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# **THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY**

## **A Book of Poems**

**by Edwin Arlington Robinson**

*To  
the memory of  
WILLIAM EDWARD BUTLER*

[Note on text: Italicized words or phrases are capitalized. Lines longer than 78 characters are broken and the continuation is indented two spaces. Some obvious errors may have been corrected.]

Several of the poems included in this book are reprinted from American periodicals, as follows: "The Gift of God", "Old King Cole", "Another Dark Lady", and "The Unforgiven"; "Flammonde" and "The Poor Relation"; "The Clinging Vine"; "Eros Turannos" and "Bokardo"; "The Voice of Age"; "Cassandra"; "The Burning Book"; "Theophilus"; "Ben Jonson Entertains a Man from Stratford".

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## THE MAN AGAINST THE SKY

### Flammonde

*The man Flammonde, from God knows where,  
With firm address and foreign air,  
With news of nations in his talk  
And something royal in his walk,  
With glint of iron in his eyes,  
But never doubt, nor yet surprise,  
Appeared, and stayed, and held his head  
As one by kings accredited.*

*Erect, with his alert repose  
About him, and about his clothes,  
He pictured all tradition hears  
Of what we owe to fifty years.  
His cleansing heritage of taste  
Paraded neither want nor waste;  
And what he needed for his fee  
To live, he borrowed graciously.*

*He never told us what he was,  
Or what mischance, or other cause,  
Had banished him from better days  
To play the Prince of Castaways.  
Meanwhile he played surpassing well*

*A part, for most, unplayable;  
In fine, one pauses, half afraid  
To say for certain that he played.*

*For that, one may as well forego  
Conviction as to yes or no;  
Nor can I say just how intense  
Would then have been the difference  
To several, who, having striven  
In vain to get what he was given,  
Would see the stranger taken on  
By friends not easy to be won.*

*Moreover, many a malcontent  
He soothed and found munificent;  
His courtesy beguiled and foiled  
Suspicion that his years were soiled;  
His mien distinguished any crowd,  
His credit strengthened when he bowed;  
And women, young and old, were fond  
Of looking at the man Flammonde.*

*There was a woman in our town  
On whom the fashion was to frown;  
But while our talk renewed the tinge  
Of a long-faded scarlet fringe,  
The man Flammonde saw none of that,  
And what he saw we wondered at—  
That none of us, in her distress,  
Could hide or find our littleness.*

*There was a boy that all agreed  
Had shut within him the rare seed  
Of learning. We could understand,  
But none of us could lift a hand.  
The man Flammonde appraised the youth,  
And told a few of us the truth;  
And thereby, for a little gold,  
A flowered future was unrolled.*

*There were two citizens who fought  
For years and years, and over nought;  
They made life awkward for their friends,  
And shortened their own dividends.  
The man Flammonde said what was wrong  
Should be made right; nor was it long  
Before they were again in line,  
And had each other in to dine.*

*And these I mention are but four  
Of many out of many more.  
So much for them. But what of him—  
So firm in every look and limb?  
What small satanic sort of kink  
Was in his brain? What broken link  
Withheld him from the destinies  
That came so near to being his?*

*What was he, when we came to sift  
His meaning, and to note the drift  
Of incommunicable ways  
That make us ponder while we praise?  
Why was it that his charm revealed  
Somehow the surface of a shield?  
What was it that we never caught?  
What was he, and what was he not?*

*How much it was of him we met  
We cannot ever know; nor yet  
Shall all he gave us quite atone  
For what was his, and his alone;  
Nor need we now, since he knew best,  
Nourish an ethical unrest:  
Rarely at once will nature give  
The power to be Flammonde and live.*

*We cannot know how much we learn  
From those who never will return,  
Until a flash of unforeseen  
Remembrance falls on what has been.  
We've each a darkening hill to climb;  
And this is why, from time to time  
In Tilbury Town, we look beyond  
Horizons for the man Flammonde.*

## **The Gift of God**

*Blessed with a joy that only she*

*Of all alive shall ever know,  
She wears a proud humility  
For what it was that willed it so,—  
That her degree should be so great  
Among the favored of the Lord  
That she may scarcely bear the weight  
Of her bewildering reward.*

*As one apart, immune, alone,  
Or featured for the shining ones,  
And like to none that she has known  
Of other women's other sons,—  
The firm fruition of her need,  
He shines anointed; and he blurs  
Her vision, till it seems indeed  
A sacrilege to call him hers.*

*She fears a little for so much  
Of what is best, and hardly dares  
To think of him as one to touch  
With aches, indignities, and cares;  
She sees him rather at the goal,  
Still shining; and her dream foretells  
The proper shining of a soul  
Where nothing ordinary dwells.*

*Perchance a canvass of the town  
Would find him far from flags and shouts,  
And leave him only the renown  
Of many smiles and many doubts;  
Perchance the crude and common tongue  
Would havoc strangely with his worth;  
But she, with innocence unwrung,  
Would read his name around the earth.*

*And others, knowing how this youth  
Would shine, if love could make him great,  
When caught and tortured for the truth  
Would only writhe and hesitate;  
While she, arranging for his days  
What centuries could not fulfill,  
Transmutes him with her faith and praise,  
And has him shining where she will.*

*She crowns him with her gratefulness,  
And says again that life is good;  
And should the gift of God be less  
In him than in her motherhood,  
His fame, though vague, will not be small,  
As upward through her dream he fares,  
Half clouded with a crimson fall  
Of roses thrown on marble stairs.*

## **The Clinging Vine**

*"Be calm? And was I frantic?  
You'll have me laughing soon.  
I'm calm as this Atlantic,  
And quiet as the moon;  
I may have spoken faster  
Than once, in other days;  
For I've no more a master,  
And now—'Be calm,' he says.*

*"Fear not, fear no commotion,—  
I'll be as rocks and sand;  
The moon and stars and ocean  
Will envy my command;  
No creature could be stiller  
In any kind of place  
Than I... No, I'll not kill her;  
Her death is in her face.*

*"Be happy while she has it,  
For she'll not have it long;  
A year, and then you'll pass it,  
Preparing a new song.  
And I'm a fool for prating  
Of what a year may bring,  
When more like her are waiting  
For more like you to sing.*

*"You mock me with denial,  
You mean to call me hard?  
You see no room for trial  
When all my doors are barred?  
You say, and you'd say dying,  
That I dream what I know;*

*And sighing, and denying,  
You'd hold my hand and go.*

*"You scowl—and I don't wonder;  
I spoke too fast again;  
But you'll forgive one blunder,  
For you are like most men:  
You are,—or so you've told me,  
So many mortal times,  
That heaven ought not to hold me  
Accountable for crimes.*

*"Be calm? Was I unpleasant?  
Then I'll be more discreet,  
And grant you, for the present,  
The balm of my defeat:  
What she, with all her striving,  
Could not have brought about,  
You've done. Your own contriving  
Has put the last light out.*

*"If she were the whole story,  
If worse were not behind,  
I'd creep with you to glory,  
Believing I was blind;  
I'd creep, and go on seeming  
To be what I despise.  
You laugh, and say I'm dreaming,  
And all your laughs are lies.*

*"Are women mad? A few are,  
And if it's true you say—  
If most men are as you are—  
We'll all be mad some day.  
Be calm—and let me finish;  
There's more for you to know.  
I'll talk while you diminish,  
And listen while you grow.*

*"There was a man who married  
Because he couldn't see;  
And all his days he carried  
The mark of his degree.  
But you—you came clear-sighted,  
And found truth in my eyes;  
And all my wrongs you've righted  
With lies, and lies, and lies.*

*"You've killed the last assurance  
That once would have me strive  
To rouse an old endurance  
That is no more alive.  
It makes two people chilly  
To say what we have said,  
But you—you'll not be silly  
And wrangle for the dead.*

*"You don't? You never wrangle?  
Why scold then,—or complain?  
More words will only mangle  
What you've already slain.  
Your pride you can't surrender?  
My name—for that you fear?  
Since when were men so tender,  
And honor so severe?*

*"No more—I'll never bear it.  
I'm going. I'm like ice.  
My burden? You would share it?  
Forbid the sacrifice!  
Forget so quaint a notion,  
And let no more be told;  
For moon and stars and ocean  
And you and I are cold."*

## **Cassandra**

*I heard one who said: "Verily,  
What word have I for children here?  
Your Dollar is your only Word,  
The wrath of it your only fear.*

*"You build it altars tall enough  
To make you see, but you are blind;  
You cannot leave it long enough  
To look before you or behind.*

*"When Reason beckons you to pause,*

*You laugh and say that you know best;  
But what it is you know, you keep  
As dark as ingots in a chest.*

*"You laugh and answer, 'We are young;  
O leave us now, and let us grow.'—  
Not asking how much more of this  
Will Time endure or Fate bestow.*

*"Because a few complacent years  
Have made your peril of your pride,  
Think you that you are to go on  
Forever pampered and untried?*

*"What lost eclipse of history,  
What bivouac of the marching stars,  
Has given the sign for you to see  
Millenniums and last great wars?*

*"What unrecorded overthrow  
Of all the world has ever known,  
Or ever been, has made itself  
So plain to you, and you alone?*

