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Transcriber's note

Minor punctuation errors have been changed without notice. Printer errors have been changed and are indicated with a [mouse-hover](#) and listed at the [end of this book](#).

IDYLLIC MONOLOGUES

Poems by Madison Cawein

OLD AND NEW WORLD VERSES

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Undertones" "Garden of Dreams"

JOHN P. MORTON AND COMPANY

Publishers—Louisville, Kentucky

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BY MADISON CAWEIN**

**TO
MY FRIEND:
R. E. LEE GIBSON**

This collection of poems is entirely new with the exception of three or four which appeared in two earlier volumes, published some ten years ago. The reprinted poems have been carefully re-written, and so changed throughout as to hardly bear any resemblance, except that of subject, to the original.

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FOREWORD.

*And one, perchance, will read and sigh:
"What aimless songs! Why will he sing
Of nature that drags out her woe
Through wind and rain, and sun, and snow,
From miserable spring to spring?"
Then put me by.*

*And one, perhaps, will read and say:
"Why write of things across the sea;
Of men and women, far and near,
When we of things at home would hear—
Well, who would call this poetry?"
Then toss away.*

*A hopeless task have we, meseems,
At this late day; whom fate hath made
Sad, bankrupt heirs of song; who, filled
With kindred yearnings, try to build
A tower like theirs, that will not fade,
Out of our dreams.*

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The Brothers

Not far from here, it lies beyond
That low-hilled belt of woods. We'll take
This unused lane where brambles make
A wall of twilight, and the blond
Brier-roses pelt the path and flake
The margin waters of a pond.

This is its fence—or that which was
Its fence once—now, rock rolled from rock,
One tangle of the vine and dock,
Where bloom the wild petunias;
And this its gate, the iron-weeds block,
Hot with the insects' dusty buzz.

Two wooden posts, wherefrom has peeled
The weather-crumbled paint, still rise;
Gaunt things—that groan when someone tries
The gate whose hinges, rust-congealed,
Snarl open:—on each post still lies
Its carven lion with a shield.

[2]

We enter; and between great rows
Of locusts winds a grass-grown road;
And at its glimmering end,—o'erflowed
With quiet light,—the white front shows
Of an old mansion, grand and broad,
With grave Colonial porticoes.

Grown thick around it, dark and deep,
The locust trees make one vast hush;
Their brawny branches crowd and crush
Its very casements, and o'ersweep
Its rotting roofs; their tranquil rush
Haunts all its spacious rooms with sleep.

Still is it called The Locusts; though
None lives here now. A tale's to tell
Of some dark thing that here befell;
A crime that happened years ago,
When by its walls, with shot and shell,
The war swept on and left it so.

For one black night, within it, shame
Made revel, while, all here about,
With prayer or curse or battle-shout,
Men died and homesteads leapt in flame:
Then passed the conquering Northern rout,
And left it silent and the same.

[3]

Why should I speak of what has been?
Or what dark part I played in all?
Why ruin sits in porch and hall
Where pride and gladness once were seen;
And why beneath this lichened wall
The grave of Margaret is green.

Heart-broken Margaret! whose fate
Was sadder yet than his who won
Her hand—my brother Hamilton—
Or mine, who learned to know too late;
Who learned to know, when all was done,
And nothing could exonerate.

To expiate is still my lot,—
And, like the Ancient Mariner,
To show to others how things are
And what I am, still helps me blot
A little from that crime's red scar,
That on my soul is branded hot.

He was my only brother. She
A sister of my brother's friend.
They met, and married in the end.
And I remember well when he

Brought her rejoicing home, the trend
Of war moved towards us sullenly.

[4]

And scarce a year of wedlock when
Its red arms took him from his bride.
With lips by hers thrice sanctified
He left to ride with Morgan's men.
And I—I never could decide—
Remained at home. It happened then.

For days went by. And, oft delayed,
A letter came of loving word
Scrawled by some camp-fire, sabre-stirred,
Or by a pine-knot's fitful aid,
When in the saddle, armed and spurred
And booted for some hurried raid.

Then weeks went by. I do not know
How long it was before there came,
Blown from the North, the clarion fame
Of Morgan, who, with blow on blow,
Had drawn a line of blood and flame
From Tennessee to Ohio.

Then letters ceased; and days went on.
No word from him. The war rolled back,
And in its turgid crimson track
A rumor grew, like some wild dawn,
All ominous and red and black,
With news of our lost Hamilton,

[5]

That hinted death or capture. Yet
No thing was sure; till one day,—fed
By us,—some men rode up who said
They'd been with Morgan and had met
Disaster, and that he was dead,
My brother.—I and Margaret

Believed them. Grief was ours too:
But mine was more for her than him;
Grief, that her eyes with tears were dim;
Grief, that became the avenue
For love, who crowned the sombre brim
Of death's dark cup with rose-red hue.

In sympathy,—unconsciously
Though it be given—I hold, doth dwell
The germ of love that time shall swell
To blossom. Sooner then in me—
When close relations so befell—
That love should spring from sympathy.

Our similar tastes and mutual bents
Combined to make us intimates
From our first meeting. Different states
Of interest then our temperaments
Begot. Then friendship, that abates
No love, whose self it represents.

[6]

These led to talks and dreams: how oft
We sat at some wide window while
The sun sank o'er the hills' far file,
Serene; and of the cloud aloft
Made one vast rose; and mile on mile
Of firmament grew sad and soft.

And all in harmony with these
Dim clemencies of dusk, afar
Our talks and dreams went; while the star
Of evening brightened o'er the trees:
We spoke of home; the end of war:
We dreamed of life and love and peace.

How on our walks in listening lanes
Or confidences of the wood,
We paused to hear the dove that cooed;

Or gathered wild-flowers, taking pains
To find the fairest; or her hood
Filled with wild fruit that left deep stains.

No echo of the drum or fife,
No hint of conflict entered in
Our thoughts then. Will you call it sin—
Indifference to a nation's strife?
What side might lose, what side might win,
Both immaterial to our life.

Into the past we did not look;
Beyond what was we did not dream;
While onward rushed the thunderous stream
Of war, that, in its torrent, took
One of our own. No crimson gleam
Of its wild course around us shook.

At last we knew. And when we learned
How he had fallen, Margaret
Wept; and, albeit my eyes were wet,
Within my soul I half discerned
A joy that mingled with regret,
A grief that to relief was turned.

As time went on and confidence
Drew us more strongly each to each,
Why did no intimation reach
Its warning hand into the dense
Soul-silence, and confuse the speech
Of love's unbroken eloquence!

But, no! no hint to turn the poise,
Or check the impulse of our youth;
To chill it with the living truth
As with the awe of God's own voice;
No hint, to make our hope uncouth;
No word, to warn us from our choice.

To me a wall seemed overthrown
That social law had raised between;
And o'er its ruin, broad and green
A path went, I possessed alone;
The sky above seemed all serene;
The land around seemed all my own.

What shall I say of Margaret
To justify her part in this?
That her young heart was never his?
But had been mine since first we met?
So would you say!—Enough it is
That when he left she loved him yet.

So passed the Spring, and Summer sped;
And early Autumn brought the day
When she her hand in mine should lay,
And I should take her hand and wed.
And still no hint that might gainsay,
No warning word of quick or dead.

The day arrived; and, with it born,
A battle, sullyng the East
With boom of cannon, that increased,
And throb of musket and of horn:
Until at last, towards dusk, it ceased;
And men with faces wild and worn,

In fierce retreat swept past; now groups;
Now one by one; now sternly white,
Or blood-stained; now with looks whose fright
Said all was lost. Then sullen troops
That, beaten, still kept up the fight.
Then came the victors; shadowy loops

Of men and horse, that left a crowd
Of officers in hall and porch....

[7]

[8]

[9]

While through the land around the torch
Circled, and many a fiery cloud
Marked out the army's iron march
In furrows red, that pillage plowed,

Here we were wedded.—Ask the years
How such could be, while over us
A sword of wrath swung ominous,
And on our cheeks its breath was fierce!
All I remember is—'twas thus,
And Margaret's eyes were wet with tears.

No other cause my memory sees
Save this, *that night was set*; and when
I found my home filled with armed men
With whom were all my sympathies
Of Union—why postpone it then?
So argued conscience into peace.

And then it was, when night had passed
There came to me an orderly
With word of a confederate spy
Late taken, who, with head downcast,
Had asked one favor, this: "That I
Would see him ere he breathed his last."

I stand alone here. Heavily
My thoughts go back. Had I not gone,
The dead had still been dead!—for none
Had yet believed his story—he,
My dead-deemed brother, Hamilton,
Who in the spy confronted me.

O you who never have been tried,
How can you judge me!—in my place
I saw him standing—who can trace
My heart thoughts then!—I turned aside,
A thing of some unnatural race,
And did not speak; and so he died.

