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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TEMPERS ***

THE TEMPERS

THE TEMPERS

BY

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS, CORK STREET
M CM XIII

TO

CARLOS HOHEB

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Peace on Earth

[Pg 7]

The Archer is wake!
The Swan is flying!
Gold against blue
An Arrow is lying.
There is hunting in heaven—
Sleep safe till to-morrow.

The Bears are abroad!
The Eagle is screaming!
Gold against blue
Their eyes are gleaming!
Sleep!
Sleep safe till to-morrow.

The Sisters lie
With their arms intertwining;
Gold against blue
Their hair is shining!
The Serpent writhes!
Orion is listening!
Gold against blue
His sword is glistening!
Sleep!
There is hunting in heaven—
Sleep safe till to-morrow.

Postlude

[Pg 8]

Now that I have cooled to you
Let there be gold of tarnished masonry,
Temples soothed by the sun to ruin
That sleep utterly.
Give me hand for the dances,
Ripples at Philae, in and out,
And lips, my Lesbian,
Wall flowers that once were flame.

Your hair is my Carthage
And my arms the bow,
And our words arrows
To shoot the stars
Who from that misty sea
Swarm to destroy us.

But you there beside me—
Oh how shall I defy you,
Who wound me in the night
With breasts shining
Like Venus and like Mars?
The night that is shouting Jason
When the loud eaves rattle
As with waves above me
Blue at the prow of my desire.

First Praise

[Pg 9]

Lady of dusk wood fastnesses,

Thou art my Lady.
I have known the crisp splintering leaf-tread with thee on before,
White, slender through green saplings;
I have lain by thee on the grey forest floor
Beside thee, my Lady.

Lady of rivers strewn with stones,
Only thou art my Lady.
Where thousand the freshets are crowded like peasants to a fair;
Clear skinned, wild from seclusion,
They jostle white armed down the tent-bordered thoroughfare
Praising my Lady.

Homage

[Pg 10]

Elvira, by love's grace
There goeth before you
A clear radiance
Which maketh all vain souls
Candles when noon is.

The loud clangour of pretenders
Melteth before you
Like the roll of carts passing,
But you come silently
And homage is given.

Now the little by-path
Which leadeth to love
Is again joyful with its many;
And the great highway
From love
Is without passers.

The Fool's Song

[Pg 11]

I tried to put a bird in a cage.
O fool that I am!
For the bird was Truth.
Sing merrily, Truth: I tried to put
Truth in a cage!

And when I had the bird in the cage,
O fool that I am!
Why, it broke my pretty cage.
Sing merrily, Truth; I tried to put
Truth in a cage!

And when the bird was flown from the cage,
O fool that I am!
Why, I had nor bird nor cage.
Sing merrily, Truth: I tried to put
Truth in a cage!
Heigh-ho! Truth in a cage.

From "The Birth of Venus," Song

[Pg 12]

Come with us and play!
See, we have breasts as women!
From your tents by the sea
Come play with us: it is forbidden!

Come with us and play!
Lo, bare, straight legs in the water!
By our boats we stay,
Then swimming away

Come to us: it is forbidden!

Come with us and play!
See, we are tall as women!
Our eyes are keen:
Our hair is bright:
Our voices speak outright:
We revel in the sea's green!
Come play:
It is forbidden!

Immortal

[Pg 13]

Yes, there is one thing braver than all flowers;
Richer than clear gems; wider than the sky;
Immortal and unchangeable; whose powers
Transcend reason, love and sanity!

And thou, beloved, art that godly thing!
Marvellous and terrible; in glance
An injured Juno roused against Heaven's King!
And thy name, lovely One, is Ignorance.

Mezzo Forte

[Pg 14]

Take that, damn you; and that!
And here's a rose
To make it right again!
God knows
I'm sorry, Grace; but then,
It's not my fault if you will be a cat.

An After Song

[Pg 15]

So art thou broken in upon me, Apollo,
Through a splendour of purple garments—
Held by the yellow-haired Clymène
To clothe the white of thy shoulders—
Bare from the day's leaping of horses.
This is strange to me, here in the modern twilight.

Crude Lament

[Pg 16]

Mother of flames,
The men that went a hunting
Are asleep in the snow drifts.
You have kept the fire burning!
Crooked fingers that pull
Fuel from among the wet leaves,
Mother of flames
You have kept the fire burning!
The young wives have fallen asleep
With wet hair, weeping,
Mother of flames!
The young men raised the heavy spears
And are gone prowling in the darkness.
O mother of flames,
You who have kept the fire burning!
Lo, I am helpless!
Would God they had taken me with them!