*"Your Dollar, Dove and Eagle make  
A Trinity that even you  
Rate higher than you rate yourselves;  
It pays, it flatters, and it's new.*

*"And though your very flesh and blood  
Be what your Eagle eats and drinks,  
You'll praise him for the best of birds,  
Not knowing what the Eagle thinks.*

*"The power is yours, but not the sight;  
You see not upon what you tread;  
You have the ages for your guide,  
But not the wisdom to be led.*

*"Think you to tread forever down  
The merciless old verities?  
And are you never to have eyes  
To see the world for what it is?*

*"Are you to pay for what you have  
With all you are?"—No other word  
We caught, but with a laughing crowd  
Moved on. None heeded, and few heard.*

## **John Gorham**

*"Tell me what you're doing over here, John Gorham,  
Sighing hard and seeming to be sorry when you're not;  
Make me laugh or let me go now, for long faces in the moonlight  
Are a sign for me to say again a word that you forgot."—*

*"I'm over here to tell you what the moon already  
May have said or maybe shouted ever since a year ago;  
I'm over here to tell you what you are, Jane Wayland,  
And to make you rather sorry, I should say, for being so."—*

*"Tell me what you're saying to me now, John Gorham,  
Or you'll never see as much of me as ribbons any more;  
I'll vanish in as many ways as I have toes and fingers,  
And you'll not follow far for one where flocks have been before."—*

*"I'm sorry now you never saw the flocks, Jane Wayland,  
But you're the one to make of them as many as you need.  
And then about the vanishing. It's I who mean to vanish;  
And when I'm here no longer you'll be done with me indeed."—*

*"That's a way to tell me what I am, John Gorham!  
How am I to know myself until I make you smile?  
Try to look as if the moon were making faces at you,  
And a little more as if you meant to stay a little while."—*

*"You are what it is that over rose-blown gardens  
Makes a pretty flutter for a season in the sun;  
You are what it is that with a mouse, Jane Wayland,  
Catches him and lets him go and eats him up for fun."—*

*"Sure I never took you for a mouse, John Gorham;  
All you say is easy, but so far from being true  
That I wish you wouldn't ever be again the one to think so;  
For it isn't cats and butterflies that I would be to you."—*

*"All your little animals are in one picture—  
One I've had before me since a year ago to-night;*

*And the picture where they live will be of you, Jane Wayland,  
Till you find a way to kill them or to keep them out of sight."*—

*"Won't you ever see me as I am, John Gorham,  
Leaving out the foolishness and all I never meant?  
Somewhere in me there's a woman, if you know the way to find her.  
Will you like me any better if I prove it and repent?"*

*"I doubt if I shall ever have the time, Jane Wayland;  
And I dare say all this moonlight lying round us might as well  
Fall for nothing on the shards of broken urns that are forgotten,  
As on two that have no longer much of anything to tell."*

## Stafford's Cabin

*Once there was a cabin here, and once there was a man;  
And something happened here before my memory began.  
Time has made the two of them the fuel of one flame  
And all we have of them is now a legend and a name.*

*All I have to say is what an old man said to me,  
And that would seem to be as much as there will ever be.  
"Fifty years ago it was we found it where it sat."—  
And forty years ago it was old Archibald said that.*

*"An apple tree that's yet alive saw something, I suppose,  
Of what it was that happened there, and what no mortal knows.  
Some one on the mountain heard far off a master shriek,  
And then there was a light that showed the way for men to seek.*

*"We found it in the morning with an iron bar behind,  
And there were chains around it; but no search could ever find,  
Either in the ashes that were left, or anywhere,  
A sign to tell of who or what had been with Stafford there.*

*"Stafford was a likely man with ideas of his own—  
Though I could never like the kind that likes to live alone;  
And when you met, you found his eyes were always on your shoes,  
As if they did the talking when he asked you for the news.*

*"That's all, my son. Were I to talk for half a hundred years  
I'd never clear away from there the cloud that never clears.  
We buried what was left of it,—the bar, too, and the chains;  
And only for the apple tree there's nothing that remains."*

*Forty years ago it was I heard the old man say,  
"That's all, my son."—And here again I find the place to-day,  
Deserted and told only by the tree that knows the most,  
And overgrown with golden-rod as if there were no ghost.*

## Hillcrest

*(To Mrs. Edward MacDowell)*

*No sound of any storm that shakes  
Old island walls with older seas  
Comes here where now September makes  
An island in a sea of trees.*

*Between the sunlight and the shade  
A man may learn till he forgets  
The roaring of a world remade,  
And all his ruins and regrets;*

*And if he still remembers here  
Poor fights he may have won or lost,—  
If he be ridden with the fear  
Of what some other fight may cost,—*

*If, eager to confuse too soon,  
What he has known with what may be,  
He reads a planet out of tune  
For cause of his jarred harmony,—*

*If here he venture to unroll  
His index of adagios,  
And he be given to console  
Humanity with what he knows,—*

*He may by contemplation learn  
A little more than what he knew,  
And even see great oaks return*

*To acorns out of which they grew.*

*He may, if he but listen well,  
Through twilight and the silence here,  
Be told what there are none may tell  
To vanity's impatient ear;*

*And he may never dare again  
Say what awaits him, or be sure  
What sunlit labyrinth of pain  
He may not enter and endure.*

*Who knows to-day from yesterday  
May learn to count no thing too strange:  
Love builds of what Time takes away,  
Till Death itself is less than Change.*

*Who sees enough in his duress  
May go as far as dreams have gone;  
Who sees a little may do less  
Than many who are blind have done;*

*Who sees unchastened here the soul  
Triumphant has no other sight  
Than has a child who sees the whole  
World radiant with his own delight.*

*Far journeys and hard wandering  
Await him in whose crude surmise  
Peace, like a mask, hides everything  
That is and has been from his eyes;*

*And all his wisdom is unfound,  
Or like a web that error weaves  
On airy looms that have a sound  
No louder now than falling leaves.*

## Old King Cole

*In Tilbury Town did Old King Cole  
A wise old age anticipate,  
Desiring, with his pipe and bowl,  
No Khan's extravagant estate.  
No crown annoyed his honest head,  
No fiddlers three were called or needed;  
For two disastrous heirs instead  
Made music more than ever three did.*

*Bereft of her with whom his life  
Was harmony without a flaw,  
He took no other for a wife,  
Nor sighed for any that he saw;  
And if he doubted his two sons,  
And heirs, Alexis and Evander,  
He might have been as doubtful once  
Of Robert Burns and Alexander.*

*Alexis, in his early youth,  
Began to steal—from old and young.  
Likewise Evander, and the truth  
Was like a bad taste on his tongue.  
Born thieves and liars, their affair  
Seemed only to be tarred with evil—  
The most insufferable pair  
Of scamps that ever cheered the devil.*

*The world went on, their fame went on,  
And they went on—from bad to worse;  
Till, goaded hot with nothing done,  
And each accoutred with a curse,  
The friends of Old King Cole, by twos,  
And fours, and sevens, and elevens,  
Pronounced unalterable views  
Of doings that were not of heaven's.*

*And having learned again whereby  
Their baleful zeal had come about,  
King Cole met many a wrathful eye  
So kindly that its wrath went out—  
Or partly out. Say what they would,  
He seemed the more to court their candor;  
But never told what kind of good  
Was in Alexis and Evander.*

*And Old King Cole, with many a puff  
That haloed his urbanity,  
Would smoke till he had smoked enough,  
And listen most attentively.*



*He beamed as with an inward light  
That had the Lord's assurance in it;  
And once a man was there all night,  
Expecting something every minute.*

*But whether from too little thought,  
Or too much fealty to the bowl,  
A dim reward was all he got  
For sitting up with Old King Cole.  
"Though mine," the father mused aloud,  
"Are not the sons I would have chosen,  
Shall I, less evilly endowed,  
By their infirmity be frozen?"*

*"They'll have a bad end, I'll agree,  
But I was never born to groan;  
For I can see what I can see,  
And I'm accordingly alone.  
With open heart and open door,  
I love my friends, I like my neighbors;  
But if I try to tell you more,  
Your doubts will overmatch my labors.*

*"This pipe would never make me calm,  
This bowl my grief would never drown.  
For grief like mine there is no balm  
In Gilead, or in Tilbury Town.  
And if I see what I can see,  
I know not any way to blind it;  
Nor more if any way may be  
For you to grope or fly to find it.*

*"There may be room for ruin yet,  
And ashes for a wasted love;  
Or, like One whom you may forget,  
I may have meat you know not of.  
And if I'd rather live than weep  
Meanwhile, do you find that surprising?  
Why, bless my soul, the man's asleep!  
That's good. The sun will soon be rising."*

