

Songs of
Shadow-of-a-Leaf

Alfred Noyes

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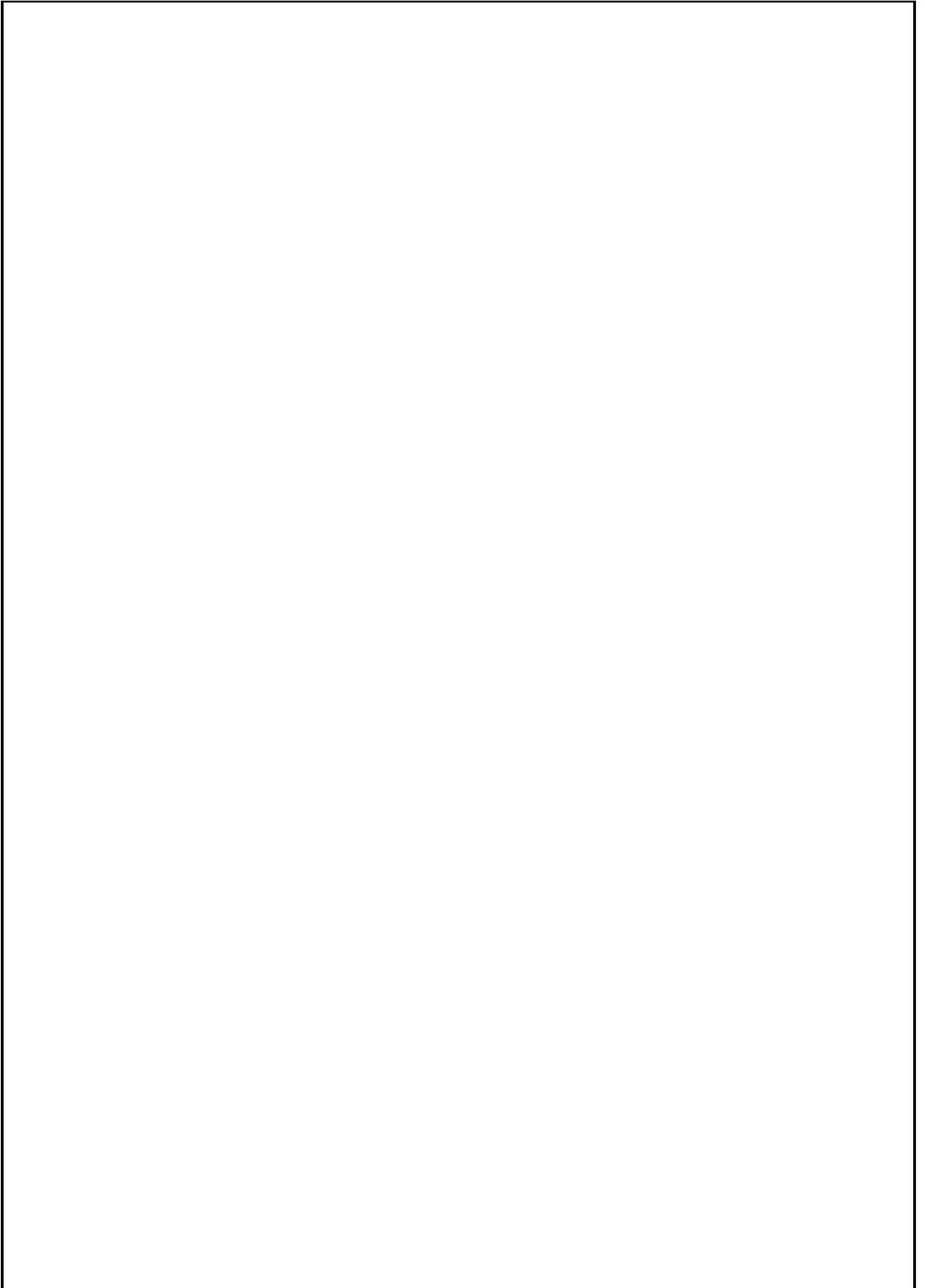
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Shadow-of-a-Leaf

Alfred Noyes



SONGS OF SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF AND OTHER POEMS

BY
ALFRED NOYES

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v

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF.

ELF-BLOODED creature, little did he reck
Of this blind world's delights,
Content to wreathe his legs around his neck
For warmth on winter nights;
Content to ramble away
Through his deep woods in May;
Content, alone with Pan, to observe his forest rites.

Or, cutting a dark cross of beauty there
All out of a hawthorn-tree,

He'd set it up, and whistle to praise and prayer,
Field-mouse and finch and bee;
And, as the woods grew dim
Brown squirrels knelt with him,
Paws to blunt nose, and prayed as well as he.

For, all his wits being lost, he was more wise
Than aught on earthly ground.
Like haunted woodland pools his great dark eyes
Where the lost stars were drowned,
Saw things afar and near.
'Twas said that he could hear
That music of the sphere which hath no sound.

And so, through many an age and many a clime,
He strayed on unseen wings;
For he was fey, and knew not space or time,
Kingdoms or earthly kings.
Clear as a crystal ball
One dew-drop showed him all,—
Earth and its tribes, and strange translunar things.

But to the world's one May, he made in chief
His lonely woodland vow,
Praying—as none could pray but Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
Under that fresh-cut bough
Which with two branches grew,
Dark, dark, in sun and dew,—
“The world goes maying. Be this my maypole now!

“Make me a garland, Lady, in thy green aisles
For this wild rood of may,

And I will make thee another of tears and smiles
To match thine own, this day.
For every rose thereof
A rose of my heart's love,
A blood-red rose that shall not waste away.

“For every violet here, a gentle thought
To worship at thine eyes;
But, most of all, for wildings few have sought,
And careless looks despise,
For ragged robins' birth
Here, in a ditch of earth,
A tangle of sweet prayers to thy pure skies.”

*Bird, squirrel, bee, and the thing that was like no other
Played in the woods that day,
Talked in the heart of the woods, as brother to brother,
And prayed as children pray,—
Make me a garland, Lady, a garland, Mother,
For this wild rood of may.*

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Songs of Shadow=of=a=Leaf

3

A TREE AGAINST THE SKY.

FALL, happy leaves, that danced so high in the air.
The One I love was hidden in your gay crowds.
Fall, you thronged joys, a Spirit far more fair
Slept in your rustling clouds.

One lean dark Form, with arms upstretched in prayer,
Emerges now, from dreams that drift and die.
Fall, yellowing leaves, and let the tree stand bare
Against the wintry sky.

4

SERO TE AMAVI.

THE ways of earth are not her ways.
There is not any land
Where you shall see her face
Or touch her hand.

Yet she is ever near, so near
That even in this loud mart
At times I think I hear
Her beating heart;

Beating and breaking, night and day,
Patient as heretofore,
Before we chose our way
And closed the door.

5

A FOREST SONG.

WHO would be a king
That can sit in the sun and sing?
Nay. I have a kingdom of my own.
A fallen oak-tree is my throne.

*Then, pluck the strings and tell me true
If Cæsar in his glory knew
The worlds he lost in sun and dew.*

Who would be a queen
That sees what my love hath seen?—
The blood of myriads vainly shed
To make one royal ruby red!

*Then, tell me, music, why the great
For quarrelling trumpets abdicate
This quick, this absolute estate.*

Nay. Who would sing in heaven
Among the choral Seven,
That hears, as Love and I have heard,
The whole sky listening to one bird?

*And where's the ruby, tell me where,
Whose crimsons for one breath compare
With this wild rose which all may share?*

6

THE GREY SPRING.

I SAW the green Spring
 Wading the brooks
 With wild jay laughter
 And hoyden looks.

I saw the grey Spring
 Weeping alone
 Where woods are misty
 And buds unblown.

Red were the lips
 Whence laughter leapt;
 But Oh, it was Beauty
 Herself that wept.

RAIN AT SUNSET.