O Crimson salamander,
Because of love's whim
sacred!

Swim
the winding flame
Predestined to disman him
And bring our fellow home to us again.

Swim in with watery fang,
Gnaw out and drown
The fire roots that circle him
Until the Hell-flower dies down
And he comes home again.

Aye, bring him home,
O crimson salamander,
That I may see he is unchanged with burning—
Then have your will with him,
O crimson salamander.

The Death of Franco of Cologne: His Prophecy of Beethoven

[Pg 18]

It is useless, good woman, useless: the spark fails me.
God! yet when the might of it all assails me
It seems impossible that I cannot do it.
Yet I cannot. They were right, and they all knew it
Years ago, but I—never! I have persisted
Blindly (they say) and now I am old. I have resisted
Everything, but now, now the strife's ended.
The fire's out; the old cloak has been mended
For the last time, the soul peers through its tatters.
Put a light by and leave me; nothing more matters
Now; I am done; I am at last well broken!
Yet, by God, I'll still leave them a token
That they'll swear it was no dead man writ it;
A morsel that they'll mark well the day they bit it,
That there'll be sand between their gross teeth to crunch yet
When goodman Gabriel blows his concluding trumpet.
Leave me!

[Pg 19]

And now, little black eyes, come you out here!
Ah, you've given me a lively, lasting bout, year
After year to win you round me darlings!
Precious children, little gambollers! "farlings"
They might have called you once, "nearlings"
I call you now, I, first of all the yearlings,
Upon this plain, for I it was that tore you
Out of chaos! It was I bore you!
Ah, you little children that go playing
Over the five-barred gate, and will still be straying
Spite of all that I have ever told you
Of counterpoint and cadence which does not hold you—
No more than chains will for this or that strange reason,
But you're always at some new loving treason
To be away from me, laughing, mocking,
Witlessly, perhaps, but for all that forever knocking
At this stanchion door of your poor father's heart till—oh, well
At least you've shown that you can grow well
However much you evade me faster, faster.
But, black eyes, some day you'll get a master,
For he will come! He shall, he must come!
And when he finishes and the burning dust from
His wheels settles—what shall men see then?
You, you, you, my own lovely children!
Aye, all of you, thus with hands together
Playing on the hill or there in a tether,
Or running free, but all mine! Aye, my very namesakes
Shall be his proper fame's stakes.
And he shall lead you!

[Pg 20]

And he shall meed you!
And he shall build you gold palaces!
And he shall wine you from clear chalices!
For I have seen it! I have seen it
Written where the world-clouds screen it
From other eyes
Over the bronze gates of paradise!

Portent

[Pg 21]

Red cradle of the night,
In you
The dusky child
Sleeps fast till his might
Shall be piled
Sinew on sinew.

Red cradle of the night,
The dusky child
Sleeping sits upright.
Lo how
The winds blow now!
He pillows back;
The winds are again mild.

When he stretches his arms out,
Red cradle of the night,
The alarms shout
From bare tree to tree,
Wild
In afright!
Mighty shall he be,
Red cradle of the night,
The dusky child!!

Con Brio

[Pg 22]

Miserly, is the best description of that poor fool
Who holds Lancelot to have been a morose fellow,
Dolefully brooding over the events which had naturally to follow
The high time of his deed with Guinevere.
He has a sick historical sight, if I judge rightly,
To believe any such thing as that ever occurred.
But, by the god of blood, what else is it that has deterred
Us all from an out and out defiance of fear
But this same perdamnable miserliness,
Which cries about our necks how we shall have less and less
Than we have now if we spend too wantonly?

Bah, this sort of slither is below contempt!

In the same vein we should have apple trees exempt
From bearing anything but pink blossoms all the year,
Fixed permanent lest their bellies wax unseemly, and the dear
Innocent days of them be wasted quite.

How can we have less? Have we not the deed?

Lancelot thought little, spent his gold and rode to fight
Mounted, if God was willing, on a good steed.

Ad Infinitum

[Pg 23]

Still I bring flowers
Although you fling them at my feet
Until none stays

That is not struck across with wounds:
Flowers and flowers
That you may break them utterly
As you have always done.

Sure happily
I still bring flowers, flowers,
Knowing how all
Are crumpled in your praise
And may not live
To speak a lesser thing.

Translations from the Spanish, "El Romancero"

[Pg 24]

I

Although you do your best to regard me
With an air seeming offended,
Never can you deny, when all's ended,
Calm eyes, that you *did* regard me.

However much you're at pains to
Offend me, by which I may suffer,
What offence is there can make up for
The great good he finds who attains you?
For though with mortal fear you reward me,
Until my sorry sense is plenished,
Never can you deny, when all's ended,
Calm eyes, that you did regard me.

