if a short one.
But one thing—one thing, I do ask of thee;
For sake of Christ's mercy look you to my body when 'tis cut down.
Me 'seemeth it is best to be dead when one is counted dead,
And I desire to take no sigh—no beat of the heart into my grave.
Convicts be thrust all too quickly into the Earth,
So 'tis said.
Od'so! of this one thing I have an unspeakable horror.
Now the Queen hath newly decreed that no gibbet shall long bear its burden
During Easter week.
'Tis a law now in force,—as perhaps you know?
Therefore I deeply pray thee—look well to me—
After.

But, good father, I have a sudden thought!
It may work out as I would desire,
Listen. Ask for my body thyself—for burial.
Use the name I be called by; though it is not mine.
I own no name save my Mother's.
She, sweet soul, was of the common folk
Who sin the common sins,—occasionally,—
And be punished in the common way. Always.
She is long since gone, but he who is my father, lives.
Most amazing to relate, he holds high authority
Under the Queen!
His titles be many and too tedious to tell over.
But he is old; much older than she would be now
Had she lived.
And he is broken by cares o' State and weary o' life
Like thee—old friar!
Furthermore, Fate hath played him a scurvy trick.
I—I born out o' wedlock—I be his only son.
'Tis in a fashion amusing—think'st not so?
Life hath given him everything—everything,—
Save the thing he wanted most; a son;
An heir to his titles and estates
That must all now go to one he deeply hates.

This is gossip o' the tavern near his Castle; but quite true gossip.
He knows not of me, save that I was born.
That much indeed he knows, so said my Mother.
She died,—and I—I fended for myself like a wild thing o' the woods.
None kept track of me, or held me those young days.
But of this irregular birth of mine I hold proof.
Ay! certain proof.
This ring I wear he gave to my Mother. Observe it well!
It bears his carven Coat of Arms.
He would remember this ring—and her—until his death.
She was not one easily to be forgotten.
And further, I have letters written her by his own hand.
One there is regarding me, when I was a year old,—
Or thereabouts.
These letters none could gainsay.
You will find the little packet of them hidden with the treasure
Where I told thee.
But there is a greater proof of who I am;
I am as like—as marvellous like this man as youth can be to age!
Even now to send to him might bring release—quick release,
For he hath great influence with Elizabeth,
And the bar sinister is not unknown at Court.
Peradventure—and all things considered—what think you?—
I might be better than no son at all?
In all the road adventures none saw my face,
None could more than surmise who was behind the mask.
Never have I taken life save in fair fighting; man to man.
Some fools would have it so—against my will.
A highwayman I am—not a murderer.
But robbers be not all on the open road. In truth, no.

Even at Whitehall may be discovered a few here and there
Though of a different stripe.
And this courtier who is my father knows the sins of the Court.
The little sins—and the scarlet sins.
I do not think he would be overcome by mine,
Particularly as they could be well hidden—.
Still, good friar, I will not send to him.
His pride is mine, though I wear not his name,
And to petition his favour likes me not.
Therefore I tell thee this dull tale of old unfaith and sorrow.
But for one reason.
Should they, on thy request, refuse to allow thee my body for burial,
Use his name—and say who I am.
The Sheriff will then permit it with small ado, I take oath!
Into the question of my identity he would not court inquiry
After execution. No! No! Not that; if I know him.
Also methinks my trial was somewhat hasty.
He might not care for that investigation neither.
I think they will accede to thee quite heartily.
God knows thou hast served the prison long
And asked little,
So I desperately pray thee, take me away from them—afterwards!
Look to me,—See I breathe not.
Lay me under the sky, and not under Newgate flag-stones—
The dreadful flagstones i' the prison yard
Under which all the hanged men lie.
Do this, and I will return to thank thee in some way;
Ay! Bring thee word of the beyond thou art so anxious about,
Should it be possible!
'Tis a strange bargain—but full o' interest,
And my part of it I will keep in good faith.
Now go—Thou dost look faint.
But stand by me at to-morrow's dawn—as thou hast promised.
I will watch for thee on Tyburn.
In truth I think the Christ will not be less kind
Than thou art—dear friar.
And now again—I bid thee go."