LUCID arrows of delight, rose-feathered and moon-white,
 Shoot from an irised bow
 Round the fern-fringed wood, making little pools of light
 Where the wild white violets grow.

Lift up your face, lift up that rain-kissed flower,
 And show how tears can shine;
 Eyes, lips, and hair that change the clinging mist of the
 shower
 By miracle, into wine.

Now, as the cloud passes, in the clear hush after the rain,
And the green boughs drip with the sky,
Let the whole earth, while the thrush makes merry again,
Fade into our joy and die.

9

THE BURNING BOUGHS.

HE pipes to himself alone,
The child of Pan, where the woods are mellowing now;
For his echo, the thrush, is flown;
And the clouds of the sunset burn on the maple-bough.
See, stained with a golden tan,
Like the smooth-skinned sun-kissed pear,
The young god shines thro' the shadows, O, little god Pan,
What song are you piping there?

The wild grape purples the glen,
But the lovers that followed the lilt of his pipes are fled.
Are they lost in the cities of men?
Does he call through the soft blue tendrils now to the dead?
Does he summon the Oread throng?
Or, leashed and lashed with the vine,
Do the panthers of Bacchus approach to the pulse of his
song;
And the white feet, splashed with wine?

10

I sing of immortal joy,—
The warbling pipes of the young god cried like a bird,—
The laughter of girl and boy,
And all the kisses and whispers that once I heard;

*For the oak may darken and turn
To a smouldering crimson pyre;
And the golden birch in her own bright tresses may burn;
But I sing of the world's desire.*

*Though the wild grape shrivel and fall,
Under boughs that are flaring like funeral torches here,
My joy shall outlive them all,
As the bare bright seed that endures till the youth of the
year.*

*As I sang when the world began,
I shall sing when the world grows old;
For I am the fruit and the berry, the little god Pan,
The green leaf under the gold.*

11

*I am the lamp in the tomb;
The little gold acorn alive in the drifts of decay;
The heart in the crumbling bloom;
The hope that abides when the petals are winnowed away.
The roses of life, at a breath,
Break; and your memories wane;
But I am the magic insurgent! Through darkness and
death,
I shall lead you to April again.*

*The sumach burns in the brake.
The hills are a furnace of colour and mellowing light,
Where junipers flame and flake,
And the blueberry dreams like a faint blue smoke on the
height.*

*The pine-cones fall below
On the sweet red-needled earth;*

12

But wilder and sweeter the pipes of the child-god blow
In a song of the world's rebirth.

*“When the Phœnix fires her nest
I sing as the rose-red feathers consume and change,
And the rainbow plumes of her breast
Kindle with beauty and shine, transfigured, and strange;
For the world and your heart's desire,
And the spice of a thousand springs
Awake with the bird reborn from the heart of the fire,
And mount on her radiant wings!”*

It is all October now;
But he sings of a mellower harvest than any of ours.
He laughs at the burning bough,
And pipes till the perishing leaves grow brighter than
flowers.

While the pomp of the world goes by,
As age upon age it has gone,
Though the sun-swarms perish like leaves on the boughs of
the sky,
The youth of the world sings on.

13

14

THE WOOD-CUTTER.

As I walked through a fir-wood
Where wild pigeons croon,
I found a deep glen
That was old as the moon;
And, deep in its midnight

Of gorse and thick fern,
I beheld a low lanthorn
Like a harvest moon burn.

Then, for leagues I groped down
By wild rocks and dark streams,
Over fir-roots and tree-ferns,
Led straight by its gleams;
Till at last, by that lanthorn,
And still as a stone,
I discerned an old wood-cutter
Standing alone.

And I crept nigh, and saw
From the edge of that glow,
That his face was like wisdom,
His elf-locks like snow;
And his eyes like black magic,
That sleeps in deep wells,
With a deeper night under
Where mystery dwells.

And his mouth had the strength
That has conquered desire;
And the axe on his shoulder
Was whiter than fire;
And he breathed, very softly,
Like a deep sea at rest,
A rune from the lost woods
That Merlin loved best.

I hear the grass growing.

*I hear the leaves fall.
I hear the years flowing,
And heed not at all.
I hear the far changes
Of seasons and tides.
I am waiting, still waiting;
For hope still abides.*

Then he lifted his lanthorn.
He swung it on high;
And it lit a great tree,
Looming up through the sky,
With its opal-skinned clusters
In darkness imperaled,
A bright fruitage of stars,
The great tree of the world.

He lowered his lanthorn;
And now I could see
A deep gash, like a cave
At the roots of the tree;
So deep that I trembled
Lest even a breath
Should send that proud Igdrasil
Crashing to death.

And the woodman breathed low,—
*Does the judgment draw nigh?
I am waiting, still waiting
One word from on high.
Are they eaten with cankers?
Is it poisonous fruit?*

*It will need but one stroke
Of mine axe, at the root.*

*Have they trampled all beauty
And truth into dust?
Have they choked their own souls
With their greed and their lust?
One stroke, and my Master
Were freed of this pain,
Since His worlds of free-will
Will His work to be vain.*

17

Then I saw the gaunt woodman
Like Azrael arise
As he heaved the great haft
Of his axe to the skies.
It was moved by sure laws.
Every lie in the night,
Every wrong in the sun
Swung the axe to its height.

By the laws in whose service
All creatures are free,
Its might was upraised
As the moon lifts the sea.
Then the night held its breath,
And above the world-oak,
The blade—ah, how slowly!—
Swung back for the stroke.

There was only one whisper
Of time dying out.

18

Yet the doomsman still waited,
Still paused, as in doubt;
A sigh of great ages
That ebbd with the tides.
He is waiting, still waiting,
For hope still abides.

No mercy can stay him.
He obeys, in his power,
Not the judgment of heaven
Or the whim of an hour;
No strength can delay him,
No godhead controls,
But the strength of the victims,
The choice of their souls.

THE RUSTLING OF GRASS.

I CANNOT tell why,
But the rustling of grass,
As the summer winds pass
Through this field where I lie,
Brings to life a lost day
Long ago, far away,
When in childhood I lay
Looking up at the sky
And the white clouds that pass,
Trailing isles of grey shadow
Across the gold grass.

Oh, the dreams that drift by
With the slow-flowing years,
Hopes, memories, tears,
In the rustling of grass.

THE CLEAR MAY.

I SAW once a clear May, was in a dark garden,
Lilting for joy to the babe at her breast,
“*Lullay, my little one; Oh, lullay, my darling;
Earth is in tumult, but heaven is at rest.*”

“Herod hath crushed out the grapes of the wine-press.
Proud ride the emperors to slaughter their fill.
*Lullay, my little one; the green leaves are growing;
Earth is in torment, but the stars are so still!*”

“Music,” said my May to me, “music surroundeth us,
Whatsoever agonies entangle our feet!
*Though the sun die, and the stars leave their courses,
Heaven moveth round them in a music most sweet.*”

“Therefore I sing,” she said, “I too sing *Magnificat*,
Caught up, as one voice, in that choir of delight;
For heaven hath stooped down to be clothed with our
weakness
And looked through the eyes of a child in our night.”

So darkly she sang, as that bird of old legends,
The bird whose warm breast was pierced through by a
thorn,

*Lullay, my little one, Oh, lullay, my darling,
Out of earth's anguish, our heaven is reborn.*

22

THE YOUNG FRIAR.

WHEN leaves broke out on the wild briar,
And bells for matins rung,
Sorrow came to the old friar
—Hundreds of years ago it was!—
And May came to the young.

The old was ripening for the sky,
The young was twenty-four.
The Franklin's daughter passed him by,
Reading a painted missal-book,
Beside the chapel door.

With brown cassock and sandalled feet,
And red Spring wine for blood;
The very next noon he chanced to meet
The Franklin's daughter, in a green May twilight,
Walking through the wood.

Pax vobiscum—to a maid
The crosiered ferns among!
But hers was only the Saxon,
And his the Norman tongue;
And the Latin taught by the old friar
Made music for the young.