In hospital or prison, when
It was he lay; what had forbid
His home return so long: amid
What hardships he had suffered, then
I dared not ask; and when I did,
Long afterwards, inquire of men,

No thing I learned. But this I feel—
He who had so returned to life
Was not a spy. Through stress and strife,—
This makes my conscience hard to heal!—
He had escaped; he sought his wife;
He sought his home that should conceal.

And Margaret! Oh, pity her!
A criminal I sought her side,
Still thinking love was justified
In all for her—whatever were
The price, a brother thrice denied,
Or thrice a brother's murderer.

Since then long years have passed away.
And through those years, perhaps, you'll ask
How to the world I wore my mask
Of honesty?—I can but say
Beyond my powers it was a task;
Before my time it turned me gray.

And when at last the ceaseless hiss
Of conscience drove, and I betrayed
All to her, she knelt down and prayed,
Then rose; and 'twixt us an abyss
Was opened; and she seemed to fade
Out of my life: I came to miss

The sweet attentions of a bride:

[10]

[11]

[12]

For each appealing heart's caress
In me, her heart assumed a dress
Of dull indifference; till denied
To me was all responsiveness;
And then I knew her love had died.

Ah, had she loaded me, perchance,
With wild reproach or even hate,
Such would have helped a hope to wait
Forgiveness and returned romance;
But 'twixt our souls, instead, a gate
She closed of silent tolerance.

Yet, 't was for love of her I lent
My soul to crime ... I question me
Often, if less entirely
I'd loved her, then, in that event,
She had been justified to see
The deed alone stand prominent.

The deed alone! But love records
In his own heart, I will aver,
No depth I did not feel for her
Beyond the plummet-reach of words:
And though there may be worthier,
No truer love this world affords

Than mine was, though it could not rise
Above itself. And so 't was best,
Perhaps, that she saw manifest
Its crime, that I, as saw her eyes,
Might see; and so, in soul confessed,
Some life atonement might devise.

Sadly my heart one comfort keeps,
That, towards the end, she took my hands
And said, as one who understands,
"Had I but seen! But love that weeps,
Sees only as its loss commands,"
And sighed. Beneath this stone she sleeps.

Yes; I have suffered for that sin;
Yet in no instance would I shun
What I should suffer. Many a one,
Who heard my tale, has tried to win
Me to believe that Hamilton
It was not; and, though proven kin,

This had not saved him. Still the stain
Of the intention—had I erred
And 't was not he—had writ the word
Red on my soul that branded Cain;
For still my error had incurred
The fact of guilt that would remain.

Ah, love at best is insecure,
And lives with doubt and vain regret;
And hope and faith, with faces set
Upon the past, are never sure;
And through their fever, grief, and fret
The heart may fail that should endure.

For in ourselves, however blend
The passions that make heaven and hell,
Is evil not accountable
For most the good we comprehend?
And through these two, or ill, or well,
Man must evolve his spiritual end.

It is with deeds that we must ask
Forgiveness; for upon this earth,
Life walks alone from very birth
With death, hope tells us is a mask
For life beyond of vaster worth,
Where sin no more sets love a task.

[13]

[14]

Ah, Geraldine, lost Geraldine,
That night of love, when first we met,
You have forgotten, Geraldine—
I never dreamed you would forget.

Ah, Geraldine, sweet Geraldine,
More lovely than that Asian queen,
Scheherazade, the beautiful,
Who in her orient palace cool
Of India, for a thousand nights
And one, beside her monarch lay,
Telling—while sandal-scented lights
And music stole the soul away—
Love tales of old Arabia,
Full of enchantments and emprise—
But no enchantments like your eyes.

Ah, Geraldine, loved Geraldine,
More lovely than those maids, I ween,
Pampinea and Lauretta, who,
In gardens old of dusk and dew,
Sat with their lovers, maid and man,
In stately days Italian,
And in quaint stories, that we know
Through grace of good Boccaccio,
Told of fond loves, some false, some true,—
But, Geraldine, none false as you.

Ah, Geraldine, lost Geraldine,
That night of love, when first we met,
You have forgotten, Geraldine—
I never dreamed you would forget.

[16]

'T was summer, and the moon swam high,
A great pale pearl within the sky:
And down that purple night of love
The stars, concurrent spark on spark,
Seemed fiery moths that swarmed above:
And through the roses, o'er the park,
Star-like the fire-flies filled the dark:
A mocking-bird in some deep tree,
Drowsy with dreams and melody,
Like a magnolia bud, that, dim,
Opens and pours its soul in musk,
Gave to the moonlight and the dusk
Its heart's pure song, its evening hymn.
Oh, night of love! when in the dance
Your heart thrilled rapture into mine,
As in a state of necromance
A mortal hears a voice divine.
Oh, night of love! when from your glance
I drank sweet death as men drink wine.

You wearied of the waltz at last.
I led you out into the night.
Warm in my hand I held yours fast.

Your face was flushed; your eyes were bright.
The moon hung like a shell of light
Above the lake, above the trees:
And borne to us with fragrances
Of roses that were ripe to fall,
The soul of music from the hall
Beat in the moonlight and the breeze,
As youth's wild heart grown weary of
Desire and its dream of love.

[17]

I held your arm and, for awhile,
We walked along the balmy aisle
Of flowers that, like velvet, dips
Unto the lake which lilies tile

Like stars; and hyacinths, like strips
Of heaven: and beside a fall,
That, down a ferned and mossy wall,
Fell in the lake,—deep, woodbine-wound,
A latticed summer-house we found;
A green kiosk,—through which the sound
Of waters and of breezes swayed,
And honeysuckle bugles played
Soft serenades of perfume sweet,—
Around which ran a rustic seat.
And seated in that haunted nook,—
I know not how it was,—a word,
A touch, perhaps, a sigh, a look,
Was father to the kiss I took;

Great things grow out of small I've heard.
And then it was I took between
My hands your face, loved Geraldine,
And gazed into your eyes, and told
The story ever new though old.
You did not look away, but met
My eyes with eyes whose lids were wet
With tears of truth; and you did lean
Your cheek to mine, sweet Geraldine,—
I never dreamed you would forget.

The night-wind and the water sighed:
And through the leaves, that stirred above,
The moonbeams swooned with music of
The dance—soft things in league with love:
I never dreamed that you had lied.

How all comes back now, Geraldine!
The melody; the glimmering scene;
Your angel face; and ev'n, between
Your lawny breasts, the heart-shaped jewel,—
To which your breath gave fluctuant fuel,—
A rosy star of stormy fire;
The snowy drift of your attire,
Lace-deep and fragrant: and your hair,
Disordered in the dance, held back
By one gemmed pin,—a moonbeam there,
Half-drowned within its night-like black.
And I who sat beside you then,
Seemed blessed above all mortal men.

I loved you for the way you sighed;
The way you said, "I love but you;"
The smile with which your lips replied;
Your lips, that from my bosom drew
The soul; your looks, like undenied
Caresses, that seemed naught but true:
I loved you for the violet scent
That clung about you as a flower;
Your moods, where shine and shadow blent,
An April-tide of sun and shower;
You were my creed, my testament,
Wherein I read of God's high power.

Was it because the loving see
Only what they desire shall be
There in the well-belovéd's soul,
Affection and affinity,
That I beheld in you the whole
Of my love's image? and believed
You loved as I did? nor perceived
'T was but a mask, a mockery!

Ah, Geraldine, lost Geraldine,
That night of love, when first we met,
You have forgotten, Geraldine—
I never dreamed you would forget.

[18]

[19]

I.

And now once more we stood within the walls
Of her old manor near the riverside;
Dead leaves lay rotting in its empty halls,
And here and there the ivy could not hide
The year-old scars, made by the Royalists' balls,
Around the doorway, where so many died
In that last effort to defend the stair,
When Rupert, like a demon, entered there.

II.

The basest Cavalier who yet wore spurs
Or drew a sword, I count him; with his grave
Eyes 'neath his plumed hat like a wolf's whom curs
Rouse, to their harm, within a forest cave;
And hair like harvest; and a voice like verse
For smoothness. Ay, a handsome man and brave!—
Brave?—who would question it! although 't is true
He warred with one weak woman and her few.

III.

Lady Isolda of the Moated Manse,
Whom here, that very noon, it happened me
To meet near her old home. A single glance
Told me 't was she. I marveled much to see
How lovely still she was! as fair, perchance,
As when Red Rupert thrust her brutally,—
Her long hair loosened,—down the shattered stair,
And cast her, shrieking, 'mid his followers there.

[21]

IV.

"She is for you! Take her! I promised it!
She is for you!"—he shouted, as he flung
Her in their midst. Then, on her poor hands (split,
And beaten by his dagger when she clung
Resisting him) and knees, she crept a bit
Nearer his feet and begged for death. No tongue
Can tell the way he turned from her and cursed,
Then bade his men draw lots for which were first.

V.

I saw it all from that low parapet,
Where, bullet-wounded in the hip and head,
I lay face-upward in the whispering wet,
Exhausted 'mid the dead and left for dead.
We had held out two days without a let
Against these bandits. You could trace with red,
From room to room, how we resisted hard
Since the great door crashed in to their petard.