## **Ben Jonson Entertains a Man from Stratford**

*You are a friend then, as I make it out,  
Of our man Shakespeare, who alone of us  
Will put an ass's head in Fairyland  
As he would add a shilling to more shillings,  
All most harmonious,—and out of his  
Miraculous inviolable increase  
Fills Ilion, Rome, or any town you like  
Of olden time with timeless Englishmen;  
And I must wonder what you think of him—  
All you down there where your small Avon flows  
By Stratford, and where you're an Alderman.  
Some, for a guess, would have him riding back  
To be a farrier there, or say a dyer;  
Or maybe one of your adept surveyors;  
Or like enough the wizard of all tanners.  
Not you—no fear of that; for I discern  
In you a kindling of the flame that saves—  
The nimble element, the true phlogiston;  
I see it, and was told of it, moreover,  
By our discriminate friend himself, no other.  
Had you been one of the sad average,  
As he would have it,—meaning, as I take it,  
The sinew and the solvent of our Island,  
You'd not be buying beer for this Terpander's  
Approved and estimated friend Ben Jonson;  
He'd never foist it as a part of his  
Contingent entertainment of a townsman  
While he goes off rehearsing, as he must,  
If he shall ever be the Duke of Stratford.  
And my words are no shadow on your town—  
Far from it; for one town's as like another  
As all are unlike London. Oh, he knows it,—  
And there's the Stratford in him; he denies it,  
And there's the Shakespeare in him. So, God help him!  
I tell him he needs Greek; but neither God  
Nor Greek will help him. Nothing will help that man.  
You see the fates have given him so much,  
He must have all or perish,—or look out  
Of London, where he sees too many lords;  
They're part of half what ails him: I suppose  
There's nothing fouler down among the demons  
Than what it is he feels when he remembers  
The dust and sweat and ointment of his calling  
With his lords looking on and laughing at him.  
King as he is, he can't be king de facto,*

And that's as well, because he wouldn't like it;  
He'd frame a lower rating of men than  
Than he has now; and after that would come  
An abdication or an apoplexy.  
He can't be king, not even king of Stratford,—  
Though half the world, if not the whole of it,  
May crown him with a crown that fits no king  
Save Lord Apollo's homesick emissary:  
Not there on Avon, or on any stream  
Where Naiads and their white arms are no more,  
Shall he find home again. It's all too bad.  
But there's a comfort, for he'll have that House—  
The best you ever saw; and he'll be there  
Anon, as you're an Alderman. Good God!  
He makes me lie awake o' nights and laugh.  
And you have known him from his origin,  
You tell me; and a most uncommon urchin  
He must have been to the few seeing ones—  
A trifle terrifying, I dare say,  
Discovering a world with his man's eyes,  
Quite as another lad might see some finches,  
If he looked hard and had an eye for nature.  
But this one had his eyes and their foretelling,  
And he had you to fare with, and what else?  
He must have had a father and a mother—  
In fact I've heard him say so—and a dog,  
As a boy should, I venture; and the dog,  
Most likely, was the only man who knew him.  
A dog, for all I know, is what he needs  
As much as anything right here to-day,  
To counsel him about his disillusionings,  
Old aches, and parturitions of what's coming,—  
A dog of orders, an emeritus,  
To wag his tail at him when he comes home,  
And then to put his paws up on his knees  
And say, "For God's sake, what's it all about?"

I don't know whether he needs a dog or not—  
Or what he needs. I tell him he needs Greek;  
I'll talk of rules and Aristotle with him,  
And if his tongue's at home he'll say to that,  
"I have your word that Aristotle knows,  
And you mine that I don't know Aristotle."  
He's all at odds with all the unities,  
And what's yet worse, it doesn't seem to matter;  
He treads along through Time's old wilderness  
As if the tramp of all the centuries  
Had left no roads—and there are none, for him;  
He doesn't see them, even with those eyes,—  
And that's a pity, or I say it is.  
Accordingly we have him as we have him—  
Going his way, the way that he goes best,  
A pleasant animal with no great noise  
Or nonsense anywhere to set him off—  
Save only divers and inclement devils  
Have made of late his heart their dwelling place.  
A flame half ready to fly out sometimes  
At some annoyance may be fanned up in him,  
But soon it falls, and when it falls goes out;  
He knows how little room there is in there  
For crude and futile animosities,  
And how much for the joy of being whole,  
And how much for long sorrow and old pain.  
On our side there are some who may be given  
To grow old wondering what he thinks of us  
And some above us, who are, in his eyes,  
Above himself,—and that's quite right and English.  
Yet here we smile, or disappoint the gods  
Who made it so: the gods have always eyes  
To see men scratch; and they see one down here  
Who itches, manor-bitten to the bone,  
Albeit he knows himself—yes, yes, he knows—  
The lord of more than England and of more  
Than all the seas of England in all time  
Shall ever wash. D'ye wonder that I laugh?  
He sees me, and he doesn't seem to care;  
And why the devil should he? I can't tell you.

I'll meet him out alone of a bright Sunday,  
Trim, rather spruce, and quite the gentleman.  
"What ho, my lord!" say I. He doesn't hear me;  
Wherefore I have to pause and look at him.  
He's not enormous, but one looks at him.  
A little on the round if you insist,  
For now, God save the mark, he's growing old;  
He's five and forty, and to hear him talk  
These days you'd call him eighty; then you'd add  
More years to that. He's old enough to be  
The father of a world, and so he is.  
"Ben, you're a scholar, what's the time of day?"  
Says he; and there shines out of him again  
An aged light that has no age or station—  
The mystery that's his—a mischievous  
Half-mad serenity that laughs at fame  
For being won so easy, and at friends

Who laugh at him for what he wants the most,  
And for his dukedom down in Warwickshire;—  
By which you see we're all a little jealous....  
Poor Greene! I fear the color of his name  
Was even as that of his ascending soul;  
And he was one where there are many others,—  
Some scrivening to the end against their fate,  
Their puppets all in ink and all to die there;  
And some with hands that once would shade an eye  
That scanned Euripides and Aeschylus  
Will reach by this time for a pot-house mop  
To slush their first and last of royalties.  
Poor devils! and they all play to his hand;  
For so it was in Athens and old Rome.  
But that's not here or there; I've wandered off.  
Greene does it, or I'm careful. Where's that boy?

Yes, he'll go back to Stratford. And we'll miss him?  
Dear sir, there'll be no London here without him.  
We'll all be riding, one of these fine days,  
Down there to see him—and his wife won't like us;  
And then we'll think of what he never said  
Of women—which, if taken all in all  
With what he did say, would buy many horses.  
Though nowadays he's not so much for women:  
"So few of them," he says, "are worth the guessing."  
But there's a work at work when he says that,  
And while he says it one feels in the air  
A deal of circumambient hocus-pocus.  
They've had him dancing till his toes were tender,  
And he can feel 'em now, come chilly rains.  
There's no long cry for going into it,  
However, and we don't know much about it.  
The Fitton thing was worst of all, I fancy;  
And you in Stratford, like most here in London,  
Have more now in the 'Sonnets' than you paid for;  
He's put her there with all her poison on,  
To make a singing fiction of a shadow  
That's in his life a fact, and always will be.  
But she's no care of ours, though Time, I fear,  
Will have a more reverberant ado  
About her than about another one  
Who seems to have decoyed him, married him,  
And sent him scuttling on his way to London,—  
With much already learned, and more to learn,  
And more to follow. Lord! how I see him now,  
Pretending, maybe trying, to be like us.  
Whatever he may have meant, we never had him;  
He failed us, or escaped, or what you will,—  
And there was that about him (God knows what,—  
We'd flayed another had he tried it on us)  
That made as many of us as had wits  
More fond of all his easy distances  
Than one another's noise and clap-your-shoulder.  
But think you not, my friend, he'd never talk!  
Talk? He was eldritch at it; and we listened—  
Thereby acquiring much we knew before  
About ourselves, and hitherto had held  
Irrelevant, or not prime to the purpose.  
And there were some, of course, and there be now,  
Disordered and reduced amazedly  
To resignation by the mystic seal  
Of young finality the gods had laid  
On everything that made him a young demon;  
And one or two shot looks at him already  
As he had been their executioner;  
And once or twice he was, not knowing it,—  
Or knowing, being sorry for poor clay  
And saying nothing.... Yet, for all his engines,  
You'll meet a thousand of an afternoon  
Who strut and sun themselves and see around 'em  
A world made out of more that has a reason  
Than his, I swear, that he sees here to-day;  
Though he may scarcely give a Fool an exit  
But we mark how he sees in everything  
A law that, given we flout it once too often,  
Brings fire and iron down on our naked heads.  
To me it looks as if the power that made him,  
For fear of giving all things to one creature,  
Left out the first,—faith, innocence, illusion,  
Whatever 'tis that keeps us out o' Bedlam,—  
And thereby, for his too consuming vision,  
Empowered him out of nature; though to see him,  
You'd never guess what's going on inside him.  
He'll break out some day like a keg of ale  
With too much independent frenzy in it;  
And all for cellaring what he knows won't keep,  
And what he'd best forget—but that he can't.  
You'll have it, and have more than I'm foretelling;  
And there'll be such a roaring at the Globe  
As never stunned the bleeding gladiators.  
He'll have to change the color of its hair  
A bit, for now he calls it Cleopatra.  
Black hair would never do for Cleopatra.

But you and I are not yet two old women,  
And you're a man of office. What he does  
Is more to you than how it is he does it,—  
And that's what the Lord God has never told him.  
They work together, and the Devil helps 'em;  
They do it of a morning, or if not,  
They do it of a night; in which event  
He's peevish of a morning. He seems old;  
He's not the proper stomach or the sleep—  
And they're two sovran agents to conserve him  
Against the fiery art that has no mercy  
But what's in that prodigious grand new House.  
I gather something happening in his boyhood  
Fulfilled him with a boy's determination  
To make all Stratford 'ware of him. Well, well,  
I hope at last he'll have his joy of it,  
And all his pigs and sheep and bellowing beeves,  
And frogs and owls and unicorns, moreover,  
Be less than hell to his attendant ears.  
Oh, past a doubt we'll all go down to see him.