23

And never a better deed was done

By Mother Church below
Than when she made old England one,
—Hundreds of years ago it was!—
Hundreds of years ago.

Rich was the painted page they read
Before that sunset died;
Nut-brown hood by golden head,
Murmuring *Rosa Mystica*,
While nesting thrushes cried.

A Saxon maid with flaxen hair,
And eyes of Sussex grey;
A young monk out of Normandy:—
“May is our Lady’s month,” he said,
“And O, my love, my May!”

Then over the fallen missal-book
The missel-thrushes sung
Till—*Domus Aurea*—rose the moon
And bells for vespers rung.
It was gold and blue for the old friar,
But hawthorn for the young.

For gown of green and brown hood,
Before that curfew tolled,
Had flown for ever through the wood
—Hundreds of years ago it was!—
But twenty summers old.

And empty stood his chapel stall,
Empty his thin grey cell,

Empty her seat in the Franklin's hall;
And there were swords that searched for them
Before the matin bell.

And, crowders tell, a sword that night
Wrought them an evil turn,
And that the may was not more white
Than those white bones the robin found
Among the roots of fern.

But others tell of stranger things
Half-heard on Whitsun eves,
Of sweet and ghostly whisperings—
Though hundreds of years ago it was—
Among the ghostly leaves:—

Sero te amavi—
Grey eyes of sun-lit dew!—
Tam antiqua, tam nova—
Augustine heard it, too.
Late have I loved that May, Lady,
So ancient, and so new!

And no man knows where they were flown,
For the wind takes the may;
But white and fresh the may was blown
—Though hundreds of years ago it was—
As this that blooms to-day.

And the leaves break out on the wild briar,
And bells must still be rung;
But sorrow comes to the old friar,

For he remembers a May, a May,
When his old heart was young.

26

THE GIPSY.

THERE was a barefoot gipsy-girl
Came walking from the West,
With a little naked sorrow
Drinking beauty at her breast.
Her breast was like the young moon;
Her eyes were dark and wild.
She was like evening when she wept,
And morning when she smiled.

The little corners of her mouth
Were innocent and wise;
And men would listen to her words,
And wonder at her eyes;
And, since she walked with wounded feet,
And utterly alone,
It seemed as if the women, too,
Would make her grief their own.

Ah, had she been an old hag
With shrivelled flesh and brain,
They would have drawn her to their hearts
And eased her of her pain;
But, since her smooth-skinned loveliness
Could only hurt their pride,
They dipped their pins in poison;

27

And, by accident, she died.

FEY JOAN.

SHE stood in the dark, where the crab-apples blow,
And told her own fortune for no man to know,
Crooning low to the bloom on a dew-dabbled spray
As, petal by petal, she plucked it away:

“Wonder and wonder
And wonder again!
This for the beauty,
And this for the pain!
This for the big star
That shines through the tree;
But all for the love
That gave Robin to me.”

She crooned like an elf that is drunk with the dew,
To a melody sweeter than earth ever knew;
Then she swayed like a fern at the flight of a wing,
And warbled aloud like an ouzel in spring:

“Wonder and wonder,
And wonder again!
This for the nest
In the dark of the lane!
This for the home
That I never shall see;
But all for the love
That gave Robin to me.”

She touched her red mouth to the lips of a flower,
And she breathed in her pain (it was nigh to her hour):
“Oh, one kiss for happiness, one kiss for tears,
And one for old age that must come with the years.

Wonder and wonder,
And wonder again!
This for grey Scotland,
And this for brown Spain!
This for the tall ship
That walked the wide sea;
But all, all for love
That gave Robin to me.”

30

31

THE WAY OF THE GARDEN.

If you return at sun-rise
With glory on your brow,
In all that wild-grown garden
You'll find no tenant now.

If you return at noon-day,
Through all that dreaming ground
But for the dead leaf falling
You shall not hear a sound.

If you return at twilight
There is no ghost to fear,
You'll walk a path forgotten
This many and many a year.

If you return at midnight,

When paths are hard to trace,
Your own lost youth shall meet you
With the tears upon its face.

32

THE ISLE OF MEMORIES.

WAS it so in Old England, when kings went to war?
Did the cottages grow silent, as the lads went away,
Leaving all they loved so, the wan face of the mother,
The lips of the young wives, the grey head and the golden,
While birds, in the blackthorn, made ready for the may?

It was even so, even so in Old England.
The homesteads were emptied of happiness and laughter.
The fields were forsaken. The lanes grew lonely.
A shadow veiled the sun. A sea-mist of sorrows
Drifted like a dream through the old oak-forests,
Flowed through our valleys, and filled them with visions,
Brooded on our mountains and crowned them with
remembrance,

33

So that many a wanderer from the shining of the West
Finds a strange darkness in the heart of our land.
Long, long since, in the days of the cross-bow,
Unknown armies from the forge and the farm,
Bought us these fields in the bleakness of death.
The may-boughs budded with the same brief glory;
And, sweetening all the air, in a shower of wet petals,
The blackbird shook them, with to-day's brave song.
His note has not changed since the days of Piers Plowman.
The star has not changed that, as curfew chimed,

In the faint green fields of the sky, like a primrose
Woke, and looked down, upon lovers in the lanes.
Their wild thyme to-night shall be crushed into sweetness,
On the crest of the downs where, dark against the crimson,
Dark, dark as death, on the crimson of the afterglow,
Other lovers wander, on the eve of farewell,
Other lovers whisper and listen to the sea.

34

It was even so, even so in Old England.
In all this bleak island, there is hardly an acre,
Hardly a gate, or a path upon the hillside,
Hardly a woodland, that has not heard or seen them
Whispering good-bye, or waving it for ever.
This rain-drenched, storm-rocked earth we adore,
These ripening orchards, these fields of thick wheat
Rippling into grey light and shadow as the wind blows;
These dark rich ploughlands, dreaming in the dusk,
Whose breath in our nostrils is better than life;
This isle of green hedgerows and deep rambling lanes;
This cluster of old counties that have mellowed through
the ages,
Like apples in autumn on a grey apple-tree;
Those moorlands of Cornwall, those mountains of
Cumberland,
Ferry coombs of Devonshire and gardens of Kent;
Those russet roofs of Sussex, those farms and faint spires,
Those fields of known flowers, whose faces, whose
fragrance,
Even in this darkness, recall our lost childhood,
Sleep like our own children, and cherish us like angels,—
All these are ours, because of the forgotten.

35

THE VISITANT.

BEAUTY forsakes her sky
 And wakes, a changeling, in our realm of night;
 Love, in immortal ecstasy,
 Dies, to be born in worlds of fading light;
 For, breathing mortal breath,
 They win their heaven at last, and conquer death.

From worlds too great to grasp,
 They turn to all these dear small mortal things.
 With dying mortal hands they clasp
 A mortal hand, a small warm hand that clings;
 Knowing that those who fold
 Love to their hearts, have more than heaven to hold.

They dwell in man's dark mind
 Lest absolute light should melt their lives like dew;
 And sight of all things leave them blind
 Even to the faces and the flowers they knew.
 They look through mortal eyes
 To save their souls from those unbounded skies.

So Merlin taught me well
 Long since, in those old morning-coloured woods,
 To see the moment's miracle,
 And how all beauty in one may-tree broods,
 And heaven is brought to birth
 Only through lesser heavens that walk on earth.

London Poems

41

THE SHINING STREETS OF LONDON.

Now, in the twilight, after rain
The wet black street shines out again;
And, softening through the coloured gloom,
The lamps like burning tulips bloom.

Now, lighted shops, down aisles of mist,
Smoulder in gold and amethyst;
And paved with fragments of the skies
Our sooty town like Venice lies.

For, streaked with tints of cloud and moon,
The tides of a bewitched lagoon
Into the solid squares we know
And round the shadowy minster flow;

Till even that emperor of the street
The bluff policeman, on his beat,
Reflected there with portly pride
From boots to helmet, floats enskied.