VI.

The rain revived me, and I leaned with pain
And saw her lying there, all soiled and splashed
And miserable; on her cheek a stain,
A dull red bruise, made when his hand had dashed
Her down upon the stones; the wretched rain
Dripped from her dark hair; and her hands were gashed.—
Oh, for a musket or a petronel
With which to send his devil's soul to hell!

[22]

VII.

But helpless there I lay, no weapon near,
Only the useless sword I could not reach
His traitor's heart with, while I chafed to hear

The laugh, the insult and the villain speech
Of him to her. Oh, God! could I but clear
The height between and, hanging like a leech,
My fingers at his throat, there tear his base
Vile tongue out, yea, and lash it in his face!

VIII.

But, badly wounded, what could I but weep
With rage and pity of my helplessness
And her misfortune! Could I only creep
A little nearer so that she might guess
I was not dead; that I my life would keep
But to avenge her!—Oh, the wild distress
Of that last moment when, half-dead, I saw
Them mount and bear her swooning through the shaw.

[23]

IX.

Long time I lay unconscious. It befell
Some woodsmen found me, having heard the sound
Of fighting cease that, for two days, made dell
And dingle echo; ventured on the ground
For plunder; and it had not then gone well
With me, I fear, had not their leader found
That in some way I would repay his care;
So bore me to his hut and nursed me there.

X.

How roughly kind he was. For weeks I hung
'Twixt life and death; health, like a varying, sick,
And fluttering pendulum, now this way swung,
Now that, until at last its querulous tick
Beat out life's usual time, and slowly rung
The long loud hours that exclaimed, "Be quick!—
Arise—Go forth!—Hear how her black wrongs call!—
Make them the salve to cure thy wounds withal!"

[24]

XI.

They were my balsam: for, ere autumn came,
Weak still, but over eager to be gone,
I took my leave of him. A little lame
From that hip-wound, and somewhat thin and wan,
I sought the village. Here I heard her name
And shame's made one. How Rupert passed one dawn,
And she among his troopers rode—astride
Like any man—pale-faced and feverish-eyed.

XII.

Which way these took they pointed, and I went
Like fire after. Oh, the thought was good
That they were on before! And much it meant
To know she lived still; she, whose image stood
Ever before me, making turbulent
Each heart-beat with her wrongs, that were fierce food
Unto my hate that, "Courage!" cried, "Rest not!
Think of her there, and let thy haste be hot!"

XIII.

But months passed by and still I had not found:
Yet here and there, as wearily I sought,
I caught some news: how he had held his ground
Against the Roundhead troops; or how he'd fought
Then fled, returned and conquered. Like a hound,
Questing a boar, I followed; but was brought
Never to see my quarry. Day by day
It seemed that Satan kept him from my way.

[25]

XIV.

A woman rode beside him, so they said,
A fair-faced wanton, mounted like a man—
Isolda!—my Isolda!—better dead,
Yea, dead and damned! than thus the courtesan,
Bold, unreluctant, of such men! A dread,
That such should be, unmanned me. Doubt began
To whisper at my heart.—But I was mad,
To insult her with such thoughts, whose love I had.

XV.

At last one day I rested in a glade
Near that same woodland which I lay in when
Sore wounded; and, while sitting in the shade
Of an old beech—what! did I dream, or men
Like Rupert's own ride near me? and a maid—
Isolda or her spirit!—Wildly then
I rose and, shouting, leapt upon my horse;
Unsheathed my sword and rode across their course.

[26]

XVI.

Mainly I looked for Rupert, and by name
Challenged him forth:—"Dog! dost thou hide behind?—
Insulter of women! Coward! save where shame
And rapine call thee! God at last is kind,
And my sword waits!"—Like an upheating flame,
My voice rose to a windy shout; and blind
I seemed to sit, till, with an outstretched hand,
Isolda rode before me from that band.

XVII.

"Gerald!" she cried; not as a heart surprised
With gladness that the loved, deemed dead, still lives;
But like the heart that long hath realized
Only misfortune and to fortune gives
No confidence, though it be recognized
As good. She spoke: "Lo, we are fugitives.
Rupert is slain. And I am going home."
Then like a child asked simply, "Wilt thou come?..."

XVIII.

"Oh, I have suffered, Gerald, oh, my God!
What shame, what vileness! Once my soul was clean—
Stained and defiled behold it!—I have trod
Sad ways of hell and horror. I have seen
And lived all depths of lust. Yet, oh, my God!
Blameless I hold myself of what hath been,
Though through it all, yea, this thou too must know,
I loved him! my betrayer and thy foe!"

[27]

XIX.

Sobbing she spoke as if but half awake,
Her eyes far-fixed beyond me, far beyond
All hope of mine.—So it was for his sake,
His love, that she had suffered!... blind and fond,
For what return!... And I to nurse a snake,
And never dream its nature would respond
With some such fang of venom! 'T was for this
That I had ventured all, to find her his!

XX.

At first half-stunned I stood; then blood and brain,
Like two stern judges, who had slept, awoke,
Rose up and thundered, "Slay her!" Every vein
And nerve responded, "Slay her at a stroke!"—
And I had done it, but my heart again,
Like a strong captain in a tumult, spoke,
And the fierce discord fell. And quietly

XXI.

But this was my reward for all I'd borne,
My loyalty and love! To see her eyes
Hollow from tears for him; her pale cheeks worn
With grief for him; to know them all for lies,
Her vows of faith to me; to come forlorn,
Where I had hoped to come on Paradise,
On Hell's black gulf; and, as if not enough,
Soiled as she was and outcast, still to love!

XXII.

Then rode one ruffian from the rest, clay-flecked
From spur to plume with hurry; seized my rein,
And—"What art thou," demanded, "who hast checked
Our way, and challenged?"—Then, with some disdain,
Isolda, "Sir, my kinsman did expect
Your captain here. What honor may remain
To me I pledge for him. Hold off thy hands!
He but attends me to the Moated Manse."

XXIII.

We rode in silence. And at twilight came
Into the Moated Manse.—Great clouds had grown
Up in the West, on which the sunset's flame
Lay like the hand of slaughter.—Very lone
Its rooms and halls: a splintered door that, lame,
Swung on one hinge; a cabinet o'erthrown;
Or arras torn; or blood-stain turning wan,
Showed us the way the battle once had gone.

XXIV.

We reached the tower-chamber towards the West,
In which on that dark day she thought to hide
From Rupert when, at last, 't was manifest
We could not hold the Manse. There was no pride
In her deep eyes now; nor did scorn invest
Her with such dignity as once defied
Him bursting in to find her standing here
Prepared to die like some dog-hunted deer.

XXV.

She took my hand, and, as if naught of love
Had ever been between us, said,—"All know
The madness of that day when with his glove
He struck then slew my brother, and brought woe
On all our house; and thou, incensed above
The rest, came here, and made my foe thy foe.
But he had left. 'T was then I promised thee
My hand, but, ah! my heart was gone from me.

XXVI.

"Yea, he had won me, this same Rupert, when
He was our guest.—Thou know'st how gallantry
And beauty can make heroes of all men
To us weak women!—And so secretly
I vowed to be his wife. It happened then
My brother found him in some villainy;
The insult followed; he was killed ... and thou
Dost still remember how I made a vow.

XXVII.

"But still this man pursued me, and I held
Firm to my vow, albeit I loved him still,
Unknown to all, with all the love unquelled

Of first impressions, and against my will.
At last despair of winning me compelled
Him to the oath he swore: He would not kill,
But take me living and would make my life
A living death. No man should make me wife.

XXVIII.

The war, that now consumes us, did, indeed,
Give him occasion.—I had not been warned,
When down he came against me in the lead
Of his marauders. With thy help I scorned
His mad attacks two days. I would not plead
Nor parley with him, who came hooped and horned,
Like Satan's self in soul, and, with his aid,
Took this strong house and kept the oath he made.

[31]

XXIX.

"Months passed. Alas! it needs not here to tell
What often thou hast heard—Of how he led
His troopers here now there; nor what befell
Me of dishonor. Oft I wished me dead,
Loathing my life, than which the nether hell
Hath less of horror ... So we fought or fled
From place to place until a year had passed,
And Parliament forces hemmed us in at last.

XXX.

"Yea, I had only lived for this—to right
With death my wrongs sometime. And love and hate
Contended in my bosom when, that night
Before the fight that should decide our fate,
I entered where he slept. There was no light
Save of the stars to see by. Long and late
I leaned above him there, yet could not kill—
Hate raised the dagger but love held it still.

[32]

XXXI.

"The woman in me conquered. What a slave
To our emotions are we! To relent
At this long-awaited moment!—Wave on wave
Of pitying weakness swept me, and I bent
And kissed his face. Then prayed to God; and gave
My trust to God; and left to God th' event.—
I never looked on Rupert's face again,
For in that morning's combat—he was slain.

XXXII.