He may be wise. With London two days off,  
Down there some wind of heaven may yet revive him;  
But there's no quickening breath from anywhere  
Shall make of him again the poised young faun  
From Warwickshire, who'd made, it seems, already  
A legend of himself before I came  
To blink before the last of his first lightning.  
Whatever there be, they'll be no more of that;  
The coming on of his old monster Time  
Has made him a still man; and he has dreams  
Were fair to think on once, and all found hollow.  
He knows how much of what men paint themselves  
Would blister in the light of what they are;  
He sees how much of what was great now shares  
An eminence transformed and ordinary;  
He knows too much of what the world has hushed  
In others, to be loud now for himself;  
He knows now at what height low enemies  
May reach his heart, and high friends let him fall;  
But what not even such as he may know  
Bedevils him the worst: his lark may sing  
At heaven's gate how he will, and for as long  
As joy may listen; but HE sees no gate,  
Save one whereat the spent clay waits a little  
Before the churchyard has it, and the worm.  
Not long ago, late in an afternoon,  
I came on him unseen down Lambeth way,  
And on my life I was afear'd of him:  
He gloomed and mumbled like a soul from Tophet,  
His hands behind him and his head bent solemn.  
"What is it now," said I,—"another woman?"  
That made him sorry for me, and he smiled.  
"No, Ben," he mused; "it's Nothing. It's all Nothing.  
We come, we go; and when we're done, we're done;  
Spiders and flies—we're mostly one or t'other—  
We come, we go; and when we're done, we're done."  
"By God, you sing that song as if you knew it!"  
Said I, by way of cheering him; "what ails ye?"  
"I think I must have come down here to think,"  
Says he to that, and pulls his little beard;  
"Your fly will serve as well as anybody,  
And what's his hour? He flies, and flies, and flies,  
And in his fly's mind has a brave appearance;  
And then your spider gets him in her net,  
And eats him out, and hangs him up to dry.  
That's Nature, the kind mother of us all.  
And then your slattern housemaid swings her broom,  
And where's your spider? And that's Nature, also.  
It's Nature, and it's Nothing. It's all Nothing.  
It's all a world where bugs and emperors  
Go singularly back to the same dust,  
Each in his time; and the old, ordered stars  
That sang together, Ben, will sing the same  
Old stave to-morrow."

When he talks like that,  
There's nothing for a human man to do  
But lead him to some grateful nook like this  
Where we be now, and there to make him drink.  
He'll drink, for love of me, and then be sick;  
A sad sign always in a man of parts,  
And always very ominous. The great  
Should be as large in liquor as in love,—  
And our great friend is not so large in either:  
One disaffects him, and the other fails him;  
Whatso he drinks that has an antic in it,  
He's wondering what's to pay in his insides;  
And while his eyes are on the Cyprian  
He's fribbling all the time with that damned House.  
We laugh here at his thrift, but after all  
It may be thrift that saves him from the devil;  
God gave it, anyhow,—and we'll suppose  
He knew the compound of his handiwork.  
To-day the clouds are with him, but anon

He'll out of 'em enough to shake the tree  
Of life itself and bring down fruit unheard-of,—  
And, throwing in the bruised and whole together,  
Prepare a wine to make us drunk with wonder;  
And if he live, there'll be a sunset spell  
Thrown over him as over a glassed lake  
That yesterday was all a black wild water.

God send he live to give us, if no more,  
What now's a-rampage in him, and exhibit,  
With a decent half-allegiance to the ages  
An earnest of at least a casual eye  
Turned once on what he owes to Gutenberg,  
And to the fealty of more centuries  
Than are as yet a picture in our vision.  
"There's time enough,—I'll do it when I'm old,  
And we're immortal men," he says to that;  
And then he says to me, "Ben, what's 'immortal'?  
Think you by any force of ordination  
It may be nothing of a sort more noisy  
Than a small oblivion of component ashes  
That of a dream-addicted world was once  
A moving atomy much like your friend here?"  
Nothing will help that man. To make him laugh,  
I said then he was a mad mountebank,—  
And by the Lord I nearer made him cry.  
I could have eat an eft then, on my knees,  
Tail, claws, and all of him; for I had stung  
The king of men, who had no sting for me,  
And I had hurt him in his memories;  
And I say now, as I shall say again,  
I love the man this side idolatry.

He'll do it when he's old, he says. I wonder.  
He may not be so ancient as all that.  
For such as he, the thing that is to do  
Will do itself,—but there's a reckoning;  
The sessions that are now too much his own,  
The roiling inward of a stilled outside,  
The churning out of all those blood-fed lines,  
The nights of many schemes and little sleep,  
The full brain hammered hot with too much thinking,  
The vexed heart over-worn with too much aching,—  
This weary jangling of conjoined affairs  
Made out of elements that have no end,  
And all confused at once, I understand,  
Is not what makes a man to live forever.  
O no, not now! He'll not be going now:  
There'll be time yet for God knows what explosions  
Before he goes. He'll stay awhile. Just wait:  
Just wait a year or two for Cleopatra,  
For she's to be a balsam and a comfort;  
And that's not all a jape of mine now, either.  
For granted once the old way of Apollo  
Sings in a man, he may then, if he's able,  
Strike unafraid whatever strings he will  
Upon the last and wildest of new lyres;  
Nor out of his new magic, though it hymn  
The shrieks of dungeoned hell, shall he create  
A madness or a gloom to shut quite out  
A cleaving daylight, and a last great calm  
Triumphant over shipwreck and all storms.  
He might have given Aristotle creeps,  
But surely would have given him his 'katharsis'.

He'll not be going yet. There's too much yet  
Unsung within the man. But when he goes,  
I'd stake ye coin o' the realm his only care  
For a phantom world he sounded and found wanting  
Will be a portion here, a portion there,  
Of this or that thing or some other thing  
That has a patent and intrinsical  
Equivalence in those egregious shillings.  
And yet he knows, God help him! Tell me, now,  
If ever there was anything let loose  
On earth by gods or devils heretofore  
Like this mad, careful, proud, indifferent Shakespeare!  
Where was it, if it ever was? By heaven,  
'Twas never yet in Rhodes or Pergamon—  
In Thebes or Nineveh, a thing like this!  
No thing like this was ever out of England;  
And that he knows. I wonder if he cares.  
Perhaps he does.... O Lord, that House in Stratford!

## Eros Turannos

She fears him, and will always ask  
What fated her to choose him;

*She meets in his engaging mask  
All reasons to refuse him;  
But what she meets and what she fears  
Are less than are the downward years,  
Drawn slowly to the foamless weirs  
Of age, were she to lose him.*

*Between a blurred sagacity  
That once had power to sound him,  
And Love, that will not let him be  
The Judas that she found him,  
Her pride assuages her almost,  
As if it were alone the cost.—  
He sees that he will not be lost,  
And waits and looks around him.*

*A sense of ocean and old trees  
Envelops and allures him;  
Tradition, touching all he sees,  
Beguiles and reassures him;  
And all her doubts of what he says  
Are dimmed of what she knows of days—  
Till even prejudice delays  
And fades, and she secures him.*

*The falling leaf inaugurates  
The reign of her confusion;  
The pounding wave reverberates  
The dirge of her illusion;  
And home, where passion lived and died,  
Becomes a place where she can hide,  
While all the town and harbor side  
Vibrate with her seclusion.*

*We tell you, tapping on our brows,  
The story as it should be,—  
As if the story of a house  
Were told, or ever could be;  
We'll have no kindly veil between  
Her visions and those we have seen,—  
As if we guessed what hers have been,  
Or what they are or would be.*

*Meanwhile we do no harm; for they  
That with a god have striven,  
Not hearing much of what we say,  
Take what the god has given;  
Though like waves breaking it may be,  
Or like a changed familiar tree,  
Or like a stairway to the sea  
Where down the blind are driven.*

## Old Trails

*(Washington Square)*

*I met him, as one meets a ghost or two,  
Between the gray Arch and the old Hotel.  
"King Solomon was right, there's nothing new,"  
Said he. "Behold a ruin who meant well."*

*He led me down familiar steps again,  
Appealingly, and set me in a chair.  
"My dreams have all come true to other men,"  
Said he; "God lives, however, and why care?"*

*"An hour among the ghosts will do no harm."  
He laughed, and something glad within me sank.  
I may have eyed him with a faint alarm,  
For now his laugh was lost in what he drank.*

*"They chill things here with ice from hell," he said;  
"I might have known it." And he made a face  
That showed again how much of him was dead,  
And how much was alive and out of place,*

*And out of reach. He knew as well as I  
That all the words of wise men who are skilled  
In using them are not much to defy  
What comes when memory meets the unfulfilled.*

*What evil and infirm perversity  
Had been at work with him to bring him back?  
Never among the ghosts, assuredly,  
Would he originate a new attack;*

*Never among the ghosts, or anywhere,  
Till what was dead of him was put away,*

Would he attain to his offended share  
Of honor among others of his day.