42

Now every woman's face is fair,
And cockney lovers walk on air,
And every road, in broken gleams,

Mirrors a travelling throng of dreams.

Like radiant galleons, lifting high
Their scutcheoned prows against the sky,
With lamps that near you, blazing white,
Or dwine in crimson through the night,

Busses (with coloured panes that spill
A splash of cherry or daffodil)
And lighted faces, row on row,
From darkness into darkness go.

*O Love, what need have you and I
Of vine and palm and azure sky,
And who would sail for Greece or Rome
When such a highway leads him home?*

A SPRING HAT.

*Dear Poet of the Sabine farm,
Whose themes, not all of blood and tears,
Beneath your happy trees could charm
Your lovers for two thousand years,
You would not blame a modern pen
For touching love with mirth again.*

For Dick and Joan went up to town,
And Joan must choose a hat for spring;
And, though Melpomene may frown,
There is no jollier theme to sing.
Ah, younger, happier than they knew

Into the fairy shop they flew.

Then she began—to try them on.

The first one had a golden feather
That like the godling's arrow shone

When first he pierced their hearts together.
“Now, what d’you think of that?” she said,
Tilting it on her dainty head.

44

The next one, like a violet wreath,

Nestled among her fragrant hair;
But Oh, her shining eyes beneath,

The while she tipped it here and there,
And said, with eager face aglow,
“How do you like it? So? Or so?”

The next one was an elfin crown.

She wore it as Titania might.
She gave the glass a smile, a frown,
And murmured “No. It isn’t *quite*!
I think the brown and fawn might do;
Or no, perhaps the green—don’t you?”

Maidens, the haughtiest ever seen,

Like willing slaves around her moved.
They tried the mauve. They tried the green.
They trembled when she disapproved;
And when she waved the pink away,
They tried the lilac and the grey.

She perched the black upon her nose.

She hid an eye behind the blue.

45

She set the orange and the rose,
With subtle artistry, askew.
She stripped the windows of their store,
Then sent her slaves to search for more.

And while they searched,—*O happy face*
Against the dark eternal night,
If I could paint you with the grace
The Master used!—

A dancing light
Shone in the laughter of her eyes.
They glowed with bird-like swift surprise.

She saw—the very hat for spring!
The first one, with the golden feather
Dropped from a laughing angel's wing
Through skies of Paradisal weather.
She pinned it on her dainty head.
“This is the very thing,” she said.

“Now, don't you like me?”—“Yes, I do,”
Said Dick. The slaves were far away.
“Your eyes have never looked so blue.”—
“I mean the hat,” she tried to say.
He kissed her. “Wait a bit,” said she.
“There's just one more I want to see.”

Who knows but when the uproar dies,
And mightier songs are dead and gone,
Perhaps her laughing face may rise
Out of the darkness and live on,
If one, who loves, should read and say,

This also happened, in that day?

47

LADY JANE AND THE PEKINESE.

THRONE^D among primrose cushions, in a window of
Berkeley Square,
Lady Jane and the Pekinese are goggling up in the air,
Where dark against the drizzling sky a British workman
stands.
Toiling?—Nah! He's lighting his pipe in the pit of his
horny hands.

But Lady Jane and the Pekinese, in heart, or stomach, or
brain,
Are seized with a secret *nostalgie* or a teeny-weeny pain;
And they think to themselves that life is hard and full of
absurd extremes,
For Bill, up there, has only his pipe, while the Peke has
chocolate creams.

So Lady Jane and the Pekinese roll off to lunch at the Ritz
With a pink-eyed poet who thinks the same, and suffers
from Bolshie fits;
And he prints his thoughts upon vellum, too, to help the
poor to a job;
And Lady Jane and the Pekinese, they read 'em together
and sob.

48

But Bill don't read 'em, of course he don't, for Bill has his
pipe to smoke;
But if only he knew it, his earthquake laugh would split the

skies at the joke;
For the kiss of his girl, and the gust of his quart, and the
smack of his noonday cheese,
Have a tang unfathomed by Lady Jane or even the Pekinese.

But none of them knows; so the realist raves in his own
strange world of dreams,
And pities that lusty son of a gun who don't like chocolate
creams;
And Lady Jane has an inward pain, and the Peke sleeps
under her chair;
But Bill has lighted his blasted pipe, and he spits into
Berkeley Square.

49

50

THE GOLDEN GARRET.

WAS it a dream—that country, free from care,
Though never free from hope, or love, or debt,
Where artists lived in garrets, cold and bare
Except for their own daubs, and you, Musette;
Or you, Fifine, Pepita, and Ninette,
Flushed with the wine for which you pawned your
shoes;
And you, the ghost of Murger, singing yet
Bohême, blithe haunt of sparrows and the Muse?

Dark-eyed Pepita, tilting back her chair,
Blowing blue smoke from many a cigarette,
With one red clove-pink in her coarse black hair
And slim brown feet upon the table set;

Lynx-eyed Fifine, who laughed away regret
And welcomed all adventure, win or lose;
In Chelsea, was it, or Montmartre, you met?
Bohême, blithe haunt of sparrows and the Muse.

51

But you, Musette, whose rose-leaf lips could swear,
Whose foot could stamp, like Hebe's in a pet;
Whose wildly generous hands would always share
Their own last sou, or risk it on a bet;
How often were your grey eyes wide and wet
For some poor luckless fool, with April dews?
When Spring returns, can you—her child—forget
Bohême, blithe haunt of sparrows and the Muse?

52

ENVOY.

Princess, the world runs mad with fuss and fret!
Would we not yet, if time were ours to choose,
And one such golden garret still to let,
Fly to that haunt of sparrows and the Muse?

53

THE CONDUCTOR.

Like oranges, friend?—No poem in those three words?
Wait. You shall hear them again.

When London sweated and choked with heat and drought,
A man, like a sack of bones,
With a pinched, white, delicate face, and a soft brown
beard
(Saint John of Clapham!) climbed to the top of the bus,

Painfully, hauled up the stair by the vigorous hand
Of a buxom wench in front, and sturdily pushed
By their two small boys below.

There was only one seat;
And the hot conductor bawled, "*One only outside!*
Grr! Inside only! One only outside, I said!"

54

The cockney Juno looked at him, half amused,
With her bold, black, honest eyes.

"Right-o," she said.

They settled their sack of bones on the vacant seat.
Saint John was breathing with care, a little afraid
It might bring on that coughing.

"*That's right!*" said Juno,
"*I'll stand. 'E mustn't!*"—

"*Nor any one else up 'ere!*"

The conductor snarled like a man with a rat at his liver.

She smiled at him again, with her bold black eyes,
Taking her time to obey.

She liked fresh air.

The doctor, of course, had said it was good for her man,
And good for the children.

55

With one Amazonian arm
She lifted the younger child against her breasts
That, under the cool blue leaves of the thin print gown,
Shook, with the jolting bus, like fruit on a tree.
The smooth little colt-like legs of the child in her arm
Shone in the sunlight, over the passengers' heads.

The bus pulled up with a jerk. Mother and children,
Obeying the law, went down to their inside place.

The dying man, with a flicker of male pugnacity,
Paying three sixpences out, and strong in the fact
That journeys like this were not made every day,
Looked up at the grim conductor.

56

“You tell ’em,” he said,
“As soon as a seat is vacant, to come up ’ere.”

The bus rolled on. The houses thinned, and the smell
Of lilac and may, like breezes from Eden Garden,
Met the sad fugitive out of the City of Death.
This day of the spring was his. Yet he looked troubled;
Till, after a while, two twopenny passengers rose,
Rang the bell for the bus to stop, and descended.

He cocked his head to listen, his delicate face
Tense with the over-anxiety of the weak
Who, all too often in life, had been pushed to the wall;
But now he heard them.

Children and mother, all smiles,
Ascended the stair. They patted his arm as they passed.