"Out of defeat escaped some scant three score
Of all his followers. And night and day
They fled; and while the Roundheads pressed them sore,
And in their road, good as a fortress, lay
The Moated Manse, where their three score or more
Might well hold out, I pointed them the way.
And they are come, amid its wrecks to end
The crime begun here.—Thou must go, my friend!

XXXIII.

"Go quickly! For the time approaches when
Destruction must arrive.—Oh, well I know
All thou wouldst say to me.—What boots it then?—
I tell thee thou must go, that thou must go!—
Yea, dost thou think I'd have thee die 'mid men
Like these, for such an one as I!—No! no!—
Thy life is clean. Thou shalt not cast away
Thy clean life for my soiled one. Go, I pray!"

[33]

XXXIV.

She ceased. I spoke—I know not what it was.
Then took her hand and kissed it and so said—
"Thou art my promised wife. Thou hast no cause
That is not mine. I love thee. We will wed.
I love thee. Come!"—A moment did she pause,
Then shook her head and sighed, "My heart is dead.
This can not be. Behold, that way is thine.
I will not let thee share this way that's mine."

XXXV.

Then turning from me ere I could prevent
Passed like a shadow from the shadowy room,
Leaving my soul in shadow ... Naught was meant
By my sweet flower of love then! bloom by bloom
I'd watched it wither; then its fragrance went,
And naught was left now.—It was dark as doom,
And bells were tolling far off through the rain,
When from that house I turned my face again.

[34]

XXXVI.

Then in the night a trumpet; and the dull
Close thud of horse and clash of Puritan arms;
And glimmering helms swept by me. Sorrowful
I stood and waited till upon the storm's
Black breast, the Manse, a burning carbuncle,
Blazed like a battle-beacon, and alarms
Of onslaught clanged around it; then, like one
Who bears with him God's curse, I galloped on.

The Forester

[35]

I met him here at Ammendorf one Spring.
It was the end of April and the Harz,
Veined to their ruin-crested summits, seemed
One pulse of tender green and delicate gold,
Beneath a heaven that was like the face
Of girlhood waking into motherhood.
Along the furrowed meadow, freshly ploughed,
The patient oxen, loamy to the knees,
Plodded or lowed or snuffed the fragrant soil;
And in each thorn-tree hedge the wild bird sang
A song to Spring, made of its own wild heart
And soul, that heard the dairy-maiden May's
Heart beating like a star at break of day,
As, kissing ripe the blossoms, she drew near,
Her mouth's sweet rose all dew-drops and perfume.
Here at this inn and underneath this tree
We took our wine, the morning prised in its
Flame-angled gold.—A goodly vintage that!
Tang with the ripeness of full twenty years.
Rare! I remember!—wine that spurred the blood,
That brought the heart glad to the limbered lip,
And made the eyes unlatticed casements where
A man's true soul you could not help but see.
As royal a Rhenish, I will vouch to say,
As that, old legends tell, which Necromance
And Magic keep, gnome-guarded, in huge casks
Of antique make deep in the Kyffhäuser,
The Cellar of the Knights near Sittendorf.—

[36]

So solaced of that wine we sat an hour.
He told me his intent in coming here.
His name was Rudolf; and his native home,
Franconia; but no word of parentage:
Only his mind to don the buff and green
And live a forester with us and be
Enfellowed in the Duke of Brunswick's train,
And for the Duke's estate even now was bound.
Tall was he for his age and strong and brown,
And lithe of limb; and with a face that seemed

Hope's counterpart—but with the eyes of doubt;
 Deep restless disks, instinct with gleaming night,
 That seemed to say, "We're sure of earth, at least
 For some short space, my friend; but afterward—
 Nay! ransack not to-morrow till to-day,
 Lest it engulf thy joy before it is!"—
 And when he spoke, the fire in his eyes
 Worked stealthy as a hunted animal's;
 Or like the Count von Hackelburg's that turn,
 Feeling the unseen presence of a fiend.
 Then, as it chanced, old Kurt had come that morn
 With some six of his jerkined foresters
 From the Thuringian forest; wet with dew,
 And fresh as morn with early travel; bound
 For Brunswick, Dummburg and the Hakel passed.
 Chief huntsman he then to our lord the Duke,
 And father of the loveliest maiden here
 In Ammendorf, the sunny Ilsabe:
 Her mother dead, the gray-haired father prized
 His daughter more than all that men hold dear;
 His only happiness, who was beloved
 Of all as Lora of Thuringia was,
 For gentle ways that spoke a noble soul,
 Winning all hearts to love her and to praise,
 As might a great and beautiful thought that holds
 Us by the simplest words.—Her eyes were blue
 As the high influence of a summer day.
 Her hair,—serene and braided over brows
 White as a Harz dove's wing,—was auburn brown,
 And deep as mists the sun has drenched with gold.
 And her young presence—well, 't was like a song,
 A far Tyrolean melody of love,
 Heard on an Alpine path at close of day
 When shepherds homeward lead their tinkling flocks.
 And when she left, being with you awhile,—
 How shall I say it?—'t was as when one hath
 Beheld an Undine by the moonlit Rhine,
 Who, ere the mind adjusts a thought, is gone,
 And in your soul you wonder if a dream.

[37]

Some thirty years ago it was;—and I,
 Commissioner of the Duke—(no sinecure
 I can assure you)—had scarce reached the age
 Of thirty,—that we sat here at our wine;
 And 't was through me that Rudolf,—whom at first,
 From some rash words dropped then in argument,
 The foresterhood was like to be denied,—
 Was then enfellowed. "Yes," said I, "he's young.
 Kurt, he is young; but see, a wiry frame;
 A chamois footing and a face for deeds;
 An eye that likes me not; too quick to turn;
 But that may be the restless soul within;
 A soul perhaps with virtues that have been
 Severely tried and could not stand the test;
 These be thy care, Kurt; and if not too deep
 In vices of the flesh, discover them,
 As divers bring lost riches up from ooze.
 Thou hast a daughter; let him be thy son."

[38]

A year thereafter was it that I heard
 Of Rudolf's passion for Kurt's Ilsabe;
 Then their betrothal. And it was from this,—
 Good Mother Mary! how she haunts me still!
 Sweet Ilsabe! whose higher womanhood,
 True as the touchstone which philosophers feign
 Transmutes to gold base metals it may touch,
 Had turned to good all evil in this man,—
 Surmised I of the excellency which
 Refinement of her purer company,
 And contact with her innocence, had resolved
 His fiery nature to, conditioning slave.
 And so I came from Brunswick—as, you know,
 Is custom of the Duke or, by his seal
 Commissioned proxy, his commissioner—
 To test the marksmanship of Rudolf, who
 Succeeded Kurt with marriage of his child,
 An heir of Kuno.—He?—Greatgrandfather

[39]

Of Kurt; and of this forestkeepership
The first possessor; thus established here—
Or this the tale they tell on winter nights:

Kuno, once in the Knight of Wippach's train,
Rode on a grand hunt with the Duke, who came,—
Grandfather of the father of our Duke,—
With much magnificence of knights and squires,
Great velvet-vestured nobles, cloaked and plumed,
To hunt Thuringian deer. Then morn,—too quick
To bid good-morrow,—was too slow for these,
And on the wind-trod hills recumbent yawned
Disturbed an hour too soon; all sleepy-eyed,
Like some young milkmaid whom the cock hath roused,
Who sits and rubs stiff eyes that still will close.
Horns sang and deer-hounds tugged a whimpering leash,
Or, loosened, bounded through the baying glens:
And ere the mountain mists, compact of white,
Broke wild before the azure spears of day,
The far-off hunt, that woke the woods to life,
Seemed but the heart-beat of the ancient hills.

And then, near noon, within a forest brake,
The ban-dogs roused a red gigantic stag, [40]
Lashed to whose back with gnarly-knotted cords,
And borne along like some pale parasite,
A man shrieked: tangle-bearded, and wild hair
A mane of forest-burs. The man himself,
Emaciated and half-naked from
The stag's mad flight through headlong rocks and trees,
One bleeding bruise, with eyes like holes of fire.
For such the law then: when the peasant chased
Or slew the dun deer of his tyrant lords,
If seized, as punishment the withes and spine
Of some strong stag, a gift to him of game,
Enough till death—death in the antlered herd,
Or slow starvation in the haggard hills.
Then was the great Duke glad, and forthwith cried
To all his hunting train a rich reward
For him who slew the stag and saved the man,
But death for him who slew both man and stag.
So plunged the hunt after the hurrying slot,
A shout and glimmer through the sounding woods,—
Like some mad torrent that the hills have loosed
With death for goal.—'T was late; and none had risked
That shot as yet,—too desperate the risk
Beside the poor life and a little gold,—
When this young Kuno, with fierce eyes, wherein
Hunt and impatience kindled reckless flame,
Cried, "Has the dew then made our powder wet? [41]
Or have we left our marksmanship at home?
Here's for its heart! the Fiend direct my ball!"—
And fired into a covert deeply packed,
An intertangled wall of matted night,
Wherein the eye might vainly strive and strive
To pierce one fathom, earn one foot beyond.
But, ha! the huge stag staggered from the brake
Hit full i' the heart. And that wan wretch, unbound,
Was ta'en and cared for. Then his grace, the Duke,
Charmed with the eagle aim, called Kuno up,
And there to him and his forever gave
The forestkeepership.