"You ponder like an owl," he said at last;  
"You always did, and here you have a cause.  
For I'm a confirmation of the past,  
A vengeance, and a flowering of what was.

"Sorry? Of course you are, though you compress,  
With even your most impenetrable fears,  
A placid and a proper consciousness  
Of anxious angels over my arrears.

"I see them there against me in a book  
As large as hope, in ink that shines by night.  
For sure I see; but now I'd rather look  
At you, and you are not a pleasant sight.

"Forbear, forgive. Ten years are on my soul,  
And on my conscience. I've an incubus:  
My one distinction, and a parlous toll  
To glory; but hope lives on clamorous.

"'Twas hope, though heaven I grant you knows of what—  
The kind that blinks and rises when it falls,  
Whether it sees a reason why or not—  
That heard Broadway's hard-throated siren-calls;

"'Twas hope that brought me through December storms,  
To shores again where I'll not have to be  
A lonely man with only foreign worms  
To cheer him in his last obscurity.

"But what it was that hurried me down here  
To be among the ghosts, I leave to you.  
My thanks are yours, no less, for one thing clear:  
Though you are silent, what you say is true.

"There may have been the devil in my feet,  
For down I blundered, like a fugitive,  
To find the old room in Eleventh Street.  
God save us!—I came here again to live."

We rose at that, and all the ghosts rose then,  
And followed us unseen to his old room.  
No longer a good place for living men  
We found it, and we shivered in the gloom.

The goods he took away from there were few,  
And soon we found ourselves outside once more,  
Where now the lamps along the Avenue  
Bloomed white for miles above an iron floor.

"Now lead me to the newest of hotels,"  
He said, "and let your spleen be undeceived:  
This ruin is not myself, but some one else;  
I haven't failed; I've merely not achieved."

Whether he knew or not, he laughed and dined  
With more of an immune regardlessness  
Of pits before him and of sands behind  
Than many a child at forty would confess;

And after, when the bells in 'Boris' rang  
Their tumult at the Metropolitan,  
He rocked himself, and I believe he sang.  
"God lives," he crooned aloud, "and I'm the man!"

He was. And even though the creature spoiled  
All prophecies, I cherish his acclaim.  
Three weeks he fattened; and five years he toiled  
In Yonkers,—and then sauntered into fame.

And he may go now to what streets he will—  
Eleventh, or the last, and little care;  
But he would find the old room very still  
Of evenings, and the ghosts would all be there.

I doubt if he goes after them; I doubt  
If many of them ever come to him.  
His memories are like lamps, and they go out;  
Or if they burn, they flicker and are dim.

A light of other gleams he has to-day  
And adulations of applauding hosts;  
A famous danger, but a safer way  
Than growing old alone among the ghosts.

But we may still be glad that we were wrong:  
He fooled us, and we'd shrivel to deny it;  
Though sometimes when old echoes ring too long,  
I wish the bells in 'Boris' would be quiet.

# The Unforgiven

*When he, who is the unforgiven,  
Beheld her first, he found her fair:  
No promise ever dreamt in heaven  
Could then have lured him anywhere  
That would have been away from there;  
And all his wits had lightly striven,  
Foiled with her voice, and eyes, and hair.*

*There's nothing in the saints and sages  
To meet the shafts her glances had,  
Or such as hers have had for ages  
To blind a man till he be glad,  
And humble him till he be mad.  
The story would have many pages,  
And would be neither good nor bad.*

*And, having followed, you would find him  
Where properly the play begins;  
But look for no red light behind him—  
No fumes of many-colored sins,  
Fanned high by screaming violins.  
God knows what good it was to blind him,  
Or whether man or woman wins.*

*And by the same eternal token,  
Who knows just how it will all end?—  
This drama of hard words unspoken,  
This fireside farce, without a friend  
Or enemy to comprehend  
What augurs when two lives are broken,  
And fear finds nothing left to mend.*

*He stares in vain for what awaits him,  
And sees in Love a coin to toss;  
He smiles, and her cold hush berates him  
Beneath his hard half of the cross;  
They wonder why it ever was;  
And she, the unforgiving, hates him  
More for her lack than for her loss.*

*He feeds with pride his indecision,  
And shrinks from what will not occur,  
Bequeathing with infirm derision  
His ashes to the days that were,  
Before she made him prisoner;  
And labors to retrieve the vision  
That he must once have had of her.*

*He waits, and there awaits an ending,  
And he knows neither what nor when;  
But no magicians are attending  
To make him see as he saw then,  
And he will never find again  
The face that once had been the rending  
Of all his purpose among men.*

*He blames her not, nor does he chide her,  
And she has nothing new to say;  
If he were Bluebeard he could hide her,  
But that's not written in the play,  
And there will be no change to-day;  
Although, to the serene outsider,  
There still would seem to be a way.*

# Theophilus

*By what serene malevolence of names  
Had you the gift of yours, Theophilus?  
Not even a smeared young Cyclops at his games  
Would have you long,—and you are one of us.*

*Told of your deeds I shudder for your dreams,  
And they, no doubt, are few and innocent.  
Meanwhile, I marvel; for in you, it seems,  
Hereditarily outshines environment.*

*What lingering bit of Belial, unforeseen,  
Survives and amplifies itself in you?  
What manner of devilry has ever been  
That your obliquity may never do?*



*Humility befits a father's eyes,  
But not a friend of us would have him weep.  
Admiring everything that lives and dies,  
Theophilus, we like you best asleep.*

*Sleep—sleep; and let us find another man  
To lend another name less hazardous:  
Caligula, maybe, or Caliban,  
Or Cain,—but surely not Theophilus.*

## **Veteran Sirens**

*The ghost of Ninon would be sorry now  
To laugh at them, were she to see them here,  
So brave and so alert for learning how  
To fence with reason for another year.*

*Age offers a far comelier diadem  
Than theirs; but anguish has no eye for grace,  
When time's malicious mercy cautions them  
To think a while of number and of space.*

*The burning hope, the worn expectancy,  
The martyred humor, and the maimed allure,  
Cry out for time to end his levity,  
And age to soften its investiture;*

*But they, though others fade and are still fair,  
Defy their fairness and are unsubdued;  
Although they suffer, they may not forswear  
The patient ardor of the unpursued.*

*Poor flesh, to fight the calendar so long;  
Poor vanity, so quaint and yet so brave;  
Poor folly, so deceived and yet so strong,  
So far from Ninon and so near the grave.*

## **Siege Perilous**

*Long warned of many terrors more severe  
To scorch him than hell's engines could awaken,  
He scanned again, too far to be so near,  
The fearful seat no man had ever taken.*

*So many other men with older eyes  
Than his to see with older sight behind them  
Had known so long their one way to be wise,—  
Was any other thing to do than mind them?*

*So many a blasting parallel had seared  
Confusion on his faith,—could he but wonder  
If he were mad and right, or if he feared  
God's fury told in shafted flame and thunder?*

*There fell one day upon his eyes a light  
Ethereal, and he heard no more men speaking;  
He saw their shaken heads, but no long sight  
Was his but for the end that he went seeking.*

*The end he sought was not the end; the crown  
He won shall unto many still be given.  
Moreover, there was reason here to frown:  
No fury thundered, no flame fell from heaven.*

## **Another Dark Lady**

*Think not, because I wonder where you fled,  
That I would lift a pin to see you there;  
You may, for me, be prowling anywhere,  
So long as you show not your little head:  
No dark and evil story of the dead  
Would leave you less pernicious or less fair—  
Not even Lilith, with her famous hair;  
And Lilith was the devil, I have read.  
I cannot hate you, for I loved you then.*

*The woods were golden then. There was a road  
Through beeches; and I said their smooth feet showed  
Like yours. Truth must have heard me from afar,  
For I shall never have to learn again  
That yours are cloven as no beech's are.*

## **The Voice of Age**

*She'd look upon us, if she could,  
As hard as Rhadamanthus would;  
Yet one may see,—who sees her face,  
Her crown of silver and of lace,  
Her mystical serene address  
Of age alloyed with loveliness,—  
That she would not annihilate  
The frailest of things animate.*

*She has opinions of our ways,  
And if we're not all mad, she says,—  
If our ways are not wholly worse  
Than others, for not being hers,—  
There might somehow be found a few  
Less insane things for us to do,  
And we might have a little heed  
Of what Belshazzar couldn't read.*

*She feels, with all our furniture,  
Room yet for something more secure  
Than our self-kindled aureoles  
To guide our poor forgotten souls;  
But when we have explained that grace  
Dwells now in doing for the race,  
She nods—as if she were relieved;  
Almost as if she were deceived.*

*She frowns at much of what she hears,  
And shakes her head, and has her fears;  
Though none may know, by any chance,  
What rose-leaf ashes of romance  
Are faintly stirred by later days  
That would be well enough, she says,  
If only people were more wise,  
And grown-up children used their eyes.*

## **The Dark House**

*Where a faint light shines alone,  
Dwells a Demon I have known.  
Most of you had better say  
"The Dark House", and go your way.  
Do not wonder if I stay.*

*For I know the Demon's eyes,  
And their lure that never dies.  
Banish all your fond alarms,  
For I know the foiling charms  
Of her eyes and of her arms,*

*And I know that in one room  
Burns a lamp as in a tomb;  
And I see the shadow glide,  
Back and forth, of one denied  
Power to find himself outside.*