“Now, ain’t that nice? Look, Will, it’s the very front seat!”
They took their places, the elder boy at her side,
Up and down restlessly bobbing and staring around;
The child astride on her knee.

57

Saint John’s wan face
Looked happy now, and quietly brightened to see her
Drinking her fill of the wholesome country air.
He watched her, glad that the joyous moment absorbed her.
Whatever might follow, he found his joy in her joy.
He watched her, alive to the sights and sounds of the fields,
Was aware of them all through *her*,—

The spires of chestnut blossom, the loaded boughs
That made the outside passengers duck their heads;
The cows in the cooling stream, under shadowy willows;
The hens by the shed, with the little arched hole in the
door;

The white horse under the elm-tree, dappled with
shadows;

All streaming by, like a picture, a coloured film,
A story thrown upon darkness—for him.

But, for her,—

The thought grew bright in his face—it was life, real life,
A real substantial earth.

At last, the bus

Pulled up at the end of their world, the country inn
That marked the very last inch of their sixpenny ride.

They rose. They looked at the fields to left and right.
Juno lifted an arm, round, strong, and bare,
And pointed over a meadow. “*We mustn’t walk far,
We’ll ’ave to go back by the six o’clock bus,*” she said.
“*That’s where we’ll ’ave our dinner, under that ’edge,
Among them ox-eye daisies. Come along, Will.*”

They gathered him up and helped him, carefully, down.
They stood on the dusty road, a little bewildered
To find they were free of the kingdom of summer at last
For one whole day.

But, as they slowly led their bundle of bones
To a stile in the flowering hedge, the conductor’s voice
Rasped out on the bee-buzzing stillness, ‘*Arf a mo!*
He stooped for a moment, rummaging under the stairs;
Then, running across the road to Saint John of Clapham,
He awkwardly thrust an orange into his hand,

Like oranges, friend?

Saint John, without a word
Took it, as children accept a gift from the sky.
Back to his bus the conductor hurried again
And tugged at his bell. As he turned the corner he saw
Saint John at rest on the stile, in the flowering hedge;
Peeling the fruit with his teeth, spitting out pips,
And munching the pulp with the strange voracious delight
Of a man to whom death brings gifts.

60

Like oranges, friend?

61

THE BLINDED SOLDIER TO HIS LOVE.

I DID not know you then.
I cannot see you now;
But let my hands again
Feel your sweet hair and brow.
Your eyes are grey, I am told,
Your hair a tawny gold.

Yet, if of these I tire,
I shall not need to stray.
Your eyes shall feed my fire
With brown or blue for grey;
And your deep hair shall be
As mutable as the sea.

Let forms and colours flow
Like clouds around a star.
I clasp the soul and know

How vain those day-dreams are;
Dreams, from these eyes withdrawn
Beyond all thought of dawn.

But what is dawn to me?

In Love's Arabian night,
What lover cares to see

The unwelcome morning light?
With you, O sweetest friend,
My night shall never end.

62

63

A PASSING LIKENESS.

ALIVE—in the flesh—no phantom! A great bell
Struck brazen noon. He passed, in the crowded street.
It seemed that, if I had paused, laughed, broken the spell
That bound us, he would have met me as old friends
meet.

The very face of the dead,—each curve, each line,
Imaged its own in the whimsical face I knew.
Eyes that had long been darkened turned on mine
With all the old light of our friendship shining through.

A stranger! And yet—Oh, like as a wave to a wave,
Long broken, lost, and reborn, and for ever the same,—
It seemed that one who had long been shut in the grave
Would have answered, at once, had I only breathed his
name.

64

65

IN A RICHMOND GARDEN.

PEACE? Is it peace? Or a dream?
In the red-walled garden, I hear
Under the rambling golden-cruled roofs
Of the trumpeters' mellow old house, only the whisper
Of cloudy wistaria bloom,
And a blackbird calling.

Peace, and a blackbird calling his bright-eyed mate;
Peace, and those young, those beautiful hosts of the dead,
So quietly sleeping under the mantle of May;
Peace, and the years of agony all gone by
As the flood of the river that flows at the garden's end;
Is it peace at last?

The blackbird flutters away in a rain of petals.
Under the open window a land-girl passes,
Dainty as Rosalind, in her short white smock,
Corduroy breeches and leggings, and soft slouch-hat.
She swings her basket, happy in her new freedom,
And passes, humming a song.

She walks through the memory-garden.
Rue for sorrow,
Rosemary for remembrance. Each in turn
For broken hearts among broken stones must bloom;
And last, in the fall of the year, and best of all,
Poppies for sleep.

She walks through the sweet-smelling herbs,
Watched by the dreaming shadows of older days,

The shadows her grandam knew, in poplin gowns
And arched sun-bonnets like old dry crumpled rose-leaves.

They peep at her, under the white-bloomed Japanese
cherry,
And delicate purple sprays of the Judas-tree.
They smile at her under the big black mulberry boughs.
With an exquisite self-reproach in their wise old eyes
They whisper together, like dim grey lavender blooms,
Glad of her careless joy, "*She will not grow old,
Never grow old as we did.*"

67

See, she pauses,
Now, at the grey sundial,
Whose legend, lichen-encrusted in rusty gold,
Lux et Umbra vicissim,
Semper Amor,
Was read by those who rustled in hooped brocades
Wistfully round it once, in its clear-cut youth.

A moment there she pauses, youthful, slim.
She reads the hour on its old dim dreaming face.
She does not see the phantoms around it now.
It is only the hour she sees.
The rest is a dazzle of full-blown lilac and sun.
She goes her way.
She darkens the deep old arch in the crumbling wall,
And vanishes, leaving an arch of light behind her.

68

Lux et Umbra vicissim,
Semper Amor!
Is it all a dream

This unbelievable peace?

The sunlight sleeps on the level black floating flakes,
The floating rafts of the Lebanon cedar-boughs.
The bees are drowsy with heat.

Tap-tap, tap-tap! Ah, no; not a ghost at the door!
It is only a dreamer, knocking the ash from his pipe,
On the warm red southward wall,
Where the crucified fruit-trees bask,
Those beautiful fruit-trees
Fastened, with arms outspread.

69

Now all is quiet again. There is only a whisper,
Calm as the whisper of grass, on a sunlit grave.
Is it peace? Was it only a dream?
That, under this beautiful cloak of the sunlit world,
We saw a blood-red gash in the clean sweet skin,
And the flesh rolled back by the hand
Of the surgeon, or devil, War;
And there, within,
Alive and crawling,
The cancer;
The monstrous cancer of hate,
With octopus arms
Gripping the blood-red walls of its tortured hell?
Is it peace at last?

Oh, which is the dream? I hear
Only the whisper of leaves, in the red-walled garden,
Waiting, waiting, for what?
And now, on the southward wall,
The dreamer, knocking the ash from his pipe again,—

70

Tap-tap, tap-tap—
And the cry of a bird to his mate.

71

BEFORE THE LIFE-MASK OF KEATS.

(AT THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, MARCH 1921.)

THEY stood like pilgrims in a holy place,
Father and daughter—she, with a wistful smile;
He with a grave compassion in his face,
Gazing at that young life-mask for a while.

She looked as Flora might, at seventeen years,
Her warm breast pulsing with the heart of spring;
While, in her father's gaze, the brooding tears
Remembered, with the dead, how youth takes wing.

I wished that Keats could see her; but his eyes
Were closed to the dim April in her own.
Blind to the young moon stooping from her skies,
He slept, more deeply than Endymion;

72

Slept, with those painted shadows of the great,
Loved by the world, a hundred years too late.

73

THE TWO KINGS.

SPELLBOUND for ever by the embalmer's art,
Here in the grey museum light they sleep,

Father and son, two great Egyptian kings
Who poured their wine and drank from cups of gold
When Britain was the desolate home of wolves.

