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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SEA POEMS ***

SEA POEMS

BY

CALE YOUNG RICE

AUTHOR OF

"WRAITHS AND REALITIES," "TRAILS SUNWARD," "COLLECTED
POEMS," ETC.

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1921

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TO
HARRISON S. MORRIS
A HATER OF SHAM AND PRETENSE,
A LOVER OF BEAUTY AND TRUTH,
A FIRM FRIEND.

FOREWORD

The poems of this volume, gathered here after many requests, are, with a few exceptions, from my previous lyrical publications. They are also in a real sense an intimate record. For the sea has often enough seemed to me almost as a vast external subconsciousness in which the forces of my being—as well as the world's—were at play.

CALE YOUNG RICE.

Louisville, Ky., August, 1921.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Sea-Hoardings	3
The Shore's Song to the Sea	5

To a Firefly by the Sea	9
Invocation	11
I Know Your Heart, O Sea!	11
A Sea-Ghost	13
Finitude	15
The Colonel's Story	16
Cosmism	21
Off the Irish Coast	22
The Fairies of God	23
The Song of the Homesick Gael	24
Pageants of the Sea	26
A Song of the Old Venetians	29
Basking	30
Sappho's Death Song	32
The Wind's Word	33
Submarine Mountains	34
The Song of the Storm-Spirits	36
The Great Seducer	37
K'u-Kiang	38
Typhoon	39
Penang	41
Nights on the Indian Ocean	42
Sighting Arabia	44
"All's Well"	45
Somnambulism	47
Chartings	48
The Trail from the Sea	50
Haunted Seas	54
Sea Lure	54
Songs to A. H. R.	
I Minglings	56
II Love and Infinity	56
III Recompense	57
IV At the Ebb-Hour	58
V In a Dark Hour	59
VI Via Amorosa	59
VII Transfusion	61
Need of Storm	62
A Florida Interlude	63
A Florida Boating Song	65

Dawn Bliss	66	
Atavism	68	
Re-reckoning	69	
To the Afternoon Moon, At Sea	70	
Paths	71	[Pg xi]
From a Northern Beach	73	
Passage	74	
Aleen	75	
To a Solitary Sea-Gull	76	
Ineffable Things	77	
The Song of a Sea-Farer	78	
Waves	79	
In a Storm	80	
After Their Parting	80	
A Word's Magic	82	
Sea Rhapsody	83	
In an Oriental Harbour	84	
Under the Sky	85	
A Song for Healing	86	
A Singhalese Love Lament	87	
The City	89	
Full Tide	89	
The Herding	91	
On the Maine Coast	92	
Séance	93	
A Sidmouth Lad	93	
Widowed	94	
To the Sea	95	
Sea-Mad	97	
The Atheist	98	
At the Helm	99	
Imperturbable	100	[Pg xii]
Waste	100	
Resurgence	101	
Life's Answer	103	
As the Tide Comes In	103	
Sense-Sweetness	104	
Tidals		

A Sailor's Wife	105
To Sea!	105
Give Over, O Sea!	106
The Nun	107
Last Sight of Land	109
	110

SEA POEMS

[Pg 3]

BY CALE YOUNG RICE

SEA-HOARDINGS

My heart is open again and sea flows in,
 It shall fill with a summer of mists and winds and clouds and waves breaking,
 Of gull-wings over the green tide, of the surf's drenching din,
 Of sudden horizon-sails that come and vanish, phantom-thin,
 Of arching sapphire skies, deep and unaching.

I shall lie on the rocks just over the weeds that drape
 The clear sea-pools, where birth and death in sunny ooze are teeming.
 Where the crab in quest of booty sidles about, a sullen shape,
 Where the snail creeps and the mussel sleeps with wary valves agape,
 Where life is too grotesque to be but seeming.

[Pg 4]

And the swallow shall weave my dreams with threads of flight,
 A shuttle with silver breast across the warp of the waves gliding;
 And an isle far out shall be a beam in the loom of my delight,
 And the pattern of every dream shall be a rapture bathed in light—
 Its evanescence a beauty most abiding.

And the sunsets shall give sadness all its due,
 They shall stain the sands and trouble the tides with all the ache of sorrow.
 They shall bleed and die with a beauty of meaning old yet ever new,
 They shall burn with all the hunger for things that hearts have failed to do,
 They shall whisper of a gold that none can borrow.

And the stars shall come and build a bridge of fire
 For the moon to cross the boundless sea, with never a fear of sinking.
 They shall teach me of the magic things of life never to tire,
 And how to renew, when it is low, the lamp of my desire—
 And how to hope, in the darkest deeps of thinking.

[Pg 5]

THE SHORE'S SONG TO THE SEA

Out on the rocks primeval,
 The grey Maine rocks that slant and break to the sea,
 With the bay and juniper round them,
 And the leagues on leagues before them,
 And the terns and gulls wheeling and crying, wheeling and crying over,
 I sat heart-still and listened.

And first I could only hear the wind in my ears,
 And the foam trying to fill the high rock-shallows.
 And then, over the wind, over the whitely blossoming foam,
 Low, low, like a lover's song beginning,
 I heard the nuptial pleading of the old shore,
 A pleading ever occultly growing louder:—

*O sea, glad bride of me!
 Born of the bright ether and given to wed me,
 Given to glance, ever, for me, and gleam and dance in the sun—*

[Pg 6]

*Come to my arms, come to my reaching arms,
That seem so still and unavailing to take you, and hold you,
Yet never forget,
Never by day or night,
The hymeneal delights of your embracings.*

*Come, for the moon, my rival, shall not have you;
No, for tho twice daily afar he beckons and you go,
You, my bride, a little way back to meet him,
As if he once had been your lover, he too, and again enspelled you,
Soon, soon, I know it is only feigning!
For turning, playfully turning, tidally turning,
You rush foamingly, swiftly back to my arms!*

*And so would I have you rush; so rush now!
Come from the sands where you have stayed too long,
Come from the reefs where you have wandered silent,
For ebbings are good, the restful ebbings of love,
But, oh, the bridal flowings of it are better!
And now I would have you loose again my tresses,
My locks rough and weedy, rough and brown and brinily tangled,
But, oh, again as a bridegroom's, when your tide, whispering in,
Lifts them up, pulsingly up with kisses!*

[Pg 7]

*Come with your veil thrown back, breaking to spray!
And oh, with plangent passion!
Come with your naked sweetness, salt and wholesome, to my bosom;
Let not a cave or crevice of me miss you, or cranny,
For, oh, the nuptial joy you float into me,
The cooling ambient clasp of you, I have waited over-long,
And I need to know again its marriage meaning!*

*For I think it is not alone to bring forth life, that I mate you;
More than life is the beauty of life with love!
Plentiful are the children that you bear to me, the blossoms,
The fruits and all the creatures at your breast dewily fed,
But mating is troubled with a far higher meaning—
A hint of a consummation for all things.
Come utterly then,
Utterly to me come,
And let us surge together, clasped close, in infinite union,
Until we reach a transcendence of all birth, and all dying,
An ecstasy holding the universe blended—
Such ecstasy as is its ultimate Aim!*

[Pg 8]

*So sang the shore, the long bay-scented shore,
Broken by many an isle, many an inlet bird-embosomed,
And the sea gave answer, bridally, tidally turning,
And leapt, radiant, into his rocky arms!*

TO A FIREFLY BY THE SEA

[Pg 9]

*Little torch-bearer, alone with me in the night,
You cannot light the sea, nor I illumine life.
They are too vast for us, they are too deep for us.
We glow with all our strength, but back the shadows sweep:
And after a while will come—unshadowed Sleep.*

*Here on the rocks that take the turning tide;
Here by the wide lone waves and lonelier wastes of sky,
We keep our poet-watch, as patient poets should,
Questioning earth's commingled ill and good to us.
Yet little of them, or naught, have truly understood.*

*Bright are the stars, and constellated thick.
To you, so quick to flit along your flickering course,
They seem perhaps as glowing mates in other fields.
And all the knowledge I have gathered yields to me
Scarce more of the great mystery their wonder wilds.*

[Pg 10]

*For the moon we are waiting—and behold
Her ardent gold drifts up, her sail has caught the breeze
That blows all being thro the Universe always.*

So now, little light-keeper, you no more need nurse
Your gleam, for lo! she mounts, and sullen clouds disperse.

And I with aching thought may cease to burn,
And humbly turn to rest—knowing no glow of mine
Can ever be so beauteous as have been to me
Your soft beams here beside the sea's elusive din:
For grief too oft has kindled me, and pain, and the world's sin.

INVOCATION

[Pg 11]

(From a High Cliff)

Sweep unrest
Out of my blood,
Winds of the sea! Sweep the fog
Out of my brain
For I am one
Who has told Life he will be free.
Who will not doubt of work that's done,
Who will not fear the work to do,
Who will hold peaks Promethean
Better than all Jove's honey-dew.
Who when the Vulture tears his breast
Will smile into the Terror's Eyes.
Who for the World has this Bequest—
Hope, that eternally is wise.

I KNOW YOUR HEART, O SEA!

I know your heart, O Sea!
You are tossed with cold desire to flood earth utterly;
You run at the cliffs, you fling wild billows at beaches,
You reach at islands with fingers of foam to crumble them;
Yes, even at mountain tops you shout your purpose
Of making the earth a shoreless circle of waters!

[Pg 12]

I know your surging heart!
Tides mighty and all-contemptuous rise within it,
Tides spurred by the wind to champ and charge and thunder—
Tho the sun and moon rein them—
At the troubling land, the breeding-place of mortals,
Of men who are ever transmuting life to spirit,
And ever taking your salt to savor their tears.