* * * * *

The dawn had laid its rose-leaf light on the sea;
It had painted with pearl and amethyst
Old Tyburn Hill.
The dew still jewelled the cobwebs on the grass,
And a lark was singing ecstatically far overhead,
When a motley group of Londoners melted away
Towards the City.
They were disappointed and sour-visaged, and grumbled, among themselves.
For they had risen so early, and seen so little.
"It had been a monstrous dull hanging," they complained.
"Not worth the trouble of crossing a road."
The two felons,—the famous highwayman,
And the sheep-stealer,
Had died swiftly, and without any ado.

The sheep-stealer was a half-wit
Who dumbly submitted as was his duty, to the law.
And the highwayman showed naught but a vast indifference.
The only sport had been from an old Franciscan friar
Who trembled so violently during the execution
His hands dropped his beads.
The small curious crowd had lingered until all was over,
But when the Newgate physician with hand on their wrists
Pronounced first one,—and then the other robber,—dead,
There was no further use to wait.
Dead men were dead men, and all alike,
Sheep-stealers, and notorious highwaymen;
And even Kings for that matter.
All alike.
Their cutting down would be accomplished quickly,—
It being Easter week and the new law now in force,—
And there was little to see in that.

"Elizabeth had too many fancies," they gossiped
Moving away.
She grew odd and unreasonable;
It had come that she could not endure the sight o' gibbet-prey
Blowing in the wind.—
A wholesome sight for all evil-doers, as was well known,
And consequently to be endured by even the Queen.
It made for law, and order and peace,
In England.
"The Queen should marry," they whispered.
"She grew full o' whims—and tempers," they said,
And discontentedly went onward.

The sun was but a little above the sky-line,
When the two robbers lay covered side by side
On the bright grass.
The gaol physician, having done his duty, had hastily gone,
And the hangman was at his heels.
Only the friar, the Sheriff, and two grave-diggers—
In a rough cart, drawn by a rough pony,—
Remained.
The friar knelt by the highwayman, drew back the covering,
And skilfully cut the rope from his throat.
All his trembling was done, and his old hands did not falter.
"I pray you, Master Sheriff," he said, rising,
"Give me this man's body for burial.
I have served Newgate long.
I have given God's absolution, many times to men about to die,
At scenes I will not mention.
Our Order, being poor—and now nearly disbanded in England—
Has yet asked nothing.
Now I ask this one thing, in your power to grant.
I greatly desire this man shall not be buried at Newgate,
But in a little garden outside our Monastery walls.
'Tis not holy ground there—but common earth.
Let me take him, I pray thee.

He was an outlaw, but one of rare courage,
Amazing courage,—for he could have saved his life,
I firmly believe, had he so determined!
Therefore this grace I pray you grant him
For my sake, or rather the sake of any little work I have done
At Newgate."
"No? You do not see fit to allow it?
Then, Master Sheriff, there is more I must tell thee.
This highwayman was the bastard son,
Of one in high authority at Whitehall;
One the Queen greatly honours, and favours, and trusts.
There are proofs of it I can show thee, shortly,—
Or take elsewhere.
The wind carries names, so move nearer—So.
This is his father's title—commonly known,
But he hath other titles by reason of various Court offices.
Now look you at this man's face—Master Sheriff.
Study it well, I pray thee."
The Sheriff glanced down, and shuddered.
"Thine is a true word, Father!" he exclaimed.
"This dead man—even as he is—is like the old Duke.
Ay! Marvellous like! Marvellous like!
I am convinced, and ask to see no further proof.
I desire no trouble brewed over this;
No question to be broached as to his identity.
No question at all of this or that, regarding him.
I wish no rumour started that the trial was short,
Or the execution hasty, as sometimes rumours go,
Nay, God forbid!
I want no report that he was the old Duke's son,
Whether his natural son or no.—
Whether true or no.—
Take him. Take him away quickly.
I myself will silence any question at Newgate.
Bury him in thy outer garden, and say naught.
By Heaven! My honours are bought too dearly
With the horrors of this office.
Make an ending.—Take him away.—And keep thy lips sealed."