*There he is who is my friend,  
Damned, he fancies, to the end—  
Vanquished, ever since a door  
Closed, he thought, for evermore  
On the life that was before.*

*And the friend who knows him best  
Sees him as he sees the rest  
Who are striving to be wise  
While a Demon's arms and eyes  
Hold them as a web would flies.*

*All the words of all the world,  
Aimed together and then hurled,  
Would be stiller in his ears  
Than a closing of still shears  
On a thread made out of years.*

*But there lives another sound,  
More compelling, more profound;  
There's a music, so it seems,  
That assuages and redeems,  
More than reason, more than dreams.*

*There's a music yet unheard  
By the creature of the word,  
Though it matters little more  
Than a wave-wash on a shore—  
Till a Demon shuts a door.*

*So, if he be very still  
With his Demon, and one will,  
Murmurs of it may be blown  
To my friend who is alone  
In a room that I have known.*

*After that from everywhere  
Singing life will find him there;  
Then the door will open wide,  
And my friend, again outside,  
Will be living, having died.*

## **The Poor Relation**

*No longer torn by what she knows  
And sees within the eyes of others,  
Her doubts are when the daylight goes,  
Her fears are for the few she bothers.  
She tells them it is wholly wrong  
Of her to stay alive so long;  
And when she smiles her forehead shows  
A crinkle that had been her mother's.*

*Beneath her beauty, blanched with pain,  
And wistful yet for being cheated,  
A child would seem to ask again  
A question many times repeated;  
But no rebellion has betrayed  
Her wonder at what she has paid  
For memories that have no stain,  
For triumph born to be defeated.*

*To those who come for what she was—  
The few left who know where to find her—  
She clings, for they are all she has;  
And she may smile when they remind her,  
As heretofore, of what they know  
Of roses that are still to blow  
By ways where not so much as grass  
Remains of what she sees behind her.*

*They stay a while, and having done  
What penance or the past requires,  
They go, and leave her there alone  
To count her chimneys and her spires.  
Her lip shakes when they go away,  
And yet she would not have them stay;  
She knows as well as anyone  
That Pity, having played, soon tires.*

*But one friend always reappears,  
A good ghost, not to be forsaken;  
Whereat she laughs and has no fears  
Of what a ghost may reawaken,  
But welcomes, while she wears and mends  
The poor relation's odds and ends,  
Her truant from a tomb of years—  
Her power of youth so early taken.*

*Poor laugh, more slender than her song  
It seems; and there are none to hear it  
With even the stopped ears of the strong  
For breaking heart or broken spirit.  
The friends who clamored for her place,  
And would have scratched her for her face,  
Have lost her laughter for so long  
That none would care enough to fear it.*

*None live who need fear anything  
From her, whose losses are their pleasure;  
The plover with a wounded wing  
Stays not the flight that others measure;  
So there she waits, and while she lives,  
And death forgets, and faith forgives,  
Her memories go foraging*

*For bits of childhood song they treasure.*

*And like a giant harp that hums  
On always, and is always blending  
The coming of what never comes  
With what has past and had an ending,  
The City trembles, throbs, and pounds  
Outside, and through a thousand sounds  
The small intolerable drums  
Of Time are like slow drops descending.*

*Bereft enough to shame a sage  
And given little to long sighing,  
With no illusion to assuage  
The lonely changelessness of dying,—  
Unsought, unthought-of, and unheard,  
She sings and watches like a bird,  
Safe in a comfortable cage  
From which there will be no more flying.*

## **The Burning Book**

*Or the Contented Metaphysician*

*To the lore of no manner of men  
Would his vision have yielded  
When he found what will never again  
From his vision be shielded,—  
Though he paid with as much of his life  
As a nun could have given,  
And to-night would have been as a knife,  
Devil-drawn, devil-driven.*

*For to-night, with his flame-weary eyes  
On the work he is doing,  
He considers the tinder that flies  
And the quick flame pursuing.  
In the leaves that are crinkled and curled  
Are his ashes of glory,  
And what once were an end of the world  
Is an end of a story.*

*But he smiles, for no more shall his days  
Be a toil and a calling  
For a way to make others to gaze  
On God's face without falling.  
He has come to the end of his words,  
And alone he rejoices  
In the choring that silence affords  
Of ineffable voices.*

*To a realm that his words may not reach  
He may lead none to find him;  
An adept, and with nothing to teach,  
He leaves nothing behind him.  
For the rest, he will have his release,  
And his embers, attended  
By the large and unclamoring peace  
Of a dream that is ended.*

## **Fragment**

*Faint white pillars that seem to fade  
As you look from here are the first one sees  
Of his house where it hides and dies in a shade  
Of beeches and oaks and hickory trees.  
Now many a man, given woods like these,  
And a house like that, and the Briony gold,  
Would have said, "There are still some gods to please,  
And houses are built without hands, we're told."*

*There are the pillars, and all gone gray.  
Briony's hair went white. You may see  
Where the garden was if you come this way.  
That sun-dial scared him, he said to me;  
"Sooner or later they strike," said he,  
And he never got that from the books he read.  
Others are flourishing, worse than he,  
But he knew too much for the life he led.*

*And who knows all knows everything  
That a patient ghost at last retrieves;*

*There's more to be known of his harvesting  
When Time the thresher unbinds the sheaves;  
And there's more to be heard than a wind that grieves  
For Briony now in this ageless oak,  
Driving the first of its withered leaves  
Over the stones where the fountain broke.*

## **Lisette and Eileen**

*"When he was here alive, Eileen,  
There was a word you might have said;  
So never mind what I have been,  
Or anything,—for you are dead.*

*"And after this when I am there  
Where he is, you'll be dying still.  
Your eyes are dead, and your black hair,—  
The rest of you be what it will.*

*"'Twas all to save him? Never mind,  
Eileen. You saved him. You are strong.  
I'd hardly wonder if your kind  
Paid everything, for you live long.*

*"You last, I mean. That's what I mean.  
I mean you last as long as lies.  
You might have said that word, Eileen,—  
And you might have your hair and eyes.*

*"And what you see might be Lisette,  
Instead of this that has no name.  
Your silence—I can feel it yet,  
Alive and in me, like a flame.*

*"Where might I be with him to-day,  
Could he have known before he heard?  
But no—your silence had its way,  
Without a weapon or a word.*

*"Because a word was never told,  
I'm going as a worn toy goes.  
And you are dead; and you'll be old;  
And I forgive you, I suppose.*

*"I'll soon be changing as all do,  
To something we have always been;  
And you'll be old... He liked you, too.  
I might have killed you then, Eileen.*

*"I think he liked as much of you  
As had a reason to be seen,—  
As much as God made black and blue.  
He liked your hair and eyes, Eileen."*

## **Llewellyn and the Tree**

*Could he have made Priscilla share  
The paradise that he had planned,  
Llewellyn would have loved his wife  
As well as any in the land.*

*Could he have made Priscilla cease  
To goad him for what God left out,  
Llewellyn would have been as mild  
As any we have read about.*

*Could all have been as all was not,  
Llewellyn would have had no story;  
He would have stayed a quiet man  
And gone his quiet way to glory.*

*But howsoever mild he was  
Priscilla was implacable;  
And whatsoever timid hopes  
He built—she found them, and they fell.*

*And this went on, with intervals  
Of labored harmony between  
Resounding discords, till at last  
Llewellyn turned—as will be seen.*

*Priscilla, warmer than her name,  
And shriller than the sound of saws,  
Pursued Llewellyn once too far,  
Not knowing quite the man he was.*

*The more she said, the fiercer clung  
The stinging garment of his wrath;  
And this was all before the day  
When Time tossed roses in his path.*

*Before the roses ever came  
Llewellyn had already risen.  
The roses may have ruined him,  
They may have kept him out of prison.*

*And she who brought them, being Fate,  
Made roses do the work of spears,—  
Though many made no more of her  
Than civet, coral, rouge, and years.*

*You ask us what Llewellyn saw,  
But why ask what may not be given?  
To some will come a time when change  
Itself is beauty, if not heaven.*

*One afternoon Priscilla spoke,  
And her shrill history was done;  
At any rate, she never spoke  
Like that again to anyone.*

*One gold October afternoon  
Great fury smote the silent air;  
And then Llewellyn leapt and fled  
Like one with hornets in his hair.*

*Llewellyn left us, and he said  
Forever, leaving few to doubt him;  
And so, through frost and clicking leaves,  
The Tilbury way went on without him.*

*And slowly, through the Tilbury mist,  
The stillness of October gold  
Went out like beauty from a face.  
Priscilla watched it, and grew old.*

*He fled, still clutching in his flight  
The roses that had been his fall;  
The Scarlet One, as you surmise,  
Fled with him, coral, rouge, and all.*

*Priscilla, waiting, saw the change  
Of twenty slow October moons;  
And then she vanished, in her turn  
To be forgotten, like old tunes.*

*So they were gone—all three of them,  
I should have said, and said no more,  
Had not a face once on Broadway  
Been one that I had seen before.*

*The face and hands and hair were old,  
But neither time nor penury  
Could quench within Llewellyn's eyes  
The shine of his one victory.*

*The roses, faded and gone by,  
Left ruin where they once had reigned;  
But on the wreck, as on old shells,  
The color of the rose remained.*