I know your tides, I know them!
"Down," they rage, "with the questing of men, and crying!
With their continents—cradles of grief and despair!
Better entombing waters for them, better our deeps unfathomed,
Where birth is soulless, life goalless, death toll-less for all,
And where dark ooze enshrouds past resurrection!"

[Pg 13]

Ah, yes, I know your heart!
I have heard it raving at coast-lights set to reveal you,
I have watched it foam at ships that sought to defy you,
I have seen it straining at cables that cross you, bearing whispers hid to you,
Or heaving at waves of the air that tell your hurricanes.

I know, I know your heart!
Men you will sink, and shores will sink; but a shore shall be man's forever,
From whence his lighthouse soul shall signal the Infinite,
Whose fleets go by, star after star, bearing their unknown burden
To a Port which only eternity shall determine!

A SEA-GHOST

Oh, fisher-fleet, go in from the sea
And furl your wings.
The bay is gray with the twilight spray
And the loud surf springs.

[Pg 14]

The chill buoy-bell is rung by the hands
Of all the drowned,
Who know the woe of the wind and tow
Of the tides around.

Go in, go in! Oh, haste from the sea,
And let them rest—
The throng who long for the air—still long,
But are still unblest.

Aye, even as I, whose hands at the bell
Now labour most.
The tomb has gloom, but oh, the doom
Of the drear sea-ghost!

He evermore must wander the ooze
Beneath the wave,
Forlorn—to warn of the tempest born,
And to save—to save!

Then go, go in! and leave us the sea,
For only so
Can peace release us and give us ease
Of our salty woe.

FINITUDE

[Pg 15]

I

One ruby, amid a diamond spray of stars,
The coast light flashes;
The tide plashes,
Across a mile of bay-sweet land the moon
Comes soon:
She has lost half of her lustre and looks old.

A cricket, finitude's incarnate cry,
And the infinite waters with their hushless sigh
Are the two sounds
The night has:
Each in eternal wistfulness abounds.

II

I have wakened out of my sleep because I too
Am wistful,
Tristeful;
Because I know that half of *me* is gone,
And that all frailty cries in the cricket's tone.

I have wakened out of my sleep to watch and listen.
For what?
To see for a moment universes glisten;
To wonder and want—and go to sleep again,
And die,
And be forgot.

[Pg 16]

THE COLONEL'S STORY

No, no, my friend; there is an agony
Not to be exorcised out of the world
By any voice of hope.—But, I will tell you.

The *Sonia* was sailing without lights—

Bearing three hundred souls—and without bells;
For she had reached the "Zone," where the Hun sharks
With their torpedo tongues could spit death at us
Out of the inky sea-hells where they hid.
On the main deck we stood, in a wind-shelter,—
My wife, and by us a pale girl whose eyes
Had all disaster in them. And my thought was,
"I hope to God the moon is shut so deep
In cloud-murk there in the East that hurricanes
Can't blow her out of it." For in the Zone
The moon had come to mean only betrayal,
And now, if ever, was her wanton chance.

[Pg 17]

The slipping water soaked with soulless dark
Fell under and around us shudderingly,
Yet somehow brought an anxious hopefulness.
"We're making twenty knots," I said; and felt
Our bow cut thro the tangle of the waves
As if the No Man's *Sea* ahead of us
Would soon be crossed; and I, out to rejoin
My regiment, could set my wife safe somewhere,
And help again to stab that curst amphibian,
Autocracy—whose spawn in the sea gave it
A terror greater than infinitude's.
For God knows, with the woman that one loves
Aboard a ship, and only a cloud perhaps
Between the Hun's shark eyes and sure escape
From the black icy fathoms that would choke her,
There's little left within a man but nerves.
So when I drew her closer into the shelter,
Out of the sheering wind, the life belt
She wore seemed like a coffin in that sepulchre
Of night and sea. And when the other, there,
With the disaster eyes and pallid face,
Turned half toward us, I was shaken as if
The moon had suddenly walked out of her shroud
With phosphorescent purpose to reveal us.

[Pg 18]

But on we plunged and tumbled, till at last
The blank monotonous sink and swell lulled me
To faith. And I was only thinking softly
Of her—my wife's—first kiss on a summer night
Under the moonlit laurels of our home,
When came a cry from the wan girl gazing
Frozenly on the sea—where the moon now
Indeed was pointing at us pallidly
A death-path. And my throat was gripped by it,
That clutching cry, as if the glacial depths
Down under us already had risen up.
So starting toward the slipping rail I called,
"What is it? where?" For, tense as a clairvoyant,
With eyes that seemed to feel under the tide
The stealthy peril stalking us, she stood there.

[Pg 19]

After a moment's gazing, I too saw—
What she foresensed—destruction seething toward us.
"The boats!" I cried, "the rafts!" And stumbled back
Over the streaming deck to her I loved.
Then the shock came, as if the sea's wild heart
Had broken under us, and ripped the entrails,
The human hundreds, out of our vessel's hold,
To strew the foam with mania and despair,
With shrieks strangled by wind and wave and terror.
And thro that floating, mangled, blind confusion,
Where hands reached at the infinite then sank,
Where faces clung to wreckage as to eternity,
I sought for her who shared my life's voyage,
Who had been my heart's pilot; and who now,
Wrecked with me, swirled, too, in the torn waters....
And soon I saw her, still by that wan girl,
Tossed on a watery omnipotence.

Blind with brine I swam for her—as the moon,
Her treachery done, again got to a cloud.
Flung back by every wave, I fought; beating

Against them as against God. And soon, somehow,
Had reached to a limp body on the surge,
Limp and strange—but living ... and not drowned!
Then seeing a raft near, I struggled onward,
Gulping the sea and being gulped by it,
But finding arms at last that drew my burden
And me from horror to half-swooning safety.

[Pg 20]

I could have died, I think, of the relief.
But the moon came again, nakedly out,
As if to see what she had done. Then I,
Bending over the form that I had fought for,
And chafing it, saw ... not her I loved!
Infinite Cruelty, not her I loved!...
But that pale girl, with the eyes of all disaster.

Oh, yes, I raved, and said God was a Hun,
A Kaiser of a Universe that loathed him.
And back, too, would have leapt, into the waves,
But the same hands that saved were ready to hold me.

COSMISM

[Pg 21]

The sea asleep like a dreamer sighs;
The salt rock-pools lie still in the sun,
Except for the sidling crab that creeps
Thro the moveless mosses green and dun.
The small gray snail clings everywhere,
For the tide is out; and the sea-weed dries
Its tangled tresses in the warm air,
That seems to ooze from the far blue skies,
Where not a white gull on white wing flies.

The mollusc gleams like a gem amid
The scurf and the clustered green sea-grapes,
Whose trellis is but the rock's bare side,
Whose husbandman but the tide that drapes.
The little sandpiper tilts and picks
His food, on the wet sea-marges hid,
Till sudden a wave comes in and flicks
Him off, then flashes away to bid
Another frighten him—as it did.

O sweet is the world of living things,
And sweet are the mingled sea and shore!
It seems as if I never again
Shall find life ill—as oft before.

As if my days should come as the clouds
Come yonder—and vanish without wings;
As if all sorrow that ever shrouds
My soul and darkly about it clings
Had lost forever its ravenings.

[Pg 22]

As if I knew with a deeper sense
That good alone is ultimate;
That never an evil wrought of God
Or man came truly out of hate.
That Better springs from the heart of Worse,
As calm from the heaving elements;
That all things born to the Universe
May suffer and perish utterly hence,
But never refute its Innocence.

OFF THE IRISH COAST

Gulls on the wind,
Crying! crying!
Are you the ghosts
Of Erin's dead?

Of the forlorn
Whose days went sighing
Ever for Beauty
That ever fled?

[Pg 23]

Ever for Light
That never kindled?
Ever for Song
No lips have sung?
Ever for Joy
That ever dwindled?
Ever for Love that stung?

THE FAIRIES OF GOD

Last night I slipt from the banks of dream
And swam in the currents of God,
On a tide where His fairies were at play,
Catching salt tears in their little white hands,
For human hearts;
And dancing, dancing, in gala bands,
On the currents of God;
And singing, singing:—

*There is no wind blows here or spray—
Wind upon us!
Only the waters ripple away
Under our feet as we gather tears.
God has made mortals for the years,
Us for alway!
God has made mortals full of fears,
Fears for the night and fears for the day.
If they would free them of grief that sears,
If they would keep what love endears,
If they would lay no more lilies on biers—
Let them say!
For we are swift to enchant and tire
Time's will!
Our feet are wiser than all desire,
Our song is better than faith or fame;
To whom it is given no ill e'er came,
Who has it not grows chill!
Who has it not grows laggard and lame,
Nor knows that the world is a Minstrel's lyre,
Smitten and never still!...*

[Pg 24]

Last night on the currents of God.

THE SONG OF THE HOMESICK GAEL

(In the characteristic minor of a recent literary movement)

I long to see the solan-goose
Wing over Ailsa crag
At dusk again—or Girvan gulls at dawn;
To see the osprey grayly glide
The winds of Kamasraig:
For grayness now my heart is set upon.

[Pg 25]

The grayness of sea-spaces where
There's loneliness alone,
Save for the wings that sweep it with unrest,
Save for the hunger-cries that sound
And die into a moan,
Save for the moaning hunger in my breast.

For grayness is the hue of all
In life that is not lies.
A thousand years of tears are in my heart;

And only in their mystery
Can I be truly wise:
From light and laughter follies only start.

I long to see the mists again
Above the tumbling tide
Of Ailsa, at the coming of the night.
There's weariness and emptiness
And soul unsatisfied
Forever in the places of delight.

PAGEANTS OF THE SEA

[Pg 26]

What memories have I of it,
The sea, continent-clasping,
The sea whose spirit is a sorcery,
The sea whose magic foaming is immortal!
What memories have I of it thro the years!