So the two robbers were put in the prison cart,
And one was taken to the Monastery near by,
While the other went on to Newgate's flagged yard.
The low-ceiled hall in the Monastery
Was cool and empty:
For it was the hour of devotion.
They had laid the highwayman on an oaken bench
In the hall.
There the friar who knew him, came to him,
Alone.
Beyond the garden walls,—in the little outer garden—
Two lay-brothers dug a grave, and spoke nothing,
As they had been commanded.
In the Chapel the monks chanted long Latin prayers,
And the sound of their voices floated through the silence,

To where the old friar knelt by the oaken bench.
Presently he rose and uncovered the highwayman's face.
Then he held a small bright steel mirror to the ashen lips.
"No mist," he said, watching. "No mist.
No littlest mist."—
The mirror shone like silver undimmed.
He waited; then again held it as before.
"No. No mist."
Softly he drew open the man's linen shirt,
Its lace ruffles torn to shreds in his capture.
"I must listen at the heart," he muttered to himself.
"So I promised,—so I promised.
I must listen long—"
And then suddenly the priest, who had gone in silence
Through that dread sunrise,
Gave a sharp cry,—a sharp broken cry.—
For he saw over the heart of the highwayman
A crucifix!
It was tattooed plainly—beautifully—on the white skin,
A picture of wonder, the length of a man's hand;
And beneath it were pricked in red, the words,
"Jesu pity me!"
This, the priest knew, was the fashion of some sailors
And soldiers of the time, whose end might be sudden
And with no spoken prayer.
Slowly he bent down and touched the Cross
With his lips,
And with that touch he seemed to feel,—No! he felt—
The faint beating of a heart.
The faint, faint, beating.
"O Christ!" he cried. "He is not dead.
Without breath—he yet is not dead.
His spirit hath come again into his body
As did the spirits of Lazarus, and of the little maid.
Bring him back. Bring him back. Dear Christ!
Bring him back.
He hath sinned—but he hath suffered—oh, grievously.
And he hath prayed.
I know Thou hast seen his prayer, scarred here upon his heart.
Sweet Jesu! It is the week of resurrection,—of resurrection!
And it is the month of love.—
It is April,—April.—"

So he fell to weeping and praying, and withal doing what he could
To bring back breath to that young body.
Long he prayed, with tears, a rain of tears,
And ceaselessly he did what he could.
Little by little—oh, very slowly,—
The highwayman came back.
They had not quite quenched the little flame
We call life;
Or else God had relighted it;
The old friar knew not which—
But many weeks went by before it burned brightly.

They kept him to themselves, the good brothers,
And they were silent—for they knew his story.
To them he was God's Miracle—
A living proof of resurrection.
Looking at him their souls were uplifted in praise.
For some great purpose he had been brought back
They agreed. Ay! For some inscrutable purpose.—
Thus, they wondered, and waited, and prayed for him.

So in peace and quiet the Summer went by—
And now the hunter's moon was a thin silver crescent,
In the evening sky.
The highwayman had grown strong again, and restless
With the restlessness of wild things caged.
It was then the old friar of Newgate heard of a ship
About to sail to the Americas.

In the Monastery garden when the leaves were falling,—
Gold, and russet, and red,—
He told of it.
"Tis a good road out for thee, my son," he said.
"The best way out, methinks. The sea-road! The blue sea-road
That leads to new lands!
They need more sailors on this ship;—
It carries some of Sir Walter's men, to the Virginian Coast.
And they need men in the far world. Men of courage, and high spirit.
It is surely thy way out."

"Then will I take it, faithful one," he answered.
"By the Crown! I knew thou wouldst find some road I could take.
The Americas! The Virginian Coast!
Sir Walter's men! There is magic in the very words.
New life, they mean to me; new life, and liberty,
And pleasant adventuring, that hath no evil in it.
It doth entrance me to think on't.
But thee; thee I do dread to leave."

The friar smiled as at something very sweet.
"Not so, my Son," he replied. "I sail also.
There be teachers of Christ needed in the new world.
Ay! Simple men like myself.
For some reason they have chosen me to go.
So I sail with thee,—my work at Newgate
Being finished."