But envious tongues
Were soon at wag; and whispered went the tale
Of how the shot was free, and how the balls
Used by young Kuno were free bullets—which
To say is: Lead by magic moulded, in
The influence and directed, of the Fiend.
Of some effect these tales, and had some force
Even with the Duke, who lent an ear so far
As to ordain Kuno's descendants all
To proof of skill ere their succession to
The father's office. Kurt himself hath shot
The silver ring out o' the popinjay's beak—
A good shot he, you see, who would succeed.

Of these enchanted bullets let me speak:
There may be such; our Earth has things as strange, [42]

Perhaps, and stranger, that we doubt not of,
While we behold, not only 'neath the thatch
Of Ignorance's hovel, but within
The pictured halls of Wisdom's palaces,
How Superstition sits an honored guest.

A cross-way let it be among the hills;
A cross-way in a solitude of pines;
And on the lonely cross-way you must draw
A blood-red circle with a bloody sword;
And round the circle, runic characters,
Gaunt and satanic; here a skull, and there
A scythe and cross-bones, and an hour-glass here;
And in the centre, fed with coffin-wood,
Stol'n from the grave of one, a murderer,
A smouldering fire. Eleven of the clock
The first ball leaves the mold—the sullen lead
Mixed with three bullets that have hit their mark,
And blood, the wounded Sacramental Host
Stolen, and hence unhallowed, oozed, when shot
Fixed to a riven pine. Ere twelve o'clock
With never a word until that hour sound,
Must all the balls be cast; and these must be
In number three and sixty; three of which
The Fiend's dark agent, demon Sammael,
Claims for his master and stamps for his own
To hit aside their mark, askew for harm.
The other sixty shall not miss their mark.

[43]

No cry, no word, no whisper, even though
Vague, gesturing shapes, that loom like moonlit mists,
Their faces human but with animal forms,
Rise thick around and threaten to destroy.
No cry, no word, no whisper should there come,
Weeping, a wandering shadow like the girl
You love, or loved, now lost to you, her eyes
Hollow with tears; all palely beckoning
With beautiful arms, or censuring; her face
Sad with a desolate love; who, if you speak
Or waver from that circle—hideous change!—
Shrinks to a wrinkled hag, whose harpy hands
Shall tear you limb from limb with horrible mirth.
Nor be deceived if some far midnight bell
Strike that anticipated hour; nor leave
By one short inch the circle, for, unseen
Though now they be, Hell's minions still are there,
Watching with flaming eyes to seize your soul.
But when the hour of midnight sounds, be sure
You have your bullets, neither more nor less;
For if through fear one more or less you have,
Your soul is forfeit to Hell's majesty.—
Then while the hour of midnight strikes, will come
A noise of galloping hoofs and outriders,
Shouting; six midnight steeds,—their nostrils, pits
Of burning blood,—postilioned, roll a stage,
Black and with groaning wheels of spinning fire:
"Room there!—ho! ho!—who bars the mountain-way?
On over him!"—But fear not, nor fare forth;
'T is but the last trick of your bounden slave.
And ere the red moon rushes through the clouds
And dives again, high the huge leaders leap,
Their fore-hoofs fire, and their eye-balls flame,
And, spun a spiral spark into the night,
Whistling the phantom flies and fades away.
Some say there comes no stage; that Hackelburg,
Wild-huntsman of the Harz, comes dark as storm,
With rain and wind and demon dogs of Hell,
The terror of his hunting-horn, an owl,
And the dim deer he hunts, rush on before;
The forests crash, and whirlwinds are the leaves,
And all the skies a-thunder, as he hurls
Straight on the circle, horse and hounds and stag.
And at the last, plutonian-cloaked, there comes,
Upon a stallion gaunt and lurid black,
The minister of Satan, Sammael,
Who greets you, and informs you, and assures.

[44]

Enough! these wives'-tales told, to what I've seen:

To Ammendorf I came; and Rudolf here
 With Kurt and his assembled men, I met.
 The abundant year,—like some sweet wife,—a smile
 At her brown baby, Autumn, in her arms,
 Stood 'mid the garnered harvests of her fields [45]
 Dreaming of days that pass like almoners
 Scattering their alms in minted gold of flowers;
 Of nights, that forest all the skies with stars,
 Wherethrough the moon—bare-bosomed huntress—rides,
 One cloud before her like a flying fawn.
 Then I proposed the season's hunt; till eve
 The test of Rudolf's skill postponed, at which
 He seemed impatient. And 't was then I heard
 How he an execrable marksman was;
 And tales that told of near, incredible shots,
 That missed their mark; or how his flint-lock oft
 Flashed harmless powder, while the curious deer
 Stood staring; as in pity of such aim
 Bidding him try his marksmanship again.
 Howbeit, he that day acquitted him
 Of all this gossip; in that day's long hunt
 Missing no shot, however rashly made
 Or distant through the intercepting trees.
 And the piled, various game brought down of all
 Good marksmen of Kurt's train had not sufficed,
 Doubled, nay, trebled, there to match his heap.
 And marvelling the hunters saw, nor knew
 How to excuse them. My indulgence giv'n,
 Some told me that but yesterday old Kurt
 Had made his daughter weep and Rudolf frown,
 By vowing end to their betrothed love, [46]
 Unless that love developed better aim
 Against the morrow's test; his ancestors'
 High fame should not be tarnished. So he railed;
 And bowed his gray head and sat moodily;
 But looking up, forgave all when he saw
 Tears in his daughter's eyes and Rudolf gone
 Out in the night black with approaching storm.
 Before this inn, yonder and here, they stood,
 The holiday village come to view the trial:
 Fair maidens and their comely mothers with
 Their sweethearts and their husbands. And I marked
 Kurt and his daughter here; his florid face
 All jubilant at Rudolf's great success;
 Hers, radiant with happiness; for this
 Her marriage eve—so had her father said—
 Should Rudolf come successful from the hunt.
 So pleased was I with what I'd seen him do,
 The trial of skill superfluous seemed, and so
 Was on the bare brink of announcing, when
 Out of the western heaven's deepening red,—
 Like a white message dropped by rosy lips,—
 A wild dove clove the luminous winds and there,
 Upon that limb, a peaceful moment sat.
 Then I, "Thy rifle, Rudolf! pierce its head!"
 Cried pointing, "and chief-forester art thou!"—
 Why did he falter with a face as strange
 As a dark omen? did his soul foresee [47]
 What was to be with tragic prescience?—
 What a bad dream it all seems now!—Again
 I see him aim. Again I hear the cry,
 "My dove! O Rudolf, do not kill my dove!"
 And from the crowd, like some sweet dove herself,
 A fluttering whiteness, came our Ilsabe—
 Too late! the rifle cracked ... The unhurt dove
 Rose, beating frightened wings—but Ilsabe!...
 The sight! the sight!... lay smitten; a red stain,
 Sullyng the pureness of her bridal bodice,
 Showed where the ball had pierced her through the heart.
 And Rudolf?—Ah, of him you still would know?—
 When he beheld this thing that he had done,
 Why he went mad—I say—but others not.
 An hour he raved of how her life had paid
 For the unholy bullets he had used,
 And how his soul was three times lost and damned.

I say that he went mad and fled forthwith
Into the haunted Harz.—Some say, to die
The prey of demons of the Dummburg ruin.
I, one of those less superstitious, say,
He in the Bodé—from that blackened rock,—
Whereon were found his hunting-cap and gun,—
The Devil's Dancing Place, did leap and die.

My Lady of Verne

[48]

It all comes back as the end draws near;
All comes back like a tale of old!
Shall I tell you all? Will you lend an ear?
You, with your face so stern and cold;
You, who have found me dying here ...

Lady Leona's villa at Verne—
You have walked its terraces, where the fount
And statue gleam and the fluted urn;
Its world-old elms, that are avenues gaunt
Of shadow and flame when the West is a-burn.

'T is a lonely region of tarns and trees,
And hollow hills that circle the West;
Haunted of rooks and the far-off sea's
Immemorial vague unrest;
A land of sorrowful memories.

A gray sad land, where the wind has its will,
And the sun its way with the fruits and flowers;
Where ever the one all night is shrill,
And ever the other all day brings hours
Of glimmering silence that dead days fill.

A gray sad land, where her girlhood grew
To womanhood proud, that the hill-winds seemed
To give their heart, like melody, to;
And the stars, their soul, like a dream undreamed—
The only glad thing that the sad land knew.

My Lady, you know, how nobly born!
Haughty of form, with a head that rose
Like a dream of empire; love and scorn
Made haunts of her eyes; and her lips were bows
Whence pride imperious flashed flower and thorn.

[49]

And I—oh, I was nobody: one
Her worshiper only; who chose to be
Silent, seeing that love alone
Was his only badge of nobility,
Set in his heart's escutcheon.