What memories of its shores!...
Of shadowy headlands doomed to stay the storm;
And red cliffs clawing ever into the tides;
Of misty moors whose royal heather purples;
Of channeled marshes, village-nesting hills;
Of crags wind-eaten, homes of hungry gulls;
Of bays—
Where sails float furled, resting softly at harbour,
Until, winging again, they sweep away.

What memories have I, too,
Of faring out at dawn upon tameless waters,
Upon the infinite wasted yearning of them,
While winds, the mystic harp-strings of the world,
Were sounding sweet farewells;
While coast and lighthouse tower were fading fast,
And from me all the world slipped like a garment.

[Pg 27]

What memories of mid-deeps!...
Of heaving on thro haunted vasts of foam,
Thro swaying terrors of tormented tides;
While the wind, no more singing, took to raving,
In rhythmic infinite words,
A chantey ancient and immeasurable
Concerning man and God.

What memories of fog-spaces—
Wide leaden deserts of dim wavelessness,
Smooth porpoise-broken glass
As gray as a dream upon despair's horizon;
What sailing soft till lo the shroud was lifted
And suddenly there came, as a great joy,
The blue sublimity of summer skies,
The azure mystery of happy heavens,
The passionate sweet parley of the breeze,
And dancing waves—that lured us on and on
Past islands above whose verdant mountain-heads
Enchanted clouds were hanging,
And whence wild spices wandered;
Past iridescent reefs and vessels bound
For ports unknown:
O far, far past, until the sun, in fire,
An impotent and shrunken orb lay dying,
On heaving twilight purple gathered round.

[Pg 28]

And then, what nights!...
The phantom moon in misty resurrection
Arising from her sepulchre in the East
And sparkling the dark waters—
The unremembering moon!
And covenants of star to faithful star,
Dewy, like tears of God, across the sky;
And under the moon's fair ring Orion running

Forever in great war adown the West.
What far, infinite nights!
With cloud-horizons where the lightning slumbered
Or wakened once and again with startled watch,
Again to fall asleep
And leave the moon-path free for all my thoughts
To wander peacefully
Away and still away
Until the stars sighed out in dawn's great pallor,
Just as the lands of my desire appeared.

What memories ... have I of it!

A SONG OF THE OLD VENETIANS

[Pg 29]

The seven fleets of Venice
Set sail across the sea
For Cyprus and for Trebizond
Ayoub and Araby.
Their gonfalons are floating far,
St. Mark's has heard the mass,
And to the noon the salt lagoon
Lies white, like burning glass.

The seven fleets of Venice—
And each its way to go,
Led by a Falier or Tron,
Zorzi or Dandolo.
The Patriarch has blessed them all,
The Doge has waved the word,
And in their wings the murmurings
Of waiting winds are heard.

The seven fleets of Venice—
And what shall be their fate?
One shall return with porphyry
And pearl and fair agate.
One shall return with spice and spoil
And silk of Samarcand.
But nevermore shall *one* win o'er
The sea, to any land.

*Oh, they shall bring the East back,
And they shall bring the West,
The seven fleets our Venice sets
A-sail upon her quest.
But some shall bring despair back
And some shall leave their keels
Deeper than wind or wave frets,
Or sun ever steals.*

[Pg 30]

BASKING

Give me a spot in the sun,
With a lizard basking by me,
In Sicily, over the sea,
Where Winter is sweet as Spring,
Where Etna lifts his plume
Of curling smoke to try me,
But all in vain for I will not climb
His height so ravishing.

Give me a spot in the sun,
So high on a cliff that, under,
Far down, the flecking sails
Like white moths flit the blue;
That over me on a crag
There hangs, O aëry wonder,
A white town drowsing in its nest

[Pg 31]

That cypress-tops peep thro.
Give me a spot in the sun,
With contadini singing,
And a goat-boy at his pipes
And donkey bells heard round
Upon steep mountain paths
Where a peasant cart comes swinging
Mid joyous hot invectives—that
So blameless here abound.

Give me a spot in the sun,
In a land whose speech is flowers,
Whose breath is Hybla-sweet,
Whose soul is still a faun's,
Whose limbs the sea enlaps,
Thro long delicious hours,
With liquid tenderness and light
Sweet as Elysian dawns.

Give me a spot in the sun
With a view past vale and villa,
Past grottoed isle and sea
To Italy and the Cape
Around whose turning lies
Old heathen-hearted Scylla,
Whom may an ancient sailor prayed
The gods he might escape.

Give me a spot in the sun:
With sly old Pan as lazy
As I, ever to tempt me
To disbelief and doubt
Of all gods else, from Jove
To Bacchus born wine-crazy.
Give me, I say, a spot in the sun,
And Realms I'll do without!

[Pg 32]

SAPPHO'S DEATH SONG

(On her sea-cliff in Leucady)

What have I gathered the years did not take from me?
(Swallows, hear, as you fly from the cold!)
Whom have I bound to me never to break from me?
(Whom, O wind of the wold?)
Whom, O wind! O hunter of spirits!
(Pierce his spirit whose spear is in mine!)
Then let Oblivion loose this ache from me, Proserpine!

Lyre and the laurel the Muses gave to me,
(Why comes summer when winter is nigh!)
Spent am I now and pain-voices rave to me.
(O sea and its cry!)
O the sea that has suffered all sorrow!
(Sea of the Delphian tongue ever shrill!)
Nought from the wreck of love can now save to me
Any thrill!

Life that we live passes pale or amorous.
(Tread, O vintagers, grapes in the press!)
Mine's but a prey to Erinīyes clamorous.
(O for wine that will bless!)
Wine that foams, but is free of all madness
(Free, O Cypris, of fury's breath!)
Free as I now shall be, O glamorous
Queen of Death!

[Pg 33]

A star that I love,
The sea, and I,
Spake together across the night.
"Have peace," said the star,
"Have power," said the sea;
"Yea!" I answered, "and Fame's delight!"
The wind on his way
To Araby
Paused and listened and sighed and said,
"I passed on the sands
A Pharaoh's tomb:
All these did he have—and he is dead."

[Pg 34]

SUBMARINE MOUNTAINS

Under the sea, which is their sky, they rise
To watery altitudes as vast as those
Of far Himàlayan peaks impent in snows
And veils of cloud and sacred deep repose.
Under the sea, their flowing firmament,
More dark than any ray of sun can pierce,
The earthquake thrust them up with mighty tierce
And left them to be seen but by the eyes
Of awed imagination inward bent.

Their vegetation is the viscid ooze,
Whose mysteries are past belief or thought.
Creation seems around them devil-wrought,
Or by some cosmic urgence gone distraught.
Adown their precipices chill and dense
With the dank midnight creep or crawl or climb
Such tentacled and eyeless things of slime,
Such monster shapes as tempt us to accuse
Life of a miscreative impotence.

[Pg 35]

About their peaks the shark, their eagle, floats,
In the thick azure far beneath the air,
Or downward sweeps upon what prey may dare
Set forth from any silent weedy lair.
But one desire on all their slopes is found,
Desire of food, the awful hunger strife,
Yet here, it may be, was begun our life
Here all the dreams on which our vision dotes
In unevolved obscurity were bound.

Too strange it is, too terrible! And yet
It matters not how we were wrought or whence
Life came to us with all its throb intense
If in it is a Godly Immanence.
It matters not,—if haply we are more
Than creatures half-conceived by a blind force
That sweeps the universe in a chance course:
For only in Unmeaning Might is met
The intolerable thought none can ignore.

THE SONG OF THE STORM-SPIRITS

[Pg 36]

Come over the tide,
Come over the foam,
Dance on the hurricane, leap its waves,
Dream not of the calm sea-caves
Nor of content in them and home.
For that is the reason the hearts of men
Are ever weary—they would abide
Somewhere out of the spumy stride
Of the world's spindrift—a want denied.
That is the reason: tho they know
That the restive years have no true home,
But only a Whence, Whither, and When—

Whence and Whither, for hearts to roam.
So who would tarry and rest the while,
Not dance as we, and sing on the wind,
Against the whole flow of the world has sinned,
And soon is weary and cannot smile.
Dance then, dance, on the fleeting spray!
None can gather eternity
Into his heart and bid it stay,
Swiftly again it slips away.
Dance, and know that the will of Life
Is the wind's will and the will of the tide,
And who finds not a home in its strife
Shall find no home on any side!

THE GREAT SEDUCER

[Pg 37]

Who looks too long from his window
At the gray, wide, cold sea,
Where breakers scour the beaches
With fingers of sharp foam;
Who looks too long thro the gray pane
At the mad, wild, bold sea,
Shall sell his hearth to a stranger
And turn his back on home.

Who looks too long from his window—
Tho his wife waits by the fireside—
At a ship's wings in the offing,
At a gull's wings on air,
Shall latch his gate behind him,
Tho his cattle call from the byre-side,
And kiss his wife—and leave her—
And wander everywhere.

Who looks too long in the twilight,
Or the dawn-light, or the noon-light,
Who sees an anchor lifted
And hungers past content,
Shall pack his chest for the world's end,
For alien sun—or moonlight,
And follow the wind, sateless,
To Disillusionment!

K'U-KIANG

[Pg 38]

Because the sun like a Chinese lantern
Set in a temple of clouds tonight,
I was back in K'u-Kiang!

Because in a temple of dragon clouds,
As if with incense misty red,
It hung there over the rim of the sea,
I was back in a narrow street,
Where amber faces pass all day,
Going to pay, going to pray,
Going the same old human way
They have gone for a thousand years, men say,
In K'u-Kiang.

And I heard the coolie cry for his fare,
I heard the merchant praise his ware
Of bronze and porcelain set to snare,
In K'u-Kiang!
I saw strange streaming signs in black
With gold and crimson on their back—
Opiate signs in an opiate street;
Where the slip and patter of felt-shod feet
Is old as the sun;
And the temple door

As cool and dark as the night.