When Jonquils Blow

When jonquils blow I think of one
Who sleeps beneath the green;
And all the light and song of life
And all the golden sheen,

Turn cold and still before my eyes,
While pearl-edged boughs of May
Seen through a sudden mist of tears
Are rimmed with ashen-gray.

To One Who Sleeps

Fare not too far, my own,
Down ways all strange and new,
For I must find alone,
The road that leads to you.

Enchantments may arise
To lure thy little feet,
And charm thy wondering eyes;—
Yet,—wait for me, my sweet!

Already Earth doth seem
A phantom place to me,
And thy far home of dream,
Is my reality.

So this is just "good-night";—
Some stars will rise and wane,—
But sure as comes the light,
I'll be with thee again!

April Again

April again! the willow wands are yellow
Rose-red the brambles that the passing wind knows,
Comes a robin's note like the note of a 'cello,
And across the valley, the calling of the crows,—
"April again!"

April again! and the marsh birds swinging
Over the rushes that belong to yester-year;
Silver shines the river, and young lips are singing
Songs as old as Eden—as old and as dear;
"April again!"

April again! with a wet wind blowing,
And along the western sky a pathway of gold;
Sounds a call to follow the road we're not knowing,
A new road—a wild road—o'er fairy lands unrolled,—
"April again!"

April again! with its wonder of gladness,
April with its haunting joy, and swift-stinging tears,—
Month of mist and music, and the old moon-madness,
Month of magic fluting, the spirit only hears,—
"April again!"

Histories

I weary of the histories of men—
The garnered store of books in grim array;
Life's bitter salvage, leather-bound, and then
Left to the silence and a bloom of gray.

I weary of the stories that they hold;
The clash of arms sounds through them like a knell
I weary of the Kings in crowns of gold,
The Kings victorious, and the Kings who fell.

There are too many tears on every page;
Too red a tide sweeps every chapter in;
There is no word of peace in any age,
Except the peace that death rode forth to win.

And old unhappiness, long wrapped in sleep,
And thrice-armed feud that passed in wrath and woe,
And white despair from many a dungeon keep,
Arise to haunt us still, where'er we go.

Yet through the years the sun was warm and sweet,
And pipers piped at morn, and night and noon,—
And there was carnival with dancing feet,
And love and joyance always came in June,—

O, to remember when the pages close—
Linked with the vision of the deathless brave,—
The nightingale, the moonlight, and the rose,
And all the beauty that the lost years gave!

On Silver Nights

On silver nights I cannot sleep;—
The ancient moon from far above,
Bids me arise, and run and keep
A rendezvous with one I love.

And in my heart a little song
Swings to and fro its clear refrain,

While down the stairs I haste along
As though the past were mine again.

Then is my spirit so beguiled
By all the night's white witchery,
That I am kin to all things wild,
And part of all things that are free!—

Then he comes back,—who long ago
Left these green paths his steps had trod;
Yes—he comes back,—I know!—I know!—
Light-footed from the fields of God.

So through the garden and the lane,
And where the lovely grass is deep,
We two go walking once again,—
On silver nights, that banish sleep.

Ships

The great grey ships! We saw them in our dreaming,
The strong grey ships—the ships of our desire,
Watched by the stars, and by the dawn's white gleaming,
And followed by the winds that never tire.

O, but we trusted them through days of weeping,
Blessed them each one, and bid each one depart
With all the brave we gave into its keeping,
The priceless, garnered treasure of the heart!

Long, long they haunted us when gales were blowing,—
Dim wraiths of ships, like shadows in the rain;—
Little we slept on winter nights of snowing,
Thinking of those who might not sail again.

Yet—dear grey ships—the spirits of the fearless,
Lost many a day beneath the deepest blue,—
The souls of mighty sailors, bright and tearless,
Arose from out the sea to sail with you.

And not alone you kept your banners flying,—
And not alone you met each bitter day,—
For dauntless ones,—unseen, and death-defying,
Swept outward with you on your darkened way!