*His fictive merchandise I bought  
For him to keep and show again,  
Then led him slowly from the crush  
Of his cold-shouldered fellow men.*

*"And so, Llewellyn," I began—  
"Not so," he said; "not so, at all:  
I've tried the world, and found it good,  
For more than twenty years this fall.*

*"And what the world has left of me  
Will go now in a little while."  
And what the world had left of him  
Was partly an unholy guile.*

*"That I have paid for being calm  
Is what you see, if you have eyes;  
For let a man be calm too long,  
He pays for much before he dies.*

*"Be calm when you are growing old  
And you have nothing else to do;  
Pour not the wine of life too thin  
If water means the death of you.*

*"You say I might have learned at home  
The truth in season to be strong?  
Not so; I took the wine of life  
Too thin, and I was calm too long.*

*"Like others who are strong too late,  
For me there was no going back;  
For I had found another speed,  
And I was on the other track.*

*"God knows how far I might have gone  
Or what there might have been to see;  
But my speed had a sudden end,  
And here you have the end of me."*

*The end or not, it may be now  
But little farther from the truth  
To say those worn satiric eyes  
Had something of immortal youth.*

*He may among the millions here  
Be one; or he may, quite as well,  
Be gone to find again the Tree  
Of Knowledge, out of which he fell.*

*He may be near us, dreaming yet  
Of unrepented rouge and coral;  
Or in a grave without a name  
May be as far off as a moral.*

## **Bewick Finzer**

*Time was when his half million drew  
The breath of six per cent;  
But soon the worm of what-was-not  
Fed hard on his content;  
And something crumbled in his brain  
When his half million went.*

*Time passed, and filled along with his  
The place of many more;  
Time came, and hardly one of us  
Had credence to restore,  
From what appeared one day, the man  
Whom we had known before.*

*The broken voice, the withered neck,  
The coat worn out with care,  
The cleanliness of indigence,  
The brilliance of despair,  
The fond imponderable dreams  
Of affluence,—all were there.*

*Poor Finzer, with his dreams and schemes,  
Fares hard now in the race,  
With heart and eye that have a task  
When he looks in the face  
Of one who might so easily  
Have been in Finzer's place.*

*He comes unfailing for the loan  
We give and then forget;  
He comes, and probably for years  
Will he be coming yet,—  
Familiar as an old mistake,  
And futile as regret.*

## **Bokardo**

*Well, Bokardo, here we are;  
Make yourself at home.  
Look around—you haven't far  
To look—and why be dumb?  
Not the place that used to be,  
Not so many things to see;  
But there's room for you and me.  
And you—you've come.*

*Talk a little; or, if not,  
Show me with a sign  
Why it was that you forgot*

What was yours and mine.  
Friends, I gather, are small things  
In an age when coins are kings;  
Even at that, one hardly flings  
Friends before swine.

Rather strong? I knew as much,  
For it made you speak.  
No offense to swine, as such,  
But why this hide-and-peek?  
You have something on your side,  
And you wish you might have died,  
So you tell me. And you tried  
One night last week?

You tried hard? And even then  
Found a time to pause?  
When you try as hard again,  
You'll have another cause.  
When you find yourself at odds  
With all dreamers of all gods,  
You may smite yourself with rods—  
But not the laws.

Though they seem to show a spite  
Rather devilish,  
They move on as with a might  
Stronger than your wish.  
Still, however strong they be,  
They bide man's authority:  
Xerxes, when he flogged the sea,  
May've scared a fish.

It's a comfort, if you like,  
To keep honor warm,  
But as often as you strike  
The laws, you do no harm.  
To the laws, I mean. To you—  
That's another point of view,  
One you may as well induce  
With some alarm.

Not the most heroic face  
To present, I grant;  
Nor will you insure disgrace  
By fearing what you want.  
Freedom has a world of sides,  
And if reason once derides  
Courage, then your courage hides  
A deal of cant.

Learn a little to forget  
Life was once a feast;  
You aren't fit for dying yet,  
So don't be a beast.  
Few men with a mind will say,  
Thinking twice, that they can pay  
Half their debts of yesterday,  
Or be released.

There's a debt now on your mind  
More than any gold?  
And there's nothing you can find  
Out there in the cold?  
Only—what's his name?—Remorse?  
And Death riding on his horse?  
Well, be glad there's nothing worse  
Than you have told.

Leave Remorse to warm his hands  
Outside in the rain.  
As for Death, he understands,  
And he will come again.  
Therefore, till your wits are clear,  
Flourish and be quiet—here.  
But a devil at each ear  
Will be a strain?

Past a doubt they will indeed,  
More than you have earned.  
I say that because you need  
Ablution, being burned?  
Well, if you must have it so,  
Your last flight went rather low.  
Better say you had to know  
What you have learned.

And that's over. Here you are,  
Battered by the past.  
Time will have his little scar,  
But the wound won't last.  
Nor shall harrowing surprise  
Find a world without its eyes  
If a star fades when the skies  
Are overcast.



God knows there are lives enough,  
Crushed, and too far gone  
Longer to make sermons of,  
And those we leave alone.  
Others, if they will, may rend  
The worn patience of a friend  
Who, though smiling, sees the end,  
With nothing done.

But your fervor to be free  
Fled the faith it scorned;  
Death demands a decency  
Of you, and you are warned.  
But for all we give we get  
Mostly blows? Don't be upset;  
You, Bokardo, are not yet  
Consumed or mourned.

There'll be falling into view  
Much to rearrange;  
And there'll be a time for you  
To marvel at the change.  
They that have the least to fear  
Question hardest what is here;  
When long-hidden skies are clear,  
The stars look strange.

## The Man against the Sky

Between me and the sunset, like a dome  
Against the glory of a world on fire,  
Now burned a sudden hill,  
Bleak, round, and high, by flame-lit height made higher,  
With nothing on it for the flame to kill  
Save one who moved and was alone up there  
To loom before the chaos and the glare  
As if he were the last god going home  
Unto his last desire.  
Dark, marvelous, and inscrutable he moved on  
Till down the fiery distance he was gone,—  
Like one of those eternal, remote things  
That range across a man's imaginings  
When a sure music fills him and he knows  
What he may say thereafter to few men,—  
The touch of ages having wrought  
An echo and a glimpse of what he thought  
A phantom or a legend until then;  
For whether lighted over ways that save,  
Or lured from all repose,  
If he go on too far to find a grave,  
Mostly alone he goes.

Even he, who stood where I had found him,  
On high with fire all round him,—  
Who moved along the molten west,  
And over the round hill's crest  
That seemed half ready with him to go down,  
Flame-bitten and flame-cleft,—  
As if there were to be no last thing left  
Of a nameless unimaginable town,—  
Even he who climbed and vanished may have taken  
Down to the perils of a depth not known,  
From death defended though by men forsaken,  
The bread that every man must eat alone;  
He may have walked while others hardly dared  
Look on to see him stand where many fell;  
And upward out of that, as out of hell,  
He may have sung and striven  
To mount where more of him shall yet be given,  
Bereft of all retreat,  
To sevenfold heat,—  
As on a day when three in Dura shared  
The furnace, and were spared  
For glory by that king of Babylon  
Who made himself so great that God, who heard,  
Covered him with long feathers, like a bird.

Again, he may have gone down easily,  
By comfortable altitudes, and found,  
As always, underneath him solid ground  
Whereon to be sufficient and to stand  
Possessed already of the promised land,  
Far stretched and fair to see:  
A good sight, verily,  
And one to make the eyes of her who bore him  
Shine glad with hidden tears.  
Why question of his ease of who before him,

*In one place or another where they left  
Their names as far behind them as their bones,  
And yet by dint of slaughter toil and theft,  
And shrewdly sharpened stones,  
Carved hard the way for his ascendancy  
Through deserts of lost years?  
Why trouble him now who sees and hears  
No more than what his innocence requires,  
And therefore to no other height aspires  
Than one at which he neither quails nor tires?  
He may do more by seeing what he sees  
Than others eager for iniquities;  
He may, by seeing all things for the best,  
Incite futurity to do the rest.*

*Or with an even likelihood,  
He may have met with atrabilious eyes  
The fires of time on equal terms and passed  
Indifferently down, until at last  
His only kind of grandeur would have been,  
Apparently, in being seen.  
He may have had for evil or for good  
No argument; he may have had no care  
For what without himself went anywhere  
To failure or to glory, and least of all  
For such a stale, flamboyant miracle;  
He may have been the prophet of an art  
Immovable to old idolatries;  
He may have been a player without a part,  
Annoyed that even the sun should have the skies  
For such a flaming way to advertise;  
He may have been a painter sick at heart  
With Nature's toiling for a new surprise;  
He may have been a cynic, who now, for all  
Of anything divine that his effete  
Negation may have tasted,  
Saw truth in his own image, rather small,  
Forbore to fever the ephemeral,  
Found any barren height a good retreat  
From any swarming street,  
And in the sun saw power superbly wasted;  
And when the primitive old-fashioned stars  
Came out again to shine on joys and wars  
More primitive, and all arrayed for doom,  
He may have proved a world a sorry thing  
In his imagining,  
And life a lighted highway to the tomb.*