How long ago does the springtime look,
When we wandered away to the hills! the hills,—
Like the land in the tale in the fairy-book,—
Covered with gold of the daffodils,
And gemmed with the crocus by brae and brook!

When I gathered a branch from a hawthorn tree,
For her hair or bosom, from boughs that hung
Odorous of heaven and purity;
And she thanked me smiling; then merrily sung,
Laughingly sung, while she looked at me:—

"There dwelt a princess over the sea—
Right fair was she, right fair was she—
Who loved a squire of low degree,
But married a king of Brittany—
Ah, woe is me!

"And it came to pass on the wedding-day—
So people say, so people say—
That they found her dead in her bridal array,

[50]

Dead, and her lover beside her lay—
Ah, well-away!

"A sour stave for your sweets," she said,
Pressing the blossoms against her lips:
Then petal by petal the branch she shred,
Snowing the blooms from her finger-tips,
Tossing them down for her feet to tread.

What to her was the look I gave
Of love despised! though she seemed to start,
Seeing, and said, with a quick hand-wave,
"Why, one would think that *that* was your heart,"
While her face with a sudden thought grew grave.

But I answered nothing. And so to her home
We came in the twilight; falling clear,
With a few first stars and a moon's curved foam,
Over the hush of meadow and mere,
Whence the boom of the bittern would often come.

Would you think that she loved me?—Who can say?—
What a riddle unread was she to me!—
When I kissed her fingers and turned away
I wanted to speak, but—what cared she,
Though her eyes looked soft and she begged me stay!

Though she lingered to watch me—that might be
A slim moon-beam or the evening haze,—
But never my Lady's drapery
Or wistful face!—in the ivy maze....
Leona of Verne—why, what cared she!

So the days went by, and the Summer wore
Her hot heart out; and, a mighty slayer,
The Autumn harried the land and shore,
And the world was red with his wrecks; but grayer
That land with the ghosts of the nevermore.

The sheaves of the Summer had long been bound;
The harvests of Autumn had long been past;
And the snows of the Winter lay deep around,
When the dark news came and I knew at last;
And the reigning woe of my heart was crowned.

So I sought her here, the young Earl's bride;
In the ancient room at the oriel dreaming,
Pale as the blooms in her hair; and, wide,
Her robe's rich satin, flung stormily, gleaming,
Like shimmering silver, twilight-dyed.

I marked as I stole to her side that tears
Were vaguely large in her beautiful eyes;
That the loops of pearls on her throat, and years
Old lace on her bosom were heaved with sighs;
So I spoke what I thought—"Then, it appears"—

And stopped with, it seemed, my soul in my gaze—
"That you are not happy, Leona of Verne?
There is that at your heart which—well, betrays
These mocking mummeries.—Live and learn!—
And this is the truth that the poet says:—

"I went to my love and I told with my heart,
In words of the soul, that are silent in speech,
All of my passion, too sacred for art;
But she heard me not—for I could not reach
Her in that world of which she is part.'—

"That world, where I saw you as one afar
Sees palms and waters, and knows that sands,
Pitiless sands, before him are;
Yet follows ever with helpless hands
Till he sinks at last.—You were my star,

"My hope, my heaven!—I loved you!... Life
Is less than nothing to me!"... She turned,

[51]

[52]

With a wild look, saying—"Now I am his wife
You come and tell me!—Indeed you are learn'd
In the language of hearts that's unheard!"... A Knife,

As she ceased and leaned on a cabinet,—
A curve of scintillant steel, keen, cold,—
Fell icily clashing; some curio met
Among Asian antiques, bronze and gold,
Mystical, curiously graven and set.

[53]

A Bactrian dagger, whose slightest prick
Through its ancient poison was death, I knew;
If true that she loved me—then!—And quick
To the unspoken thought she replied, "'T is true!
I have loved you long, and my soul was sick,

"Sick for the love that has made me weak,
Weak to your will even now!"—And more
She said, in my arms, that I shall not speak—
And the dagger there on the polished floor
Ever her eyes, while she spoke, would seek.

"'And it came to pass on the wedding-day"—
Then my lips for a moment were crushed to hers—
"That they found her dead in her bridal array,"
She sang; then said, "You finish the verse!
Finish the song, for you know the way."

And I whispered "yes," for my mind had thought
Her own thought through—that life were a hell
To her as to me,—So the blade I caught
With a sudden hand; and she leaned, and—well,
What a little wound, and the blood it brought

To crimson her bosom!—I set her there
In that carven chair; then turned the blade,—
With its glittering haft one savage glare
Of gold and jewels, wildly inlaid,—
To my breast, for the poisonous point rent bare.

[54]

A stain of blood on her bosom, and one
Black red o'er my heart.—You see, 't is good
To die so for love!... Does the sinking sun,
Through the dull vast west burst banked with blood?—
Or is it that life will at last have done?...

So you are her husband? and—well, you see,
You see she is dead ... But your face, how white!
—Is it with hate or with misery?—
What matters it now!—For, at last, the night
Falls and the silence covers me.

An Old Tale Re-told

[55]

From the terrace here, where the hills indent,
You can see the uttermost battlement
Of the castle there; the Cliffords' home;
Where the seasons go and the seasons come
And never a footstep else doth fall
Save the prowling fox's; the ancient hall
Echoes no voice save the owlet's call:
Its turret chambers are homes for the bat;
And its courts are tangled and wild to see;
And where in the cellar was once the rat,
The viper and toad move stealthily.
Long years have passed since the place was burned,
And he sailed to the wars in France and earned
The name that he bears of the bold and true
On his tomb. Long years, since my lord, Sir Hugh,
Lived; and I was his favorite page,
And the thing then happened; and he of an age
When a man will love and be loved again,
Or hie to the wars or a monastery,

Or toil till he conquer his heart's sore pain,
Or drink and forget it and finally bury.

I was his page. And often we fared
Through the Clare demesnes, in autumn, hawking;
If the Baron had known, how they would have glared
'Neath their bushy brows, those eyes of mocking!—
That last of the Strongbows, Richard, I mean—
And growling some six of his henchmen lean
To mount and after this Clifford and hang
With his crop-eared page to the nearest oak,
How he would have cursed us while he spoke!
For Clare and Clifford had ever a fang
In the other's side ... And I hear the clang
Of his rage in the hall when the hawker told—
If he told!—how we met on the autumn wold
His daughter, sweet Clara of Clare, the day
Her hooded tiercel its brails did burst,
And trailing its jesses, came flying our way—
An untrained haggard the falconer cursed
While he tried to secure:—as the eyas flew
Slant, low and heavily over us, Hugh,—
Who saw it coming, and had just then cast
His peregrine hawk at a heron quarry,—
In his saddle rising, so, as it passed,
By the jesses caught, and to her did carry,
Where she stood near the wood. Her face flushed rose
With the glad of the meeting. No two foes
Her eyes and my Lord's, I swear, who saw
'Twas love from the start. And I heard him speak
Some words; then he knelt; and the sombre shaw,
With the rust of the autumn waste and bleak,
Grew spring with her smile, as the hawk she took
On her lily wrist, where it pruned and shook
Its ragged wings. Then I saw him seize
The hand, that she reached to him, long and white,
As she smilingly bade him rise from his knees—

[56]

When he kissed its fingers, her eyes grew bright.
But her cheeks grew pallid when, lashing through
The woodland there, with a face a-flare
With the sting of the wind, and his gipsy hair
Flying, the falconer came, and two
Or three of the people of Castle Clare.
And the leaves of the autumn made a frame
For the picture there in the morning's flame.

[57]

What was said in that moment, I do not know,
That moment of meeting, between those lovers;
But whatever it was, 't was whispered low,
And soft as a leaf that swings and hovers,
A twinkling gold, when the leaves are yellow.
And her face with the joy was still aglow,
When down through the wood that burly fellow
Came with his frown, and made a pause
In the pulse of their words. My lord, Sir Hugh,
Stood with the soil on his knee. No cause
Had he, but his hanger he partly drew,
Then clapped it sharp in its sheath again,
And bowed to my Lady, and strode away;
And mounting his horse, with a swinging rein
Rode with a song in his heart all day.

He loved and was loved, I knew; for, look!
All other sports for the chase he forsook.
And strange that he never went to hawk,
Or hunt, but Clara would meet him there
In the Strongbow forest! I know the rock,
With its fern-filled moss, by the bramble lair,
Were oft and again he met—by chance,
Shall I say?—the daughter of Clare; as fair
Of face as a queen in an old romance,
Who waits with her sweet face pale; her hair
Night-deep; and eyes dove-gray with dreams;—
By the fountain-side where the statue gleams

[58]

And the moonbeam lolls in the lily white,—
For the knightly lover who comes at night.