[Pg 39]

And where dim lanterns, swinging there,
As a lure to human grief and care,
Half reveal and half conceal
The ancestral gloom of the gods.

I saw all this with sudden pang,
As if by hashish swept or bhang,
Because the sun, like a Chinese lantern,
Set in a temple of clouds!

TYPHOON

(At Hong-kong)

I was weary and slept on the Peak;
The air clung close like a shroud,
And ever the blue-fly at my ear
Buzzed haunting, hot and loud;
I awoke and the sky was dun
With awe and a dread that soon
Went shuddering thro my heart, for I knew
That it meant typhoon! typhoon!

In the harbour below, far down,
The junks like fowl in a flock
Were tossing in wingless terror, or fled
Fluttering in from the shock.
The city, a breathless bend
Of roofs, by the water strewn,
Lay silent and waiting, yet there was none
Within it but said typhoon!

[Pg 40]

Then it came, like a million winds
Gone mad immeasurably,
A torrid and tortuous tempest stung
By rape of the fair South Sea.
And it swept like a scud escaped
From crater of sun or moon,
And struck as no power of Heaven could,
Or of Hell—typhoon! typhoon!

And the junks were smitten and torn,
The drowning struggled and cried,
Or, dashed on the granite walls of the sea,
In succourless hundreds died.
Till I shut the sight from my eyes
And prayed for my soul to swoon:
If ever I see God's face, let it
Be guiltless of that typhoon!

PENANG

[Pg 41]

I want to go back to Singapore
And ship along the Straits,
To a bungalow I know beside Penang;
Where cocoanut palms along the shore
Are waving, and the gates
Of Peace shut Sorrow out forevermore.
I want to go back and hear the surf
Come beating in at night,
Like the washing of eternity over the dead.
I want to see dawn fare up and day
Go down in golden light;
I want to go back to Penang! I want to go back!

I want to go back to Singapore
And up along the Straits

To the bungalow that waits me by the tide.
Where the Tamil and Malay tell their lore
At evening—and the fates
Have set no soothless canker at life's core.
I want to go back and mend my heart
Beneath the tropic moon,
While the tamarind-tree is whispering thoughts of sleep.
I want to believe that Earth again
With Heaven is in tune.
I want to go back to Penang! I want to go back!

[Pg 42]

I want to go back to Singapore
And ship along the Straits
To the bungalow I left upon the strand.
Where the foam of the world grows faint before
It enters, and abates
In meaning as I hear the palm-wind pour.
I want to go back and end my days
Some evening when the Cross
On the southern sky hangs heavily far and sad.
I want to remember when I die
That life elsewhere was loss.
I want to go back to Penang! I want to go back!

NIGHTS ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

Nights on the Indian Ocean,
Long nights of moon and foam,
When silvery Venus low in the sky
Follows the sun home.
Long nights when the mild monsoon
Is breaking south-by-west,
And when soft clouds and the singing shrouds
Make all that is seem best.

[Pg 43]

Nights on the Indian Ocean,
Long nights of space and dream,
When silent Sirius round the Pole
Swings on, with steady gleam;
When oft the pushing prow
Seems pressing where before
No prow has ever pressed—or shall
From hence forevermore.

Nights on the Indian Ocean,
Long nights—with land at last,
Dim land, dissolving the long sea-spell
Into a sudden past—
That seems as far away
As this our life shall seem
When under the shadow of death's shore
We drop its ended dream.

SIGHTING ARABIA

[Pg 44]

My heart, that is Arabia, O see!
That talismanic sweep of sunset coast,
Which lies like richly wrought enchantment's ghost
Before us, bringing back youth's witchery!

"Arabian Nights!" At last to us one comes,
The crescent moon upon its purple brow.
Will not Haroun and Bagdad rise up now
There on the shore, to beating of his drums?

Is not that gull a roc? That sail Sindbad's?
That rocky pinnacle a minaret?
Does the wind call to prayer from it? O yet
I hear the fancy, fervid as a lad's!

"Allah il Allah," rings it; O my heart,
Fall prostrate, for to Mecca we are near,
That flashing light is but a sign sent clear
From her, your houri, as her curtains part!

Soon she will lean out from her lattice, soon,
And bid you climb up to your Paradise,
Which is her panting lips and passion eyes
Under the drunken sweetness of the moon!

O heart, my heart, drink deeply ere they die,
The sunset dome, the minaret, the dreams
Flashing afar from youth's returnless streams:
For we, my heart, must grow old, you and I!

[Pg 45]

"ALL'S WELL"

I

The illimitable leaping of the sea,
The mouthing of its madness to the moon,
The seething of its endless sorcery,
Its prophecy no power can attune,
Swept over me as, on the sounding prow
Of a great ship that steered into the stars,
I stood and felt the awe upon my brow
Of death and destiny and all that mars.

II

The wind that blew from Cassiopeia cast
Wanly upon my ear a rune that rung;
The sailor in his eyrie on the mast
Sang an "All's well," that to the spirit clung
Like a lost voice from some aërial realm
Where ships sail on forever to no shore,
Where Time gives Immortality the helm,
And fades like a far phantom from life's door.

[Pg 46]

III

"And is all well, O Thou Unweariable,
Who launchest worlds upon bewildered space,"
Rose in me, "All? or did thy hand grow dull
Building this world that bears a piteous race?
O was it launched too soon or launched too late?
Or can it be a derelict that drifts
Beyond thy ken toward some reef of Fate
On which Oblivion's sand forever shifts?"

IV

The sea grew softer as I questioned—calm
With mystery that like an answer moved,
And from infinity there fell a balm,
The old peace that God *is*, tho all unproved.
The old faith that tho gulfs sidereal stun
The soul, and knowledge drown within their deep,
There is no world that wanders, no not one
Of all the millions, that He does not keep.

SOMNAMBULISM

[Pg 47]

I

Night is above me,
And Night is above the night.
The sea is beside me sougning, or is still.
The earth as a somnambulist moves on
In a strange sleep ...

A sea-bird cries.
And the cry wakes in me
Dim, dead sea-folk, my sires—
Who more than myself are me.
Who sat on their beach long nights ago and saw
The sea in its silence;
And cursed it or implored;
Or with the Cross defied;
Then on the morrow in their boats went down.

II

Night is above me ...
And Night is above the night.
Rocks are about me, and, beyond, the sand ...
And the low reluctant tide,
That rushes back to ebb a last farewell
To the flotsam borne so long upon its breast.
Rocks ... But the tide is out,
And the slime lies naked, like a thing ashamed
That has no hiding-place.
And the sea-bird hushes—
The bird and all far cries within my blood—
And earth as a somnambulist moves on.

[Pg 48]

CHARTINGS

There is no moon, only the sea and stars;
There is no land, only the vessel's bow
On which I stand alone and wonder how
Men ever dream of ports beyond the bars
Of Finitude that fix the Here and Now.
A meteor falls, and foam beneath me breaks;
Dim phosphor fires within it faintly die.
So soft the sea is that it seems a sky
On which eternity to life awakes.

The universe is spread before my face,
Worlds where perchance a million seas like this
Are flowing and where tides of pain and bliss
Find, as on earth, so prevalent a place
That nothing of their wont we there should miss.
The Universe, that man has dared to say
Is but one Being—ah, courageous thought!
Which is so vast that hope itself is fraught
With shame, while saying it, and shrinks away.

[Pg 49]

Shrinks, even as now! For clouds sweep up the skies
And darken the wide waters circling round,
From out whose deep arises the old sound
Of Terror unto which no tongue replies
But Faith—that nothing ever shall confound.
Not only pagan Perseus but the Cross
Is shrouded—with wild wind and wilder rain,
That on me beat until my soul again
Sings unsundering to fears of Loss.

For this I know,—yea, tho all else lie hid
Uncharted on the waters of our fate,
All lands of Whence or Whither, whose estate
In vain imagination seeks to thrid,
Yet cannot, for the fog within Death's gate,—
This thing I know, that life, whatever its Source
Or Destiny, comes with an upward urge,
And that we cannot thwart its mighty surge,
But with a joy in strife must keep the course.

[Pg 50]

I took the trail to the wooded canyon,
The trail from the sea:
For I heard a calling in me,
A landward calling irresistible in me:—

*Have done with things of the sea—things of the soul;
Have done with waters that slip away from under you.
Have done with things faithless, things unfathomable and vain;
With the vast deeps of Time and the Hereafter.*

*Have done with the fog-breather, the fog-beguiler;
With the foam of the never-resting.
Have done with tides and passions, tides and mysteries for a season.
Have done with infinite yearnings cast adrift on infinite vagueness—
With never a certain sail, never a rudder sure for guidance,
With never a compass-needle free of desire.*

[Pg 51]

*For the ways of earth are good, as well as sea-ways,
The peaks of it as well as ports unknown.
Not only perils matter, stormy perils, over the pathless,
Not only the shoals that sink your ship of dreams.
Not only the phantom lure of far horizons,
Not only the windy guess at the goals of God.*

*But morning matters, and dew upon the rose,
And noon, shadowless noon, and simple sheep on the pastures straying.
And toil matters, amid the accustomed corn,
And peace matters, the valley-spirit of peace, unprone to wander,
Unprone to pierce to the world's end—and past it.
And zephyrs matter, that never lift up a sail,
Save that of the thistle voyaging over the meadow.*

[Pg 52]

*And the lark—oh—the sunny lark—as well as the songless petrel,
Who cries the foamy length of a thousand leagues.
And silence matters, silence free of all surging,
Silence, the spirit of happiness and home.*

*And oh how much the laugh of a child matters:
More than the green of an island suddenly lit by sun at dawn.
And friends, the greetings of friends, how they matter:
More than ships that meet and fling a wild ahoy and pass,
On any alien tides however enchanted.
And the face of love, the evening face of love, at a window waiting,
Shall ever a kindled Light on any long-unlifting shore,
Shall ever a Harbor Light like that light matter?*

*Ah no! so enough of the sea and the soul for a season.
Too long followed they leave life as a dream,
Reality as a mirage when port is made.
"Ever in sight of the human," is the helm-word of the wisest,
For earth is not earth to one upon the flood of infinity;
To the eye, then, it is but an atom-star, adrift, and oh,
No longer warm with the beating of countless hearts.*

[Pg 53]

*No longer warm with the human throb—the simple breath of today,
With yester-hours or the near dreams of to-morrow.
No longer rich with the little innumerable blooms of brief delights,
Nor all divinely drenched with sympathy.
No longer green with the humble grass of duties that must grow,
To clothe it against desert aridity.
No longer zoned with the air of hope, no longer large with faith—
No longer heaven enough—if Heaven fails us!*

HAUNTED SEAS

[Pg 54]

A gleaming glassy ocean,
Under a sky of gray;
A tide that dreams of motion,
Or moves, as the dead may;
A bird that dips and wavers
Over lone waters round,
Then with a cry that quavers
Is gone—a spectral sound.