*Or, mounting with infirm unsearching tread,  
His hopes to chaos led,  
He may have stumbled up there from the past,  
And with an aching strangeness viewed the last  
Abysmal conflagration of his dreams,—  
A flame where nothing seems  
To burn but flame itself, by nothing fed;  
And while it all went out,  
Not even the faint anodyne of doubt  
May then have eased a painful going down  
From pictured heights of power and lost renown,  
Revealed at length to his outlived endeavor  
Remote and unapproachable forever;  
And at his heart there may have gnawed  
Sick memories of a dead faith foiled and flawed  
And long dishonored by the living death  
Assigned alike by chance  
To brutes and hierophants;  
And anguish fallen on those he loved around him  
May once have dealt the last blow to confound him,  
And so have left him as death leaves a child,  
Who sees it all too near;  
And he who knows no young way to forget  
May struggle to the tomb unreconciled.  
Whatever suns may rise or set  
There may be nothing kinder for him here  
Than shafts and agonies;  
And under these  
He may cry out and stay on horribly;  
Or, seeing in death too small a thing to fear,  
He may go forward like a stoic Roman  
Where pangs and terrors in his pathway lie,—  
Or, seizing the swift logic of a woman,  
Curse God and die.*

*Or maybe there, like many another one  
Who might have stood aloft and looked ahead,  
Black-drawn against wild red,  
He may have built, unawed by fiery gules  
That in him no commotion stirred,  
A living reason out of molecules  
Why molecules occurred,  
And one for smiling when he might have sighed  
Had he seen far enough,  
And in the same inevitable stuff  
Discovered an odd reason too for pride  
In being what he must have been by laws*

Infrangible and for no kind of cause.  
Deterred by no confusion or surprise  
He may have seen with his mechanic eyes  
A world without a meaning, and had room,  
Alone amid magnificence and doom,  
To build himself an airy monument  
That should, or fail him in his vague intent,  
Outlast an accidental universe—  
To call it nothing worse—  
Or, by the burrowing guile  
Of Time disintegrated and effaced,  
Like once-remembered mighty trees go down  
To ruin, of which by man may now be traced  
No part sufficient even to be rotten,  
And in the book of things that are forgotten  
Is entered as a thing not quite worth while.  
He may have been so great  
That satraps would have shivered at his frown,  
And all he prized alive may rule a state  
No larger than a grave that holds a clown;  
He may have been a master of his fate,  
And of his atoms,—ready as another  
In his emergence to exonerate  
His father and his mother;  
He may have been a captain of a host,  
Self-eloquent and ripe for prodigies,  
Doomed here to swell by dangerous degrees,  
And then give up the ghost.  
Nahum's great grasshoppers were such as these,  
Sun-scattered and soon lost.

Whatever the dark road he may have taken,  
This man who stood on high  
And faced alone the sky,  
Whatever drove or lured or guided him,—  
A vision answering a faith unshaken,  
An easy trust assumed of easy trials,  
A sick negation born of weak denials,  
A crazed abhorrence of an old condition,  
A blind attendance on a brief ambition,—  
Whatever stayed him or derided him,  
His way was even as ours;  
And we, with all our wounds and all our powers,  
Must each await alone at his own height  
Another darkness or another light;  
And there, of our poor self dominion reft,  
If inference and reason shun  
Hell, Heaven, and Oblivion,  
May thwarted will (perforce precarious,  
But for our conservation better thus)  
Have no misgiving left  
Of doing yet what here we leave undone?  
Or if unto the last of these we cleave,  
Believing or protesting we believe  
In such an idle and ephemeral  
Florescence of the diabolical,—  
If, robbed of two fond old enormities,  
Our being had no onward auguries,  
What then were this great love of ours to say  
For launching other lives to voyage again  
A little farther into time and pain,  
A little faster in a futile chase  
For a kingdom and a power and a Race  
That would have still in sight  
A manifest end of ashes and eternal night?  
Is this the music of the toys we shake  
So loud,—as if there might be no mistake  
Somewhere in our indomitable will?  
Are we no greater than the noise we make  
Along one blind atomic pilgrimage  
Whereon by crass chance billeted we go  
Because our brains and bones and cartilage  
Will have it so?  
If this we say, then let us all be still  
About our share in it, and live and die  
More quietly thereby.

Where was he going, this man against the sky?  
You know not, nor do I.  
But this we know, if we know anything:  
That we may laugh and fight and sing  
And of our transience here make offering  
To an orient Word that will not be erased,  
Or, save in incommunicable gleams  
Too permanent for dreams,  
Be found or known.  
No tonic and ambitious irritant  
Of increase or of want  
Has made an otherwise insensate waste  
Of ages overthrown  
A ruthless, veiled, implacable foretaste  
Of other ages that are still to be  
Depleted and rewarded variously  
Because a few, by fate's economy,  
Shall seem to move the world the way it goes;

No soft evangel of equality,  
 Safe cradled in a communal repose  
 That huddles into death and may at last  
 Be covered well with equatorial snows—  
 And all for what, the devil only knows—  
 Will aggregate an inkling to confirm  
 The credit of a sage or of a worm,  
 Or tell us why one man in five  
 Should have a care to stay alive  
 While in his heart he feels no violence  
 Laid on his humor and intelligence  
 When infant Science makes a pleasant face  
 And waves again that hollow toy, the Race;  
 No planetary trap where souls are wrought  
 For nothing but the sake of being caught  
 And sent again to nothing will attune  
 Itself to any key of any reason  
 Why man should hunger through another season  
 To find out why 'twere better late than soon  
 To go away and let the sun and moon  
 And all the silly stars illuminate  
 A place for creeping things,  
 And those that root and trumpet and have wings,  
 And herd and ruminant,  
 Or dive and flash and poise in rivers and seas,  
 Or by their loyal tails in lofty trees  
 Hang screeching lewd victorious derision  
 Of man's immortal vision.

Shall we, because Eternity records  
 Too vast an answer for the time-born words  
 We spell, whereof so many are dead that once  
 In our capricious lexicons  
 Were so alive and final, hear no more  
 The Word itself, the living word no man  
 Has ever spelt,  
 And few have ever felt  
 Without the fears and old surrenderings  
 And terrors that began  
 When Death let fall a feather from his wings  
 And humbled the first man?  
 Because the weight of our humility,  
 Wherefrom we gain  
 A little wisdom and much pain,  
 Falls here too sore and there too tedious,  
 Are we in anguish or complacency,  
 Not looking far enough ahead  
 To see by what mad couriers we are led  
 Along the roads of the ridiculous,  
 To pity ourselves and laugh at faith  
 And while we curse life bear it?  
 And if we see the soul's dead end in death,  
 Are we to fear it?  
 What folly is here that has not yet a name  
 Unless we say outright that we are liars?  
 What have we seen beyond our sunset fires  
 That lights again the way by which we came?  
 Why pay we such a price, and one we give  
 So clamorously, for each racked empty day  
 That leads one more last human hope away,  
 As quiet fiends would lead past our crazed eyes  
 Our children to an unseen sacrifice?  
 If after all that we have lived and thought,  
 All comes to Nought,—  
 If there be nothing after Now,  
 And we be nothing anyhow,  
 And we know that,—why live?  
 'Twere sure but weaklings' vain distress  
 To suffer dungeons where so many doors  
 Will open on the cold eternal shores  
 That look sheer down  
 To the dark tideless floods of Nothingness  
 Where all who know may drown.

[End of text.]

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## Notes on the etext:

*John Gorham:*

*Catches him and let's him go and eats him up for fun."—  
changed to:  
Catches him and lets him go and eats him up for fun."—*

*Ben Jonson Entertains a Man from Stratford:*

*Whatever there be, they'll be no more of that;  
not changed, but noted as possibly incorrect—should it be?:  
Whatever there be, there'll be no more of that;*

*Then are as yet a picture in our vision.  
changed to:  
Than are as yet a picture in our vision.*

## About the author: Edwin Arlington Robinson, 1869-1935.

From the Biographical Notes of "The Second Book of Modern Verse" (1919, 1920), edited by Jessie B. Rittenhouse:

Robinson, Edwin Arlington. Born at Head Tide, Maine, Dec. 22, 1869. Educated at Harvard University. Mr. Robinson is a psychological poet of great subtlety; his poems are usually studies of types and he has given us a remarkable series of portraits. He is recognized as one of the finest and most distinguished poets of our time. His successive volumes are: "Children of the Night", 1897; "Captain Craig", 1902; "The Town Down the River", 1910; "The Man against the Sky", 1916; "Merlin", 1917; and "Launcelot", 1920. The last-named volume was awarded a prize of five hundred dollars, given by The Lyric Society for the best book manuscript offered to it in 1919. In addition to his work in poetry, Mr. Robinson has written two prose plays, "Van Zorn", and "The Porcupine".

In "American Poetry Since 1900", Louis Untermeyer notes, "his name was known only to a few of the literati until Theodore Roosevelt... acclaimed and aided him." Rittenhouse's Biographical Notes (above quoted) contain this entry immediately before Edwin Arlington Robinson's: "Robinson, Corinne Roosevelt.... Mrs. Robinson, who is a sister to Col. Theodore Roosevelt,... has written several volumes of verse...." It is always interesting to see the coincidence of events in history, and it is worth asking if this was not even a causal relationship.—A. L.

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