Heigho! they ceased, those meetings; I wot,
Betrayed to the Baron by some of his crew
Of menials who followed and saw and knew.
For she loved too well to have once forgot
The time and the place of their trysting true.
"Why and when?" would ask Sir Hugh
In the labored letters he used to lock—
The lovers' post—in a coigne of that rock.
She used to answer, but now did not.
But nearing Yule, love got them again
A twilight tryst—through frowardness sure!—
They met. And that day was gray with rain,
Or snow: and the wind did ever endure
A long bleak moaning thorough the wood,
That chapped i' the cheek and smarted the blood;
And a brook in the forest went throb and throb,
And over it all was the wild-beast sob
Of the rushing boughs like a thing pursued.
And then it was that he learned how she,
(God's blood! how it makes my old limbs quiver
To think what a miserable tyrant he—
The Baron Richard—aye and ever
To his daughter was!) forsooth! must wed
With an eastern earl, a Lovell: to whom
(Would God o' his mercy had struck him dead!)
Clara of Clare when only a child,—
With a face like a flower, that blooms in the wild
Of the hills, and a soul like its soft perfume,—
Was given; to seal, or strengthen, some ties
Of power and wealth—say bartered, then,
Like the merest chattel. With tearful eyes
And trembling lips she spoke; and when
Her lover, the Clifford, had learned and heard,—
He'd have had her flee with him then, 'sdeath!
In spite of them all! Let her speak the word,
They would fly together; the Baron's men
Might follow, and if ... and he touched his sword,
It should answer! But she, while she seemed to stay,
With a hand on her bosom, her heart's quick breath,
Replied to his heat, "They would take and slay
Thee who art life of me!—No! not thus
Shall we fly! there's another way for us;
A way that is sure; an only way;
I have thought it out this many a day."—
The words that she spoke, how well I remember!
As well as the mood o' that day of December,
That bullied and blustered and seemed in league,
Like a spiteful shrew, with the wind and snow,
To drown the words of their sweet intrigue,
With the boom of the boughs tossed to and fro.
Her last words these, "By curfew sure,
On Christmas eve, at the postern door."

[59]

[60]

And we were there; with a led horse too;
Armed for a journey I hardly knew
Whither, but why, you well can guess.
For often he whispered a certain name,
The talisman of his happiness,
That warmed his blood like a yule-log's flame.
While we waited there, till its owner came,
We saw how the castle's baronial girth,
Like a giant's, loosed for reveling more,
Shone; and we heard the wassail and mirth
Where the mistletoe hung in the hearth's red roar,
And the holly brightened the weaponed wall
Of ancient oak in the banqueting hall.
And the spits, I trow, by the scullions turned
O'er the snoring logs, rich steamed and burned,
While the whole wild-boar and the deer were roasted,
And the half of an ox and the roe-buck haunches;
While tuns of ale, that the cellars boasted,
And casks of sack, were broached for paunches

[61]

Of vassals who reveled in stable and hall.
The song of the minstrel; the yeomen's quarrel
O'er the dice and the drink; and the huntsman's bawl
In the baying kennels, its hounds a-snarl
O'er the bones of the banquet; now loud, now low,
We could hear where we crouched in the drifting snow.

Was she long? did she come?... By the postern we
Like shadows waited. My lord, Sir Hugh,
Spoke, pointing a tower, "That casement, see?
When a stealthy light in its slit burns blue
And signals thrice slowly, thus—'t is she."
And close to his breast his gaberdine drew,
For the wind it whipped and the snow beat through.
Did she come?—We had waited an hour or twain,
When the taper flashed in the central pane,
And flourished three times and vanished so.
And under the arch of the postern's portal,
Holding the horses, we stood in the snow,
Stiff with the cold. Ah, me! immortal
Minutes we waited, breath-bated, and listened
Shivering there in the hiss of the gale:
The parapets whistled, the angles glistened,
And the night around seemed one black wail
Of death, whose ominous presence over
The stormy battlements seemed to hover.
Said my lord, Sir Hugh,—to himself he spoke,—
"She feels for the spring in the sliding panel
'Neath the arras, hid in the carven oak.
It opens. The stair, like a well's dark channel,
Yawns; and the draught makes her taper slope.
Wrapped deep in her mantle she stoops, now puts
One foot on the stair; now a listening pause
As nearer and nearer the mad search draws
Of the thwarted castle. No smallest hope
That they find her now that the panel shuts!...
If the wind, that howls like a tortured thing,
Would throttle itself with itself, then I
Might hear how her hurrying footsteps ring
Down the hollow ... there! 't is her fingers try
The postern's bolts that the rust makes cling."—
But ever some whim of the storm that shook
A clanging ring or a creaking hook
In buttress or wall. And we waited, numb
With the cold, till dawn—but she did not come.

[62]

I must tell you why and have done: 'T is said,
On the brink of the marriage she fled the side
Of the guests and the bridegroom there; she fled
With a mischievous laugh,—"I'll hide! I'll hide!
Seek! and be sure that you find!"—so led
A long search after her; but defied
All search for—a score and ten long years....

[63]

Well, the laughter of Yule was turned to tears
For them and for us. We saw the glare
Of torches that hurried from chamber to stair;
And we heard the castle re-echo her name,
But neither to them nor to us she came.
And that was the last of Clara of Clare.

That winter it was, a month thereafter,
That the home of the Cliffords, roof and rafter,
Burned.—I could swear 't was the Strongbow's doing,
Were I sure that he knew of the Clifford's wooing
His daughter; and so, by the Rood and Cross!
Had burned Hugh's home to avenge his loss.—
So over the channel to France with his King,
The Black Prince, sailed to the wars—to deaden
The ache of the mystery—Hugh that spring,
And fell at Poitiers; for his loss made leaden
His heart; and his life was a weary sadness,
So he flung it away in a moment's madness.
And the Baron died. And the bridegroom?—well,
Unlucky was he in truth!—to tell

Of him there is nothing. The Baron died,
The last of the Strongbows he—gramercy!
And the Clare estate with its wealth and pride
Devolved to the Bloets, Walter and Percy.

And years went by. And it happened that they
Ransacked the old castle; and so, one day,
In a lonesome tower uprummaged a chest,
From Flanders; of ebon, and wildly carved
All over with things: a sinister crest,
And evil faces, distorted and starved;
Fast-locked with a spring, which they forced and, lo!
When they opened it—Death, like a lady dressed,
Grinned up at their terror!—but no, not so!
A skeleton, jeweled and laced, and wreathed
With flowers of dust; and a miniver
Around it clasped, that the ruin sheathed
Of a once rich raiment of silk and fur.

[64]

I'd have given my life to hear him tell,
The courtly Clifford, how this befell!
He'd have known how it was: For, you see, in groping
For the secret spring of that panel, hoping
And fearing as nearer and nearer drew
The search of retainers, why, out she blew
The tell-tale taper; and, seeing this chest,
Would hide her a minute in it, mayhap,
Till the hurry had passed; but the death-lock, pressed
By the lid's great weight, closed fast with a snap,
Ere her heart was aware of the fiendish trap.

The Water Witch

[65]

See! the milk-white doe is wounded.
He will follow as it bounds
Through the woods. His horn has sounded.
Echoing, for his men and hounds.
But no answering bugle blew.
He has lost his retinue
For the shapely deer that bounded
Past him when his bow he drew.

Not one hound or huntsman follows.
Through the underbrush and moss
Goes the slot; and in the hollows
Of the hills, that he must cross,
He has lost it. He must fare
Over rocks where she-wolves lair;
Wood-pools where the wild-boar wallows;
So he leaves his good steed there.

Through his mind then flashed an olden
Legend told him by the monks:—
Of a girl, whose hair is golden,
Haunting fountains and the trunks
Of the woodland; who, they say,
Is a white doe all the day;
But when woods are night-enfolden
Turns into an evil fay.

[66]

Then the story oft his teacher
Told him; of a mountain lake
Demons dwell in; vague of feature,
Human-like, but each a snake,
She is queen of.—Did he hear
Laughter at his startled ear?
Or a bird? And now, what creature
Is it, or the wind, stirs near?

Fever of the hunt. This water,
Murmuring here, will cool his head.
Through the forest, fierce as slaughter,

Slants the sunset; ruby red
Are the drops that slip between
His cupped hands, while on the green,—
Like the couch of some wild daughter
Of the forest,—he doth lean.

But the runnel, bubbling, dripping,
Seems to bid him to be gone;
As with crystal words, and tripping
Steps of sparkle luring on.
Now a spirit in the rocks
Calls him; now a face that mocks,
From behind some boulder slipping,
Laughs at him with liliated locks.

[67]

So he follows through the flowers,
Blue and gold, that blossom there;
Thridding twilight-haunted bowers
Where each ripple seems the bare
Beauty of white limbs that gleam
Rosy through the running stream;
Or bright-shaken hair, that showers
Starlight in the sunset's beam.

Till, far in the forest, sleeping
Like a luminous darkness, lay
A deep water, wherein, leaping,
Fell the Fountain of the Fay,
With a singing, sighing sound,
As of spirit things around,
Musically laughing, weeping
In the air and underground.