The brown sad sea-weed drifting
Far from the land, and lost.
The faint warm fog unlifting,
The derelict long-tossed,
But now at rest—tho haunted
By the death-scenting shark,
Whose prey no more undaunted
Slips from it, spent and stark.

SEA LURE

(The Maine Coast)

It is so, O sea! wild roses
Bloom here in the scent of your brine.
And the juniper round them closes,
And the bays amid them twine,
To guard and to praise their beauty;
And the gulls above them cry,
And the stern rocks stand on duty,
Where the surf beats white and high.

[Pg 55]

It is so, O sea! wild roses,
With the day-long fog bedrenched,
Have come from their inland closes
With a thirst for you unquenched.
And over your cliffs they clamber,
And over your vast they gaze;
For the tides of you can enamour
Even them with their woodland ways.

Yea, the passion of you and the power
And the largeness are a lure
To even the heart of a flower,
O sea, with a heart unsure!
For love is a thing unsated,
Nor ever in any breast
Has it dwelt, all want abated,
At rest.

SONGS TO A. H. R.

[Pg 56]

I

MINGLINGS

It is the old old vision,
The moonlit sea—and you.
I cannot make disseverance
Between the two.
For all the world's wide beauty
To me you seem,
All that I love in shadow
Or glow or gleam.

It is the old old murmur,
The sea's sound and your voice.
God in his Bliss between them
Could make no choice.
For all the world's deep music
In you I hear:
Nor shall I ask death, ever,
For aught more dear.

II

LOVE AND INFINITY

Across the kindling twilight moon
A late gull wings to rest.
The sea is murmuring underneath
Its vast eternal quest.
The coast-light flashes over the tide
A red and warning eye,
And oh the world is very wide,
But you are nigh!

[Pg 57]

The stars come out from zone to zone,
The wind knows every one
And blows their message to my heart,
As it has ever done.
"They are all God's," it tells me, "all,
However huge or high."
But ah I could not trust its call—
Were you not by!

III

RECOMPENSE

Not if I chose from a world of days
Could I find a day like this.
The sky is a wreath of azure haze
And the sea an azure bliss.
The surf runs racing the young salt wind,
Shouting without a fear
Over reef, bar, cliff and scaur,
Where you and I lie near.

[Pg 58]

O you and I who have watched the sky
And sea from many a shore!
You, love, and I who will live and die—
And watch the sea no more!
O joy of the world! Joy of love,
Joy that can say to death,
"Tho you end all with your wanton pall,
We two have had this breath!"

IV

AT THE EBB-HOUR

As I hear, thro the midnight sighing,
The low ebb-tide withdrawn,
And gulls on the dark cliff crying
For far discernless dawn,
It seems that all life is lying
Within your every breath,
Yet I can not believe in dying,
Or death.

As I hear, from the gray church tower,
The bell's unfailing sound
Peal forth hour after hour
To night's lone reaches round,
It seems as if Time's wan power
Would sear all things apace—
All, save in my heart one flower,
Your face.

[Pg 59]

V

IN A DARK HOUR

You are not with me—only the moon,
The sea and the gulls' cry, out of tune;
The myriad cry of the gulls still strewn
On the sands where the tide will enter soon.

You are not with me, only the breath
Of the wind—and then the wind's death.
A shrouding silence then that saith,

"Even as wind love vanisheth."

You are not with me—only fear,
As old as earth's first frenzied bier
That severed two whose hearts were near,
And left one with all Life unclear.

VI

VIA AMOROSA

When we two walk, my love, on the path
The moon makes over the sea,
To the end of the world where sorrow hath
An end that is ecstasy,
Should we not think of the other road
Of wearying dust and stone
Our feet would fare did each but care
To follow the way alone?

[Pg 60]

When we two slip at night to the skies
And find one star that we keep
As a trysting-place to which our eyes
May lead our souls ere sleep,
Should we not pause for a little space
And think how many must sigh
Because they gaze over starry ways
With no heart-comrade by?

When we two then lie down to our dreams
That deepen still the delight
Of our wandering where stars and streams
Stray in immortal light,
Should we not grieve with the myriads
From East of earth to West
Who lay them down at night but to drown
A longing for some loved breast?

Ah, yes, for life has a thousand gifts,
But love it is gives life.
Who walks thro his world in lonesness lifts
A soul that is sorrow-rife.
But they to whom it is given to tread
The moon-path and not sink
Can ever say the unhappiest way
Earth has is fair, to the brink.

[Pg 61]

VII

TRANSFUSION

A shoal-light flashes east,
And livid lightning west,
The silvery dark night-sea between,
On which we ride at rest,
And gaze far, far away
Into the fretless skies,
World-sadness in our thought—but ah,
Content within our eyes.

The ship's bell strikes—the sound
Floats shrouded to our ears,
Then suddenly, as at a touch,
The universe appears
A Presence Infinite
That penetrates our love
And makes us one with night and sea
And all the stars above.

(Naples-on-the-Gulf)

On the green floor of the Gulf the wind is walking,
Printing it with invisible feet;
The tide is talking.

Purple and grey the horizon walls them round
With purpler clouds.
They wander in it like guests gently astray
In a house deep mystery shrouds.

I do not know the speech of the tide,
For too articulate have become my years:
Beauty brings only words, not breathless tears.

So the young heron fishing there in the foam
On the sand's edge,
Would once have taken my spirit far, far home
To the infinite, when he vanished thro the gloam.

But now I am left behind on the beach—a shell
That no more knows the wonder of the sea's swell,
Or more than the empty echo of its knell.

To sea then, Life, wildly to sea with a storm
Sweep me again,
From the smooth dull beach of custom where I lie,
That I may feel once more
The swaying surge of passion thro me swarm!

[Pg 63]

A FLORIDA INTERLUDE

(Naples-on-the-Gulf)

I

Behind me lie the Everglades,
The mystic grassy Everglades,
Where the moccasin and the Seminole glide
In secret silent Indian ways.
Before me lies the Gulf,
The cup of blue bright tropic waters,
Held to the parched lips of the South
To cool and quench its thirst.

Behind me lie the Everglades,
Before me lies the Gulf,
Which the sunset soon shall change to wine,
A Eucharist for the longing soul.
Its rim of land shall be transformed
To Mexic opal and chrysoprase,
And then shall come the moon
As calm as a thought of Christ.

As calm as a thought of Christ—
Over the cup's sand-rim enchased
With palm and pine, Floridian friends,
Saying their twilight litanies;
While homeward flies the heron
To his island cypress in the swamp,
Which Spanish mosses drape and the moon
Silverly soothes to peace.

[Pg 64]

II

Behind me lie the Everglades,
Where the bittern wails to the moon's face.
Peace is gone as I wake
And memory in me wails
From the primal swamp, Heredity,
Whence I have come with all the desires
Of creeping, walking, flying things,
To creep or walk or fly.

With all the desires of the earth-creatures;
Yet with a want transcendent,
A want that comes with the glimmer of stars
And pierces to my heart.
A want of the life I have not known,
Of the life unknowable,
In the Everglades of the Universe
Where the Great Spirit glides.

[Pg 65]

A FLORIDA BOATING SONG

Down thro Florida keys,
From island, to island!
Down thro Florida keys,
Where mangrove roots dip in the seas!
A myriad tangled roots
From each palmetto byland,
Oyster-encrusted roots mid which
The heron wades in the shallow shades!

Down thro Florida keys,
Around them, between them,
Thro low green Florida keys,
So low they scarce seem born of the seas!
Where pouchy pelicans roost
On cypresses that lean them
Out over the idle lap of the tide
That comes and goes with balmy flows!

[Pg 66]

Down thro Florida keys,
Thro mazes on mazes
Of ripple-encircled keys,
Where sun and wind play as they please!
Where the eaglet, high in air,
Or the wild white ibis, dazes
Eyes that follow them up the blue,
As the heart would do, the heart too!

Down thro Florida keys
I'm going, I'm going!
Thro low green Florida keys
And greener glades of Florida seas!
And this is all I know,
That all in the world worth knowing
Is joy like that of the tarpon's leap
In air divine with the warm sunshine!

DAWN-BLISS

(Naples-on-the-Gulf)

I went out at dawn,
Pelicans were fishing,
Big-beaked, grey and brown;
Little waves were swishing.
Clouds creamed the sky,
As shells creamed the shore;
Wild aery hues of beauty
Round seemed to pour!

[Pg 67]

I went out at dawn,
Pelicans were floating,
Big beaks on their breasts;
Up the sun came boating.
"Ship ahoy!" I cried,
To his golden sail.
Bliss-winds of beauty in me
Broke—to a gale!