Empires have risen and drifted by like smoke;
And now, at last, a world beyond their ken,
An unknown race, lifting with alien hands
These unremembering faces to the light,
Unwraps them to the gaze of shadowy throngs
That come and go, as all things come and go;
Though, since they died, these faces have not changed.

The father died in youth. His boyish face
Looks out upon you with unwrinkled brow,
And mouth still curved as when he kissed his bride
Under a palm-tree, by the moon-lit Nile.

74

The son grew old. His head was bowed with age
When he, too, died; and all his haggard griefs,
Hard-bitten wisdom, and wrinkled ironies
Brood on, in these deep furrows of his face.

Here, side by side, through drifting London fogs
The strange boy father, and the strange old son,
Out of the drifting clouds of time emerge,
Challenging, *which is older, he or I?*

75

PAGAN MARJORIE.

WHEN Marjorie walked in the wood
There was nothing to frighten her there.

She was beautiful, bold, and good;
But the little leaves whispered *beware*;
For she walked,
Alone in the
Wood,
Like a daughter of Berkeley Square.

She had left her car by the road;
And her shoes, at the most, were threes.
She was dressed in the latest mode;
But she stole through the glimmering trees
And into the
Ferns tip-
toed,
Though the wild briars clung to her knees;

Till, under the boughs of a pine,
Where the woods run down to the sand,
She saw, white line upon line,
The salt waves creep to the land,
And shielded her
Eyes from the
Shine
Of the warm blue sea with her hand.

Was it only the blaze of the sea
That dazzled poor Marjorie there?
Ah, what was the chuckle of glee
That struck her, awake and aware,
While her mother
Was taking
Tea,

With the Begums of Berkeley Square.

Ah, what was the flute that she heard
On the cliff, from that wild sea-shelf?
Pan's voice, or the cry of a bird?
And who was the bare brown elf
That danced on the
Sand? She
Stared;
For that sun-burnt fay was herself.

And the salt sea sang in her blood,
And she danced, with the wind in her hair;
While Marjorie, watching her, stood
In the shade of the pine-tree there,
And hungrily
Wished that the
Wood
Would swallow up Berkeley Square.

77

78

THE BIRD-SHOP.

SEE where the cages, packed in the gas-lit window,
Draw to their wan half-circle of smells and sawdust,
Out of the night a smouldering mist of faces,
Ripe for the brooding mind and brush of a Rembrandt.

Women and children and men, they huddle together,
Hushed and bent, observantly unobservant,
Noting the delicate stripes on the emerald plumage,
Utterly blind to the wild hearts breaking beneath them.

Here, a child, with eyes brimful of the magic,
Dreams how lorikeets, love-birds, Hartz canaries,
Warbled among strange hills, or flashed through the palm-
trees,
Dreams; but not as these caged ones, also, are dreaming.

79

There, the dull bleared eyes of a drunkard, blindly
Stare at the dew-bright eyes of the pining captives;
Here, an anæmic clerk, snub-nose to the window,
Reads the price on a cage to the girl beside him.

There, a woman, whose hands were fashioned for pity,
Stoops, befeathered and furred; and, with eyes like cats'
eyes,
Happily watches those wings of the boundless forest
Beating in vain on the wires of their six-inch cages.

*Oh, for the brooding mind and brush of a Rembrandt,
Only to paint that circle of gas-lit faces,
So that the world, from its old twelfth-century darkness,
Burning with shame, might wake and remember, and
free them.*

80

81

SEAGULLS ON THE SERPENTINE.

MEMORY, out of the mist, in a long slow ripple
Breaks, blindly, against the shore.
The mist has buried the town in its own oblivion.
This, this is the sea once more.

Mist—mist—brown mist; but a sense in the air of

snowflakes!

I stand where the ripples die,
Lift up an arm and wait, till my lost ones know me,
Wheel overhead, and cry.

Salt in the eyes, and the seagulls, mewing and swooping,
Snatching the bread from my hand;
Brushing my hand with their breasts, in swift caresses
To show that they understand.

Oh, why are you so afraid? We are all of us exiles!
Wheel back in your clamorous rings!
We have all of us lost the sea, and we all remember.
But you—have wings.

82

83

A HOSPITAL.

WITHIN these walls, Pity will war with Death,
Conquer and fail, and conquer yet again.
Here broken life on life will fight for breath.
Grave eyes will watch, and hearts grow numb with pain;

Till the new hope that makes the eyes grow blind
Breathes, and the long suspense breaks down in tears;
And quiet skill, content to serve its kind,
Turns to new conflicts, through uncounted years.

Here knowledge like a heavenly lamp shall shine,
And wondering children's faces, peaked and wise,
Look up at strangers' faces and divine
The unchanging love that looks through changing eyes.

84

For Love that left high heaven to dwell with men
Looks, through men's eyes, on His own children then.

85

ON REMBRANDT'S PORTRAIT OF A RABBI.

HE has thought and suffered, but without a cry.
The wan-hope of this wise old face appears
To watch, with eyes that hide their own deep tears,
The generations hurrying down to die;
For he can see, beyond our midnight sky
New griefs arising with the unborn years;
And, brooding on the riddle of things, he bears
His load of thought, in dreadful innocence.

Children have nestled to him; but all are flown.
He awaits their homing wings, as old men do
Across this world's bewildering surge and roar.
An envoy of the Eternal and Unknown;
An alien to all pride; he faces you,
In simplest brotherhood, and desires no more.

86

AN EPILOGUE.

[For "Not So Bad as We Seem," at Devonshire
House, in aid of the David Copperfield Library for
Children, in the house where Dickens lived as a child,
at Somers Town.]

87

THERE was no way out, except the garret
In the roof of that small dark house,—
A glory-hole for dusty books and boxes,
A haunt of the spider and the mouse.

So he crept up the stair, bare-footed,
Like a lonely little thief in the night;
Through the creakings and the slumber-heavy breathings,
Till he stood there, in a ring of candle-light.

His elders thought that attics led to nowhere,
But he felt that they very seldom knew;
And, somewhere in the dark, there must be doorways
That a boy might scramble through;

And a treasure that was hidden very deeply
From the day where all hope died.
His elders had not found it. Was it buried
In the things they had thrown aside?

88

There were worlds in the balance, as he doubted,
Was it worth while looking? *Should he go?*
Then he saw it—at his feet—a book of magic,
And the wizard name, *Defoe*.

And he sat him down among the tattered volumes;
And, with one foot under him curled,
His dark eyes blazed above the pages,
And he woke—in that great new world.

The night was grim, and dark, and growing darker.
He sat there, stiller than a stone,—
A small boy, reading in a garret,

A great king, seated on a throne.

Was it lonely in the Abbey where they laid him
When the dreams had all come true?
Would a shadow hunt again for hidden treasure
In the house that his childhood knew?

89

For he stole up the narrow street in Somers Town,
And there, through a window, he could see
Not a room, but a harbour, bright with lanthorns,
And tall ships casting from the quay;

To every ship a watchman in the crow's nest,
With one foot under him curled;
And a crew of urchins crowding on the canvas
For adventure to the ends of the world.

They were skippered by the hawk-eyed Cooper,
And the Mississippi king, Mark Twain;
And a lean Samoan Scot, named Robert Louis,
Full-sail to the South again;

And Defoe, still dreaming of his island
With that strangely single footprint in the sand!
There were smoke-stacks roaring down to Rio;
And wings—for the Never-never land.

90

And the shadow at the window stood and wondered,
“Oh, who can the harbour-master be?
For his pilot-lights are shining on the waters
As they never shone for me.”

Then he saw—a crookéd stair behind the harbour;
And he crept through the open door.
He climbed to a little room, and entered
Like a thief in the night, once more.

It was narrow as his house in the Abbey.
It was dim with smiles and tears;
And he groped for the master of the dream-ships
Through the mists of a hundred years.

He groped there, silent as a shadow;
For he saw him, stiller than a stone,—
A small boy, reading in a garret,
A great king, seated on a throne.