Thinking thus to dismay me
You beheld me with disdain,
But instead of destroying the gain,
In fact with doubled good you paid me.
For though you show them how hardly
They keep off from leniency bended,
Never can you deny, when all's ended,
Calm eyes, that you did regard me.

[Pg 25]

II

Ah, little green eyes,
Ah, little eyes of mine,
Ah, Heaven be willing
That you think of me somewise.

The day of departure
You came full of grieving
And to see I was leaving
The tears 'gan to start sure
With the heavy torture
Of sorrows unbrightened
When you lie down at night and
When there to you dreams rise,
Ah, Heaven be willing
That you think of me somewise.

Deep is my assurance
Of you, little green eyes,
That in truth you realise
Something of my durance
Eyes of hope's fair assurance
And good premonition
By virtue of whose condition
All green colours I prize.
Ah, Heaven be willing
That you think of me somewise.

[Pg 26]

Would God I might know you
To which quarter bended
And why comprehended

When sighings overflow you,
And if you must go through
Some certain despair,
For that you lose his care
Who was faithful always.
Ah, Heaven be willing
That you think of me these days.

Through never a moment
I've known how to live lest
All my thoughts but as one pressed
You-ward for their concernment.
May God send chastisement
If in this I belie me
And if it truth be
My own little green eyes.
Ah, Heaven be willing
That you think of me somewise.

[Pg 27]

III

Poplars of the meadow,
Fountains of Madrid,
Now I am absent from you
All are slandering me.

Each of you is telling
How evil my chance is
The wind among the branches,
The fountains in their welling
To every one telling
You were happy to see.
Now I am absent from you
All are slandering me.

With good right I may wonder
For that at my last leaving
The plants with sighs heaving
And the waters in tears were.
That you played double, never
Thought I this could be,
Now I am absent from you
All are slandering me.

[Pg 28]

There full in your presence
Music you sought to waken,
Later I'm forsaken
Since you are ware of my absence.
God, wilt Thou give me patience
Here while suffer I ye,
Now I am absent from you
All are slandering me.

IV

The day draweth nearer,
And morrow ends our meeting,
Ere they take thee sleeping
Be up—away, my treasure!

Soft, leave her breasts all unheeded,
Far hence though the master still remaineth!
For soon uptil our earth regaineth
The sun all embraces dividing.
N'er grew pleasure all unimpeded,
N'er was delight lest passion won,
And to the wise man the fit occasion
Has not yet refused a full measure:
Be up—away, my treasure!

[Pg 29]

If that my love thy bosom inflameth
With honest purpose and just intention,
To free me from my soul's contention
Give over joys the day shameth;
Who thee lameth he also me lameth,
And my good grace builds all in thy good grace;

Be up—away! Fear leaveth place,
That thou art here, no more unto pleasure,
Be up—away, my treasure!

Although thou with a sleep art wresting,
'Tis rightful thou bringst it close,
That of the favour one meeting shows
An hundred may hence be attesting.
'Tis fitting too thou shouldst be mindful
That the ease which we lose now, in kind, full
Many a promise holds for our leisure;
Ere they take thee sleeping;
Be up—away, my treasure!

Hic Jacet

[Pg 30]

The coroner's merry little children
Have such twinkling brown eyes.
Their father is not of gay men
And their mother jocular in no wise,
Yet the coroner's merry little children
Laugh so easily.

They laugh because they prosper.
Fruit for them is upon all branches.
Lo! how they jibe at loss, for
Kind heaven fills their little paunches!
It's the coroner's merry, merry children
Who laugh so easily.

Contemporania

[Pg 31]

The corner of a great rain
Steamy with the country
Has fallen upon my garden.

I go back and forth now
And the little leaves follow me
Talking of the great rain,
Of branches broken,
And the farmer's curses!

But I go back and forth
In this corner of a garden
And the green shoots follow me
Praising the great rain.

We are not curst together,
The leaves and I,
Framing devices, flower devices
And other ways of peopling
The barren country.

Truly it was a very great rain
That makes the little leaves follow me.

To wish Myself Courage

[Pg 32]

On the day when youth is no more upon me
I will write of the leaves and the moon in a tree top!
I will sing then the song, long in the making—
When the stress of youth is put away from me.

How can I ever be written out as men say?
Surely it is merely an interference with the long song—
This that I am now doing.

But when the spring of it is worn like the old moon
And the eaten leaves are lace upon the cold earth—
Then I will rise up in my great desire—
Long at the birth—and sing me the youth-song!

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