I went out at dawn,
Pelicans were winging.
Palms waved passion plumes,
Beach sands were singing.
Stripped, save of strength,
I plunged into the sea
And swam, till the bliss of beauty
Died away in me.

ATAVISM

[Pg 68]

I leant out over a ledging cliff and looked down into the sea,
Where weed and kelp and dulse swayed, in green translucency;
Where the abalone clung to the rock and the star-fish lay about,
Purpling the sands that slid away under the silver trout.

And the sea-urchin too was there, and the sea-anemone.
It was a world of watery shapes and hues and wizardry.
And I felt old stirrings wake in me, under the tides of time,
Sea-hauntings I had brought with me out of the ancient slime.

And now, as I muse, I cannot rid my senses of the spell
That in a tidal trance all things around me drift and swell
Under the sea of the Universe, down into which strange eyes
Keep peering at me, as I peered, with wonder and surmise.

RE-RECKONING

[Pg 69]

Two years have gone, and again I stand
On the bow of a mighty ship
That pushes her way 'twixt sea and stars
With soft and dreamy dip.
Two years of labouring, heart and hand,
Of waging spirit-wars,
Of wondering ever what life is—
And if death heals its scars.

Two years; and again the mast-bell sounds
Above me—with a low voice,
As ghostly as the white phosphor-foam
That breaks with the old noise
Of waters that have washed all bounds
Of earth, that is man's home—
His ark—on the wide ether flung,
Unrestingly to roam.

For, even as we, is this our earth
An endless wanderer
Far down a universe with vast
Strange voyagings astir;
And where time ever brings to birth
A craving, never past,
To fare from where we are, to where
No anchor ever was cast.

A craving—in the mote, the man,
The mollusc and the star;
A yearning on—O life! O life!
How far leads it, how far?
All unbelievably began
Our voyage, mid a strange strife—
That, meaningless, yet seems to mean
It is with Wisdom rife.

[Pg 70]

But if it is not, shall we say,
"Let man scuttle his ship,
And drown in universal death
The griefs that at him grip?"
No; for no surety rests therein

To certain end of breath.
He can but let hope set the course
His soul foretokeneth.

TO THE AFTERNOON MOON, AT SEA

Take care, O wisp of a moon,
Vague on the sunny blue above the sea,
Or the gull flying across you
Will pierce your veil-thin shape with a sharp wing!

[Pg 71]

Take care, or the wind will wilt you,
As he does the clouds snowily drifting by you,
And diffuse you over the sky, a silvery mist,
To give more cool to the day!

Take care, so near the horizon,
Or a phantom skipper, one who has long been drowned,
Will reach above it and seize you
And make you his sail to circle the world forever!

Take care, take care! for frailty
Is the prey of the strong, and you, a wraith of it,
Have yet a long while to go before nightfall
Brings you to sure effulgence!

PATHS

Crushing in my hand
The bay as I pass,
Drinking in its fragrance
With the sea's scent,
While gull-wings write
Poems white and fast
On the blue sky
That is soft with content;
Crushing in my hand
The bay and the juniper,
While I record
Each line the gulls write,
I go by sea paths
Down to the sea's edge,
I go by heart paths
Deep into delight.

[Pg 72]

Simple is my joy
As the little sandpiper's,
Who follows beside me
With silvery song;
Blither than the breeze,
That skims great billows
Nor knows how deep
Is their flow—or strong.
Simple is my joy,
A sunny sense-sweetness,
Full of bird-bliss,
Bay-warmth, spray-leap.
Mysteries there are
And miseries beneath it,
But sunk, like wrecks,
Far down in the deep.

FROM A NORTHERN BEACH

[Pg 73]

Is it because for a million years
The tide has entered here

From cold north seas
Where ice-floes freeze
That ever unto my ear
Primordial loneness in its voice
Comes telling of that time
When life was not, upon the earth,
But only glacier-rime?

Is it because these granite rocks
I share with weed and scurf
Were held so long
By the ice-throng
That now they take the surf
So selflessly and soullessly,
As if God's Immanence
Had been pressed from them, never more
To enter, with sweet sense?

And is it because I, too, evolved
From ice and sea and shore,
Can understand
How life has spanned
The lifeless ages o'er,
That as I sit here, suddenly
The tide again seems stilled
And earth beneath a great white pall
Again lies changed and chilled?

So it must be—ah, so; for soft
Within my muted brain
The heritage
Of age on age
Reverberates again.
Wherefore when glacial Silence comes
With Death shall I emerge
From that as from the frozen Past,
Under Life's endless urge?

[Pg 74]

PASSAGE

A dark sail,
Like a wild-goose wing,
Where the sunset was.
The moon soon will silver its sinewy flight
Thro the night watches,
And the far flight
Of those immortal migrants,
The ever-returning stars.

ALEEN

[Pg 75]

The long line of the foaming coast
Is muffled by the fog's gray ghost.
I cross the league of sea between
And lift the latch and kiss Aleen.

She throws a log upon the fire.
I draw her to me, nigh and nigher.
She does not know what a brief time
Ago it was my arms held—crime.

The surf is beating on the shore.
We hear our own heart-beatings more.
She speaks of *him* and my reply
Is silence: does she wonder why?

"I do not love him: have no fear,"
Her whisper is, against my ear.
At last, "I have no fear," say I.

She starts, as at a wild-beast's cry.

And then she sees red on my coat.
A still-born cry throbs in her throat.
The fog sweeps by the window pane.
Her sight is fixed on one dull stain.

I rise and light my pipe and go,
Leaving her standing, staring so.
The wind means storm, I think, to-night:
But more than that will make her white.

[Pg 76]

And yet had it been yesterday
She said those words, I still could pray.
There would be still a God above—
For two, now overwhelmed, to love!

TO A SOLITARY SEA-GULL

Lone white gull with sickle wings,
You reap for the heart inscrutable things:
Sorrow of mists and surf of the shore,
Winds that sigh of the nevermore;
Fret of foam and flurry of rain,
Swept far over the troubled tide;
Maths of mystery and grey pain
The sea's voice ever yields, beside.
Lone white gull, you reap for the heart
Life's most sad and inscrutable part.

INEFFABLE THINGS

[Pg 77]

The little song-sparrow is gone
And the summer is nearly ended,
The rill of his song was a happy rift
In the surging sound of the sea.
The swallow is lingering on,
And the silvery swift sandpiper,
And I—tho I know my saddened heart
Has lost an ineffable thing,
That summer no more can bring.

With the first bay-leaves that flung
Their scent to me by the billows,
I twined some faith, some trust,
As glad as the sparrow's song.
And the terns that darted among
The tides seemed weaving for me
Impalpable wings of peace and hope—
That now have taken flight
Beyond the day and the night.

Ah, Life, you have known my plea
For sun and the tide of fortune,
For winds to waken my sail and bear
Me joyously over the world.
Know too how much of your fog
And storm and rain I will suffer,
If only you do not sweep from me
The dear ineffable things,
To which your fragrance clings.

[Pg 78]

THE SONG OF A SEA-FARER

Many are on the sea to-day
With all sails set.

The tide rolls in a restive gray,
The wind blows wet.
The gull is weary of his wings,
And I am weary of all things.

Heavy upon me longing lies,
My sad eyes gaze
Across sad leagues that sink and rise
And sink always.
My life has sunk and risen so,
I'd have it cease awhile to flow.

WAVES

[Pg 79]

The evening sails come home
With twilight in their wings.
The harbour-light across the gloam
Sings;
The wind sings.

The waves begin to tell
The sea's night-sorrow o'er,
Weaving within their ancient spell
More
Than earth's lore.

The rising moon wafts strange
Low lures across the tide,
On which my dim thoughts seem to range,
Stride
Upon stride,

Until, with flooding thrill,
They seem at last to blend
With waves that from the Eternal Will
Wend,
Without end.

IN A STORM

[Pg 80]

(To a Petrel)

All day long in the spindrift swinging,
Bird of the sea! bird of the sea!
How I would that I had thy winging—
How I envy thee!

How I would that I had thy spirit,
So to careen, joyous to cry,
Over the storm and never fear it!
Into the night that hovers near it!
Calm on a reeling sky!

All day long, and the night, unresting!
Ah! I believe thy every breath
Means that life's best comes ever breasting
Peril and pain and death!

AFTER THEIR PARTING

(A Woman Speaks)

You know that rock on a rocky coast,
Where the moon came up, a ruined ghost,
Distorted until her shape almost
Seemed breaking?

Came up like a phantom silently
And dropped her shroud on the red night sea,
Then walked, a spectral mystery,
Unwaking?

[Pg 81]

You know how, sudden, there came a change,
When she had left the sea's low range,
Its lurid crimson, stark and strange,
Behind her?
How, sudden, her silver self shone thro,
Tranquilly free of the earth's stained hue,
And found a way where the clouds were few
To bind her?

You know this? Then go back some day,
When I have gone the moonless way,
To that dark rock whereon we lay
And waited;
And when the moon has arisen free,
Your soiling doubt shall fall from me,
And eased of unrest your heart shall be,
And sated.

A WORD'S MAGIC

[Pg 82]

Do you remember Etajima,
And how, upon a moon-fogged sea,
As ghostly as ever a tide shall be,
We passed an island silently?

And how a low voice in the gloom
Of the temple pine-trees leaning there
Said *sayonara* to one somewhere
Unseen in the shadow-haunted air?

Just *sayonara*: but it seemed
The soul of all farewells that night,
The sigh of all withdrawn delight,
The sound of love's last rapture-rite.

And now, after long years, it comes
Again from isles of memory
To bring once more to birth in me
The breath of all lost witchery.

Yes, one low word of parting, now
Echoing, thro the fog of years,
Has touched my heart with beauty's tears,
And youth thro all things reappears.