91

92

THE LAST OF THE BOOKS.

Is it too strange to think
That, when all life at last from earth is gone,
And round the sun's pale blink
Our desolate planet wheels its ice and stone,
Housed among storm-proof walls there yet may abide
Defying long the venoms of decay,
A still dark throng of books, dumb books of song
And tenderest fancies born of youth and May.

A quiet remembering host,
Out-living the poor dust that gave them birth,
Unvisited by even a wandering ghost,
But treasuring still the music of our earth,
In little fading hieroglyphs they shall bear

Through death and night, the legend of our Spring,
And how the lilac scented the bright air
When hearts throbbed warm, and lips could kiss and
sing.

And, ere that record fail,
Strange voyagers from a mightier planet come
On wingéd ships that through the void can sail
And gently alight upon our ancient home;
Strange voices echo, and strange flares explore,
Strange hands, with curious weapons, burst these bars,
Lift the brown volumes to the light once more,
And bear their stranger secrets through the stars.

The Anvil, and Other Poems

97

THE ANVIL.

STAND like a beaten anvil, when thy dream
Is laid upon thee, golden from the fire.
Flinch not, though heavily through that furnace-gleam
The black forge-hammers fall on thy desire.

Demoniac giants round thee seem to loom.
'Tis but the world-smiths heaving to and fro.
Stand like a beaten anvil. Take the doom
Their ponderous weapons deal thee, blow on blow.

Needful to truth as dew-fall to the flower
Is this wild wrath and this implacable scorn.
For every pang, new beauty, and new power,
Burning blood-red shall on thy heart be born.

98

Stand like a beaten anvil. Let earth's wrong
Beat on that iron and ring back in song.

99

AS WE FORGIVE.

BEFORE Thy children, Lord, were fully grown,
They bowed like suppliants at their Maker's throne

And prayed, like slaves, that mercy might be shown.

They knelt before Thee, pleading in the night,
That Thou wouldst wash their scarlet raiment white.
Now, in the dawn, at last they stand upright.

Not with irreverent hearts, yet unafraid,
The silent helpless myriads Thou hast made,
Give Thee the gifts for which, of old, they prayed:

Compassion for the burden Thou must bear;
And, though they know not why these evils were,
Their mute forgiveness for the griefs they share.

100

Yes, for one human grief that still must be
Too sad for heaven, too tragical for Thee,
Who even in death wast sure of victory;

For those farewells that darken our brief day,
The child struck down, the young love torn away,
And those dear hopes that kiss us to betray;

For perishing youth, for beauty's fading eyes;
For all Thyself hast given us in such wise
That, ere we grasp its loveliness, it dies,

Dies and despite our faith, we are not sure.
Our love, O God, was never so secure
As Thine, in Thy strong heaven which must endure.

So, in our human weakness, for the scorn
And scourging, for the bitter cross of thorn
That this dark earth, from age to age has borne,

101

We—Thy clay creatures—warped and marred and blind,
Stretch out our arms at last, and bid Thee find
Rest to Thy soul, in crucified mankind.

Come to us! Leave Thy deathless realms on high.
We tell Thee, as our dumb dark myriads die,
We do absolve Thee, with our last sad cry.

102

SEA-DISTANCES.

His native sea-washed isle
Was bleak and bare.
Far off, there seemed to smile
An isle more fair.

Blue as the smoke of Spring
Its far hills rose,
A delicate azure ring
Crowned with faint snows.

At dusk, a rose-red star
Set free from wrong,
It beacons him afar,
His whole life long.

Not till old age drew nigh
He voyaged there.
He saw the colours die
As he drew near.

It towered above him, bleak

103

And cold, death-cold.
From peak to phantom peak
A grey mist rolled.

Then, under his arched hand,
From that bare shore.
Back at his own dear land
He gazed once more.

Clothed with the tints he knew
He saw it smile,—
Opal, and rose and blue,
His native isle.

THE LAST OF THE SNOW.

I.

Now, feathered with snow, the fir-tree's beautiful sprays
Pensively nod in the sun, while young April delays,—
“Yes—yes—*we* know
How briefly our hearts with the light of the may-tide
shall glow,
Ere the darkness of winter return; and the green boughs and
gold
Shall all be choked down by the snow
In the end, as of old.

II.

“Yes, white snow, you will have your revenge for the

warm dreams that stir
In the sap of my boughs," said the wise old heart of the fir.
"None the less you shall go!
For my brother, the hawthorn, has dreamed of a new
kind of snow,
With honey for bees in its heart; and it's worth it, I say,
Though you'll freeze us to death, as we know,
At the end of our day.

105

III.

"There's a glory in fighting for dreams that are doomed to
defeat;
So perhaps it's because you'll return that the bloom smells
so sweet.
There's our victory, too,
Which you cannot prevent, for we're stronger in one
thing than you,
Since we win the one prize that's worth winning, win
heaven on earth;
And, if truth remain true,
Find in death our rebirth."

106

IV.

So, feathered with snow, the beautiful boughs of the fir
Dipped to the thaw of the world as the spring touched them
there;
And the lane, like a brook,
Sang in the sun, and the pretty girls came out to look,
Saying, "Spring is begun! Look, look, how the snow runs

away!

It is only the snow on the fir-tree that seems to delay!”

V.

“That’s true,” said the fir, “and if only the wind of the
spring

Would whisper a tale that I know, or a blackbird sing,
I think I might shake off this ghost!”—

“Oh, pouf! If that’s all,”

Chuckled the spring-wind, “Listen! I think that’s the call
Of a blackbird! And what d’you suppose is that other
faint sound—

107

Snow melting?—leaves budding?—or young lovers
whispering all round,

In forest and meadow and city? Oh, yes, they’ve begun!
Wake up! Tell that spectre to go!”

And the fir-tree listened and shook, and the last of the snow
Slipped from its hold and plumped down on the daffodil
bed;

And the green-plumed branches danced for delight in the
sun;

And a blackbird alighted, at once, on the bright wet
boughs,

And called to his bright-eyed mate on the roof of the shed,
“*Oh, see what a beautiful hiding-place for our house!*”

—“That’s better,” the fir-tree said.

108

THE old horse, Dobbin,
Out at grass
Turns his tail
To the winds that pass;

And stares at the white road
Winding down
Through the dwindling fields
To the distant town.

He hears, in the distance,
A snip-snap trot,
He sees his master,
A small dark dot,

Riding away
On the smart new mare
That came last month
From Pulborough Fair.

Dobbin remembers
As horses may
How often he trotted
That ringing way.

His coat is ragged
And blown awry.
He droops his head
And he knows not why.

Something has happened.
Something has gone.
The world is changing.

His work is done.

But his old heart aches
With a heavier load
As he stands and wonders
And stares at the road.

110

THE PARROT.

WHEN the king and his folk lay dead,
And the murderous hordes had gone,
He gnawed through his cage and fled
To the swallowing woods alone;
But, after an endless age,
He was taken by man once more;
And swung in a sturdier cage
By a sun-bleached wine-house door.

And there, on a hot white noon,
From his place on the blistered wall,
He whistled a dark old tune
And called, as a ghost might call,
Farlo—Merillo—Rozace,
With a chuckle of impish glee,
The words of the vanished race
That none knew now but he.

Farlo—Merillo—Geray!
And the spell-struck listeners heard
The tongue of the dead that day
Talking again in a bird;

111

And his eyes were like blood-red stones,
For round him the wise men drew,
And coaxed him with terrapin bones
To tell them the words he knew.

Sleek as a peach was his breast,
His long wings green as palms;
And, whiles, like a prince he'd jest,
Then, beggar-like, whine for alms;
And, whiles, like a girl in flight
He'd titter, then mimic a kiss,
And chuckle again with delight
In that wicked old way of his.

He'd courtesy low, and he'd dance
On his perch, and mockingly leer,
And stiffen himself and prance
For the grey-beards listening there;
And once—O, dreadful and wild,
In the blaze of that noonday sun,
He shrieked, like a frightened child
That into the dark had gone.