SEA RHAPSODY

[Pg 83]

(*Out of Hong-kong*)

Never again, never again
Did I hope to breathe such joy!
The sea is blue and the winds halloo
Up to the sun "Ahoy!"
"Ahoy!" they shout and the mists they rout
From the mountain-tops go streaming
In happy play where the gulls sway,
And a million waves are gleaming!

And every wave, billowing brave,
Is tipped with a wild delight.
A garden of isles around me smiles,
Bathed in the blue noon light,
The rude brown bunk of the fishing junk
Seems fair as a sea-king's palace:

O wine of the sky the gods have spilt
Out of its crystal chalice!

For wine is the wind, wine the sea,
Wine for the sinking spirit,
To lift it up from the cling of clay
Into high Bliss—or near it!
So let me drink till I cease to think,
And know with a sting of rapture
That joy is yet as wide as the world
For men, at last, to capture!

IN AN ORIENTAL HARBOUR

[Pg 84]

All the ships of the world come here,
Rest a little, then set to sea;
Some ride up to the waiting pier,
Some drop anchor beyond the quay.
Some have funnels of blue and black,
(Some come once but come not back!)
Some have funnels of red and yellow,
Some—O war!—have funnels of gray.

All the ships of the world come here,
Ships from every billow's foam;
Fruiter and oiler, pirateer,
Liner and lugger and tramp a-roam.
Some are scented of palm and pine,
(Some are fain for the Pole's far clime).
Some are scented of soy and senna,
Some—ah me!—are scented of home.

All the ships of the world come here,
Day and night there is sound of bells,
Seeking the port they calmly steer,
Clearing the port they ring farewells.
Under the sun or under the stars
(Under the light of swaying spars),
Under the moon or under morning
Do they swing, as the tide swells.

[Pg 85]

All the ships of the world come here,
Rest a little and then are gone,
Over the crystal planet-sphere
Swept, thro every season, on.
Swept to every cape and isle
(Every coast of cloud or smile),
Swept till over them sweeps the sorrow
Of their last sea-dawn.

UNDER THE SKY

Far out to sea go the fishing junks,
With all sails set,
The tide swings gray and the clouds sway,
The wind blows wet;
Blows wet from the long coast lying dim
As if mist-born.
Far out they sail, as the stars pale,
The stars of morn.

Far out to sea go the fishing junks,
And I who pass
Upon a deck that is vaster reck
No more, alas,
Of all their life, or they of mine,
Than comes to this,—
That under the sky we live and die,
Like all that is.

[Pg 86]

A SONG FOR HEALING

(On the South Seas)

When I return to the world again,
The world of fret and fight,
To grapple with godless things and men,
In battle, wrong or right,
I will remember this—the sea,
And the white stars hanging high,
And the vessel's bow
Where calmly now
I gaze to the boundless sky.

When I am deaf with the din of strife,
And blind amid despair,
When I am choked with the dust of life
And long for free soul-air,
I will recall this sound—the sea's,
And the wide horizon's hope,
And the wind that blows
And the phosphor snows
That fall as the cleft waves ope.

When I am beaten—when I fall
On the bed of black defeat,
When I have hungered, and in gall
Have got but shame to eat,
I will remember this—the sea,
And its tide as soft as sleep,
And the clear night sky
That heals for aye
All who will trust its Deep.

[Pg 87]

A SINGHALESE LOVE LAMENT

As the cocoanut-palm
That pines, my love,
Away from the sound
Of the planter's voice,
Am I, for I hear
No more resound
Your song by the pearl-strewn sea!
The sun may come
And the moon wax round,
And in its beam
My mates may rejoice,
But I feast not
And my heart is dumb,
As I long, O long, for thee!

In the jungle-deeps,
Where the cobra creeps,
The leopard lies
In wait for me,
But O, my love,
When the daylight dies
There is more to my dread than he!
Harsh lonely tears
That assail my eyes
Are worse to bear,—
For the misery
That makes them well
Is the long, long years
That I moan away from thee!

O again, again,
In my katamaran
A-keel would I push
To your palmy door!

[Pg 88]

Again would I hear
The heave and hush
Of your song by the plantain-tree.
But far away
Do I toil and crush
The hopes that arise
At my sick heart's core.
For never near
Does it come, the day
That draws me again to thee!

THE CITY

[Pg 89]

Soft and fair by the Desert's edge,
And on the dim blue edge of the sea,
Where white gulls wing all day and fledge
Their young on the high cliff's sandy ledge,
There is a city I have beheld,
Sometime or where, by day or dream,
I know not which, for it seems enspelled
As I am by its memory.

Pale minarets of the Prophet pierce
Above it into the white of the skies,
And sails enchanted a thousand years
Flit at its feet while fancy steers.
No face of all its faces to me
Is known—no passion of it or pain.
It is but a city by the sea,
Enshrined forever beyond my eyes!

FULL TIDE

Sea-scents, wild-rose scents,
Bay and barberry too,
Drench the wind, the Maine wind,
That gulls are dipping thro,
With soft hints, sweet hints,
With lull, lure and desire;
With memory-wafts and mysteries,
And all the ineffable histories
Made when the sea and land meet,
And the sun lends nuptial fire.

[Pg 90]

Sea-foam, and dream-foam,
And which is which, who knows,
When all day long the heart goes out
To every wave that blows,
That blossoms on the bright tide,
Then sheds a shimmering crest
And yields its tossing place to one
Whose blooming is as quickly done—
For beauty is ever swift—begot
Of rapture and unrest.

Sea-deeps, and soul-deeps,
And where shall faith be found
If not within the heart's beat
Or in the surging sound
Of the sea, which is the earth's heart,
Beating with tireless might;
Beating—tho but a tragedy
Life seems on every land and sea;
Beating to bring all breath, somehow,
Out of despair's blight.

[Pg 91]

THE HERDING

Quietly, quietly in from the fields
Of the grey Atlantic the billows come,
Like sheep to the fold.
Shorn by the rocks of fleecy foam,
They sink on the brown seaweed at home;
And a bell, like that of a bellwether,
Is scarcely heard from the buoy—
Save when they suddenly stumble together,
In herded hurrying joy,
Upon its guidance: then soft music
From it is tolled.

Far out in the murk that follows them in
Is heard the call of the fog-horn's voice,
Like a shepherd's—low.
And the strays as if waiting it seem to pause
And lift their heads and listen—because
It is sweet from wandering ways to be driven,
When we have fearless breasts,
When all that we strayed for has been given,
When no want molests
Us more—no need of the tide's ebbing
And tide's flow.

ON THE MAINE COAST

[Pg 92]

The rocks, lean fingers of the land,
Reach out into the sea
And cool themselves, all day long,
In the tide drippingly.
They catch the seaweed in them
And the starfish on their tips,
And gulls that light
And the swift flight
Of swallows skimming grey and white—
And spars of broken ships.

The moon, God's perfect silver,
With which He pays the world
For toil and quest and day's unrest,
Is washed on them and swirled.
And avidly they seize it,
Then let it slip away,
Only again
And yet again
To grasp at it—as eager men
At joy no hand can stay.

SEANCE

[Pg 93]

Hovering wings of terns
Over the rock-pools flutter,
For the tide, ebbd far out,
Seems to stumble and stutter;
Seems like a spirit lost,
Unable to come again
Back to the wonted ways and days
Of ever-wanting men.

And the moon, a medium
Trance-pale, is laying her light
Over its surge—till, lo,
It turns from the deep and night.
And the spirit-word it brings
Is the message of all time,
That doubt is only the ebb of faith,

A SIDMOUTH LAD

Salcombe Hill and four hills more
Lie to leftward of this shore.
On the right Peak Hill arises
Ever rises, sickening, o'er.

Two score rotting years I've seen
Sidmouth sit those hills between:
Only Sidmouth—and twice over
Must I bide it, as I've been.

Then a churchyard hole for me,
By the dull voice of the sea.
Rotting, still in Sidmouth rotting,
Rotting to eternity.

[Pg 94]

WIDOWED

One wild gull on a wilder storm,
Winging to keep her lone heart warm.
One wild gull by the surf—and I,
Beaten by wind and rain and sky.

One wild gull in the offing lost,
Wilder heart in my bosom tost.
One wild gull—O why but one!
Two, dear God, should there be—or none!

TO THE SEA

Are you enraged, O sea, with the blue peace
Of heaven, so to uplift your armed waves,
Your billowy rebellion against its ease,
And with Tartarean mutter from cold caves,
From shuddering profundities where shapes
Of awe glide thro entangled leagues of ooze,
To hoot your watery omens evermore,
And evermore your moanings interfuse
With seething necromancy and mad lore?

Or do you labour with the drifting bones
Of countless dead, O mighty Alchemist,
Within whose stormy crucible the stones
Of sunk primordial shores, granite and schist,
Are crumbled by your all-abrasive beat?
With immemorial chanting to the moon,
And cosmic incantation, do you crave
Rest to be found not till your wilds are strewn
Frigid and desert over earth's last grave?

You seem drunk with immensity, mad, blind—
With raving deaf, with wandering forlorn,
Parent of Demogorgon whose dire mind
Is night and earthquake, shapeless shame and scorn
Of the o'ermounting birth of Harmony.
Bound in your briny bed and gnawing earth
With foamy writhing and fierce-panted tides,
You are as Fate in torment of a dearth
Of black disaster and destruction's strides.

And how you shatter silence from the world,
Incarnate Motion of all mystery!
Whose waves are fury-wings, whose winds are hurled

[Pg 95]

[Pg 96]

Whither your Ghost tempestuous can see
A desolate apocalypse of death.
Yea, how you shatter silence from the world,
With emerald overflowing, waste on waste
Of flashing susurrations, dashed and swirled
On isles and continents that shrink abased!