THE HOLY CHERRY-TREE.

THE years come, and the years go.
Clouds drift, and rivers flow.
The wild flowers travel across the plains.
All things into the sunset stream,
The hills are changing like a dream.

Only the Temple of Love remains.

And, beautiful in that drifting tide,
Standing at the Temple's side,
Whispers the lovers' cherry-tree.
Kanzakura, the Tree of Love,
Older than the hills above,
Older than all but memory.

Little laughters, happy vows,
Tremble through its blossomed boughs,
Even as when, an age ago,
Nano, with her seventeen years,
Exquisite in smiles and tears
Knelt beneath its rosy snow.

“*Boughs of April*,” so she prayed
Kneeling in that dim blue shade,
“*Since they say that I must wed;
Though my father goes to find
Someone suited to his mind,
Send me one to mine instead.*”

“Send me someone tall and strong,
Very handsome, too, and young;
(Twenty-one, I think, is well.)
Let his heart be always true,
And let Nano love him, too,
Always, as old stories tell.

“Let us love, and understand
At the touch of hand and hand,

All the spirit's hidden bliss;
And when all sweet things are past,
In each other's arms at last
Let us die, in one last kiss.

“All the wise and great to-day,
Laugh such love as this away.
That is why, I hope, you'll hear!
I am neither great nor wise.
Grant me, then, what they despise.
This is all of Nano's prayer!”

114

HELICON.

I CLIMBED to Helicon's height and found you,
Daughters of Memory, heavenly Nine.
Though the dawn-mist flowed like a veil around you,
I drank your glory again like wine.

I saw how the cold clear morning glances
Through peaks of pine on your breasts of snow,
Where, slowly wreathing your stately dances
You drift through the glens of delight and go;

With scents of the wild thyme round you blowing,
And limbs that burn in the rising sun,
And the golden law of the measure showing
The way that the many are woven in one;

How the pulse of life dictates your pleasure
To hearts and tides and the stars on high;

115

For all the universe moves in measure,
And even the gods, if they break it, die.

Long since, in music, this law was spoken
To all that wander on Helicon hill.
By wrong and death though the song be broken,
The stars are working the Muses' will.

This law runs deeper than all earth's dreaming.
Who follows it, walks in a heaven unseen.
He has passed all veils of thinking and seeming,
Who drinks one cup of this Hippocrene.

116

EUTERPE.

THE witchery of her voice from far blue hills
At sunset, called me on,
With exquisite echoes of all those bird-like rills
That warble on Helicon.
Once, over a cloud of thyme, I saw her gleam.
I touched her snowy side.
She vanished, into the dusk, a moth-like dream;
And all that music died.

Farewell, Euterpe. Turn to your own skies.
Few dreams are half so fair
As those that lit the mutiny of your eyes
And crowned your fragrant hair;
Yet, if the lyric muse like mist can go,
I, too, can go like rain;
For I've a tryst to keep on earth below,

A troth to plight again.

Let all those proud immortals, then, betray
The hopes they brought to birth;
But I will crown, with violets of a day,
A love that walks on earth;
Though never a Muse on Helicon may wear
More sweetness on her brow
Than lives and breathes in my dear lady's hair
Like April blossoms now.

117

Then, as I looked into my true love's face,
Thinking all dreams had gone,
Clear, through her own deep eyes, with mocking grace,
The lost Immortal shone.
Low from her lips the sweet lost music flowed,—
*“Euterpe left your sky
Only to be your comrade on the road.
Look closely. It is I.”*

118

TO CERTAIN PHILOSOPHERS.

AFTER all the dreaming, the laughter, and the tears,
Comes a tramp of armies, a shock of naked spears.

After all the loving, with lips and eyes alight,
Comes the iron slumber and the endless night.

After all the singing, and all that souls can pray,
Comes the touch of Silence, closing all with *Nay*;

After all the striving comes the doom foretold,
When the earth is darkened, and the sun is cold.

Yet, my latter sophists, if your creed were true,
Gods, if gods existed, well might kneel to you.

119

You have found the one thing that gods have never heard;
Found what hell despaired of, found the final word.

120

THE TRUE REBELLION.

LET the wild throng go paint themselves with woad,
For we've a jest between us, Truth and I.

We know that those who live by fashion die
Also by fashion, and that mode kills mode.

We know the great new age is on the road,
And death is at the heart of every lie.

But we've a jest between us, Truth and I;
And we have locked the doors to our abode.

Yet if some great new "rebel" in his pride

Should pass that way and hear us laughing low
Like lovers, in the darkness, side by side,

He might catch this:—*The dullards do not know
That names are names. New "rebel" is old "thrall."
And we're the lonely dreamers after all.*

121

BEAUTY IN EDEN.

WHEN beauty, white
As lilies in Eden night,
Woke for the deepening heavens' delight,

Her rosy looks
Taught laughter to the brooks,
And were the world's first gospel-books.

And wild things came,
By loveliness made tame,
And fawned on her pure feet with eyes of flame.

Yet, though her splendour
Bade the wild earth surrender
And taught those burning panthers to attend her,

They did not lose
The suppleness of their thews,
Nor that fierce might, loved by the warrior Muse.

122

Music hath fire,
Passion and strong desire,
Which now plumb hell, and now to heaven aspire.

Yet, to be strong,
Must that tumultuous throng
Never escape the reins that guide the song.

Strong Charioteer,
The steeds are thine to steer.
Rule our weak souls. Bring back the Golden Year.

123

THE SHADOW.

A SHADOW leaned over me, whispering, in the darkness,
Thoughts without sound;
Sorrowful thoughts that filled me with helpless wonder
And held me bound.

Sadder than memory, sharp as remorse, in the quiet
Before I slept,
The whisper I heard of the one implacable Shadow,
And my heart wept.

“Day by day, in your eyes, the light grows dimmer,
With the joy you have sung.
You knew it would go; but, ah, when you knew it and sang
it,
Your heart was young;

“And a year to you, then, was an age; but now,” said the
Shadow,
Malignant and cold,
“The light and the colour are fading, the ecstasy dying,
It is time to grow old.”

Oh, I could have borne the worst that he had to tell me,
Lost youth, age, death;
But he turned to breathe on the quiet heart sleeping beside
me
The same cold breath.

And there by the throat I grappled him. “Let me bear all of
it.

Let her dream on.”
Soundlessly, shadow with shadow, we wrestled together,
Till the grey dawn.

125

THE SEA-MARK.

WHEN death divides us, and my soul must go,
Whirled on the seas of universal night,
If I could see one smallest spark of light
Beyond that unremembering ebb and flow,
One only constant star, dear, I should know
That neither life, nor death, nor depth, nor height,
Could utterly divide you from my sight;
For, in that sea-mark, all our love would glow.

Set it a myriad light-years past the scope
Of our terrestrial vision, my fixed eyes
Should hold it, knowing your eyes would hold it, too;
Steered by that light, my lonely sail of hope
Should steal, through all those vast and desolate skies
Nearer, with every conquered age, to you.

126

RESURRECTION.

WHEN all the altar lights were dead,
And mockery choked the world's desire;
When every faith on earth had fled,
A spirit rose on wings of fire.

He rose and sang. I never heard
A song of such ecstatic breath;
And, though I caught no throbbing word,
I knew that he had conquered death.

He sang no comfortable things;
But as a shaft had pierced him through;
And the dark stain between his wings
Grew darker as the glory grew.

He sang the agonies of loss;
Of dumb farewells, and love's last kiss.
He sang in heaven as on a cross,
A spirit crucified with bliss.

Over these ruined shrines he rose,
These crumbling graves where all men grope,
Racked by the universal throes,
And singing the eternal hope.

127

128

Transcriber's Notes

- Silently corrected several palpable typographical errors.
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[The end of *Songs of Shadow-of-a-Leaf and Other Poems* by Alfred Noyes]