And yet, O veering veil of the Unknown,
Gathered from primal mist and firmament;
O surging shape of Life's unfathomed moan,
Whelming humanity with fears unmeant;
Yet do I love you, far above all fear,
And loving you unconquerably trust
The runes that from your ageless surfing start
Would read, were they revealed, gust upon gust,
That Immortality is might of heart!

SEA-MAD

[Pg 97]

(A Breton Maid)

Three waves of the sea came up on the wind to me!
One said:
"Away! he is dead!
Upon my foam I have flung his head!
Go back to your cote, you never shall wed!—
(Nor he!)"

Three waves of the sea came up on the wind to me.
Two brake.
The third with a quake
Cried loud, "O maid, I'll find for thy sake
His dead lost body: prepare his wake!"
(And back it plunged to the sea!)

Three waves of the sea came up on the wind to me.
One bore—
And swept on the shore—
His pale, pale face I shall kiss no more!
Ah, woe to women death passes o'er!
(Woe's me!)

THE ATHEIST

[Pg 98]

Over a scurf of rocks the tide
Wanders inward far and wide,
Lifting the sea-weed's sloven hair,
Filling the pools and foaming there,
Sighing, sighing everywhere.

Merged are the marshes, merged the sands,
Save the dunes with pine-tree hands
Stretching upward toward the sky,
Where the sun, their god, moves high:
Would I too had a god—yea, I!

For, the sea is to me but sea,
And the sky but infinity.
Tides and times are but some chance
Born of a primal atom-dance.
All is a mesh of Circumstance.

In it there is no Heart—no Soul—
No illimitable Goal—
Only wild happenings, by wont
Made into laws no might can shunt
From the deep grooves in which they hunt.

Wings of the gull I watch or claws

Of the cold crab whose strangeness awes:
Faces of men that feel the force
Of a hid thing they call life's course:
It is their hoping or remorse.

[Pg 99]

Yet it may be that I have missed
Something that only they who tryst,
Not with the sequence of events
But with their viewless Immanence,
Find and acclaim with spirit-sense.

AT THE HELM

(Nova Scotia)

Fog, and a wind that blows the sea
Blindly into my eyes.
And I know not if my soul shall be
When the day dies.

But if it be not and I lose
All that men live to gain—
I who have known but heaving hues
Of wind and rain—

Still I shall envy no man's lot,
For I have held this great,
Never in whines to have forgot
That Fate is Fate.

IMPERTURBABLE

[Pg 100]

Three times the fog rolled in today, a silent shroud,
From which the breakers ran like ghosts, moaning and tumbling.
Three times a startled sea-bird cried aloud,
On the wind stumbling.

But I cast my net with never a fear, tho wraiths in me
And birds of wild unrest were stirring and starting and crying.
For I knew that under the sway of every sea
There is calm lying.

WASTE

I flung a wild rose into the sea,
I know not why.
For swinging there on a rathe rose-tree,
By the scented bay and barberry,
Its petals gave all their sweet to me,
As I passed by.

And yet I flung it into the tide,
And went my way.
I climbed the gray rocks, far and wide,
And many a cove of peace I tried,
With none of them all to be satisfied,
The whole long day.

[Pg 101]

For I had wasted a beautiful thing,
Which might have won
Each passing heart to pause and sing,
On the sea-path there, of its blossoming.
And who wastes beauty shall feel want's sting,
As I had done.

RESURGENCE

I was content, O Sea, to be free for a space from striving,
Content as the brown weed is, at rest on rocks in the sun,
When the salt tide is out, and the surf no more is riving
At its roots, or swirling and bidding it sway where the white waves run.

I was content—with life, and love, and a little over;
A little achieved of the much that is given to men to do.
But now with your tidal strife do you come again, vain rover,
And tell of vastitudes, to be sailed, or sounded, anew.

[Pg 102]

Now again do you surge. And the fathomless tides of thinking,
Of wanting, waiting, despairing—or daring—with you come;
The inner tides of the soul, that had ebbed with slumberous shrinking,
But now are bursting again, thro the caves of it long numb.

So vainly I lie on the cliff with the blissful Blue above me
And listless sated gulls afloat below on the swells,
For I am soothless, sateless, because of desires that shove me
Out and away with the winds, on quests no distance quells!

LIFE'S ANSWER

[Pg 103]

A stroke of lightning stabbed the storm-black sea,
As if it sought the heart of Life thereunder,
And meant to put an end to it utterly;—
Then came thunder—
Wildly applauding thunder.

Riven with fear the foam-crests ran before it,
Hissed by the rain and beaten down to darkness.
A gull rose out of the murk with wings that tore it—
Life's answer to the storm's terrible starkness.

AS THE TIDE COMES IN

The quivering terns dart wild and dive,
As the tide comes tumbling in.
The calm rock-pools grow all alive,
With the tide tumbling in.
The crab who under the brown weed creeps,
And the snail who lies in his house and sleeps,
Awake and stir, as the plunging sweeps
Of the tide come tumbling in.

[Pg 104]

Gray driftwood swishes along the sand,
As the tide comes tumbling in.
With wreck and wrack from many a land,
On the tide, tumbling in.
About the beach are a broken spar,
A pale anemone's torn sea-star
And scattered scum of the waves' old war,
As the tide tumbles in.

And, oh, there is a stir at the heart of me,
As the tide comes tumbling in.
All life once more is a part of me,
As the tide tumbles in.
New hopes awaken beneath despair
And thoughts slip free of the sloth of care,
While beauty and love are everywhere—
As the tide comes tumbling in.

SENSE-SWEETNESS

Flowers are dancing, waves playing, pines swaying, gulls are a-swarm;
Sea and heather, sunning together, glad of the weather, with God are warm.

Flowers are dancing, clouds winging, larks singing, summer abrew—
Summer the old ecstatic passion of Life to fashion the world anew.

TIDALS

[Pg 105]

Low along the sea, low along the sea,
The gray gulls are flying, and one sail swings;
The tide is foaming in; the soft wind sighing;
The brown kelp is stretching, to the surf, harp-strings.

Low along the sea, low along the sea,
The gray gulls are flying, and one sail fades;
The tide is foaming out; the soft wind dying;
And white stars are peeping from the night's pale shades.

A SAILOR'S WIFE

Into port when the sun was setting
Rode the ship that bore my love,
Over the breakers wildly fretting,
Under the skies above.

Down to the beach I ran to meet him;
He would come as he had said:
And he came—in a sailor's coffin,
Dead!

O the ships of the sea! the lovers
Torn by them apart!...
The tide has nothing now to tell me,
The breakers break my heart!

[Pg 106]

TO SEA!

Give me the tiller; up with the sail!
Now let her swing to the breeze.
Out to sea with a dripping rail,
To sea, with a heart at ease!

Out of the Harbour! out of the Bay!
Out by the valiant Light,
Out by rocks where the young gulls lay—
And glad winds teach them flight!

Out of the Harbour! out of the Bay!
Out to the open sea!
O there's not in the world a way
To feel so wildly free!

So, let her quiver! So, let her leap!
So, let her dance the foam!
All life else is a narrow keep,
The sea alone is home!

GIVE OVER, O SEA!

[Pg 107]

Give over, O sea! You never shall reach Nirvana!
Your tides, like the tidal generations, ever shall rise and fall,
And your infinite waves find birth, rebirth, and billowy dissolution.

The years of your existence are unending.

The years of your unresting are forever.
The sun, who is desire, ever begets in you his passion,
And the moon is ever drawing you, with silvery soft alluring,
To surge and sway, to wander and fret, to waste yourself in foam.
So Buddha-calm shall never descend upon you.

And tho it may often seem you have found the Way,
Your tempest-sins return and quicken to wild reincarnations,
And again great life, pulsing and perilous,
Omnipotent life, that ever resurges thro the universe,
Lashes you back to striving, back to yearning, back to speech.
To utterance on all shores of the world
Of things unutterable.

[Pg 108]

Give over then, you never shall reach Nirvana!
Nor I, who am your acolyte for a moment;
Who swing a censer of fragrant words before your priestly feet,
That tread these altar-rocks, bedraped with weeds gently afloat,
And with the wild flutter of gulls wildly mysterious.

Give over and call your winds again to join you!
O chanter of deep enchantments, of uncharted litanies,
Call them and bid them say with you that life transcends retreat,
And that, in the temple of its Immanence,
There is no peace that does not spring daily from peacelessness,
And no Nirvana save in the lee of storm.

THE NUN

[Pg 109]

A lone palm leans in the moonlight,
Over a convent wall.
The sea below is waking and breaking
With a calm heave and fall.
A young nun sits at a window;
For Heaven she is too fair;
Yet even the dove of God might nest
In her bosom beating there.

A lone ship sails from the harbour:
Whom does it bear away?
Her lover who, sin-hearted, has parted
And left her but to pray?
She has no lover, nor ever
Has heard afar love's sigh.
Only the Convent's vesper vow
Has ever dimmed her eye.

For naught knows she of her beauty,
More than the palm of its peace:
And none shall cross her portal, to mortal
Desires to bend her knees.
The ways of the world have flowers,
And any who will pluck those;
But in His hand, against all harm,
God still will keep some rose.

LAST SIGHT OF LAND

[Pg 110]

The clouds in woe hang far and dim;
I look again, and lo,
Only a faint and shadow line
Of shore—I watch it go.

The gulls have left the ship and wheel
Back to the cliff's gray wraith.
Will it be so of all our thoughts
When we set sail on Death?

And what will the last sight be of life
As lone we fare and fast?

Grief and a face we love in mist—
Then night and awe too vast?

Or the dear light of Hope—like that,
Oh, see, from the lost shore
Kindling and calling "Onward, you
Shall reach the Evermore!"

THE END

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