Not a ripple o'er it merried:
Like the round moon 'neath a cloud,
In its rocks the lake lay buried:
And strange creatures seemed to crowd
Its dark depths; vague limbs and eyes
To the surface seemed to rise
Spawn-like and, as formless, ferried
Through the water, shadow-wise.

[68]

Foliage things with human faces,
Demon-dreadful, pale and wild
As the forms the lightning traces
On the clouds the storm has piled,
Seeming now to draw to land,
Now away—Then up the strand
Comes a woman; and she places
On his arm a spray-white hand.

Ah! an untold world of sorrow
Were her eyes; her hair, a place
Whence the moon its gold might borrow;
And a dream of ice her face:
'Round her hair and throat in rims
Pearls of foam hung; and through whims
Of her robe, as breaks the morrow,
Shone the rose-light of her limbs.

Who could help but look with gladness
On such beauty? though within,
Deep within the beryl sadness
Of those eyes, the serpent sin
Coil?—When she hath placed her cheek
Chilly upon his, and weak,
With love longing and its madness,
Is his will grown, then she'll speak:

[69]

"Dost thou love me?"—"If surrender
Is to love thee, then I love."—
"Hast no fear then?"—"In the splendor
Of thy gaze who knows thereof?
Yet I fear—I fear to lose
Thee, thy love!"—"And thou dost choose
Aye to be my heart's defender?"—

"Take me. I am thine to use."

"Follow then. Ah, love, no lowly
Home I give thee."—With fixed eyes,
To the water's edge she slowly
Drew him.... And he did surmise
'Twas her lips on his, until
O'er his face the foam closed chill,
Whisp'ring, and the lake unholy
Rippled, rippled and was still.

At Nineveh

[70]

Written for my friend Walter S. Mathews.

There was a princess once, who loved the slave
Of an Assyrian king, her father; known
At Nineveh as Hadria; o'er whose grave
The sands of centuries have long been blown;
Yet sooner shall the night forget its stars
Than love her story:—How, unto his throne,
One day she came, where, with his warriors,
The king sat in the hall of audience,
'Mid pillared trophies of barbaric wars,
And, kneeling to him, asked, "O father, whence
Comes love and why?"—He, smiling on her, said,—
"O Hadria, love is of the gods, and hence
Divine, is only soul-interpreted.

But why love is, ah, child, we do not know,
Unless 'tis love that gives us life when dead."—
And then his daughter, with a face aglow
With all the love that clamored in her blood
Its sweet avowal, lifted arms of snow,
And, like Aurora's rose, before him stood,
Saying,—"Since love is of the powers above,
I love a slave, O Asshur! Let the good
The gods have giv'n be sanctioned. Speak not of
Dishonor and our line's ancestral dead!

They are imperial dust. I live and love."—
Black as black storm then rose the king and said,—
A lightning gesture at her standing there,—
"Enough! ho, Rhana, strike me off her head!"

And at the mandate, with his limbs half bare
A slave strode forth. Majestic was his form
As some young god's. He, gathering up her hair,
Wound it three times around his sinewy arm.

Then drew his sword. It for one moment shone
A semicircling light, and, dripping warm,
Lifting the head he stood before the throne.
Then cried the despot, "By the horn of Bel!
This was no child of mine!"—Like chiselled stone
Still stood the slave, a son of Israel.

Then striding towards the monarch, in his eye
The wrath of heaven and the hate of hell,
Shrieked, "Lust! I loved her! look on us and die!"
Swifter than fire clove him to the brain.

Then kissed the dead fair face of her held high,
And crying, "Judge, O God, between us twain!"
A thousand daggers in his heart, fell slain.

[71]

How They Brought Aid to Bryan's Station

[72]

During the siege of Bryan's Station, Kentucky, August 16, 1782, Nicholas Tomlinson and Thomas Bell, two inhabitants of the Fort, undertook to ride through the besieging Indian and Tory lines to Lexington, Ky., for aid. It happened also during this siege that the pioneer women of the Fort, when the water supply was exhausted, heroically carried water from a spring, at a considerable distance outside the palisades of the Station, to its inmates, under the very guns of the enemy.

With saddles girt and reins held fast,

Our rifles well in front, at last
Tom Bell and I were mounted.
The gate swung wide. We said, "Good-bye."
No time for talk had Bell and I.
One said, "God speed!" another, "Fly!"
Then out we galloped. Live or die,
We felt each moment counted.

The trace, the buffaloes had worn,
Stretched broad before us; and the corn
And cane through which it wended,
We knew for acres from the gate
Hid Indian guile and Tory hate.
We rode with hearts that seemed to wait
For instant death; and on our fate
The Station's fate depended.

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No rifle cracked. No creature stirred,
As on towards Lexington we spurred
Unflinchingly together.
We reached the woods: no savage shout
Of all the wild Wyandotte rout
And Shawanese had yet rung out:
But now and then an Indian scout
Showed here a face and feather.

We rode expecting death each stride
From thicket depth or tree-trunk side,
Where some red foe might huddle—
For well we knew that renegade,
The blood-stained Girty, had not stayed
His fiends from us, who rode for aid,—
The dastard he who had betrayed
The pioneers of Ruddle.

And when an arrow grazed my hair
I did not turn, I did not spare
To spur as men spur warward:
A war-whoop rang this side a rock:
Then painted faces swarmed, to block
Our way, with brandished tomahawk
And rifle: then a shout, a shock—
And we again rode forward.

[74]

They followed; but 'twas no great while
Before from them by some long mile
Of forest we were sundered.
We galloped on. I'd lost my gun;
And Bell, whose girth had come undone,
Rode saddleless. The summer sun
Was up when into Lexington
Side unto side we thundered.

Too late. For Todd had left that day
With many men. Decoyed away
To Hoy's by some false story.
And we must after. Bryan's needs
Said, "On!" although our gallant steeds
Were blown—Enough! we must do deeds!
Must follow where our duty leads,
Be it to death or glory.

The way was wild and often barred
By trees and rocks; and it was hard
To keep our hearts from sinking;
But thoughts of those we'd left behind
Gave strength to muscle and to mind
To help us onward through the blind
Deep woods. And often we would find
Ourselves of loved ones thinking.

[75]

The hot stockade. No water left.
The fierce attack. All hope bereft
The powder-grimed defender.
The war-cry and the groan of pain.
All day the slanting arrow-rain

Of fire from the corn and cane.
The stern defence, but all in vain.
And then at last—surrender.

But not for Bryan's!—no! too well
Must they remember what befell
At Ruddle's and take warning.
So thought we as, all dust and sweat,
We rode with faces forward set,
And came to Station Boone while yet
An hour from noon ... We had not let
Our horses rest since morning.

Here Ellis met us with his men.
They did not stop nor tarry then.
That little band of lions;
But setting out at once with aid,
Right well you know how unafraid
They charged the Indian ambuscade,
And through a storm of bullets made
Their entrance into Bryan's.

And that is all I have to tell.
No more the Huron's hideous yell
Sounds to assault and slaughter.—
Perhaps to us some praise is due;
But we are men, accustomed to
Such dangers, which we often woo.
Much more is due our women who
Brought to the Station—water.

[76]

On the Jellico Spur of the Cumberlands

[77]

TO J. FOX, JR.

You remember how the mist,
When we climbed to Devil's Den,
Pearly in the mountain glen,
And above us, amethyst,
Throbbled or circled? then away,
Through the wildwoods opposite,
Torn and scattered, morning-lit,
Vanished into dewy gray?—
Vague as in romance we saw,
From the fog, one riven trunk,
Talon-like with branches shrunk,
Thrust a monster dragon claw.
And we climbed for hours through
The dawn-dripping Jellicoes,
To a wooded rock that shows
Undulating leagues of blue
Summits; mountain-chains that lie
Dark with forests; bar on bar,
Ranging their irregular
Purple peaks beneath a sky
Soft as slumber. Range on range
Billow their enormous spines,
Where the rocks and priestly pines
Sit eternal, without change.
We were sons of Nature then:
She had taken us to her,
Signalized by brier and burr,
Something more to her than men:
Pupils of her lofty moods,
From her bloom-anointed looks,
Wisdom of no man-made books
Learned we in those solitudes:
How the seed supplied the flower;
How the sapling held the oak;
How within the vine awoke
The wild impulse still to tower;
How in fantasy or mirth,

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Springing from her footsteps there,
 Curious fungi everywhere
 Bulged, exuded from the earth;
 Coral vegetable things,
 That the underworld exhaled,
 Bulbous, crystal-ribbed and scaled,
 Many colored and in rings,
 Like the Indian-Pipe that grew
 Pink and white in loamy cracks,
 Flowers of a natural wax,
 She had turned her fancy to.—
 On that laureled precipice,
 Where the chestnuts dropped their burrs,
 Sweet with balsam of the firs,
 First we felt her mother kiss
 Full of heaven and the wind;
 While the forests, wood on wood,
 Murmured like a multitude
 Giving praise where none hath sinned.—
 Freedom met us there; we saw
 Freedom giving audience;
 In her face the eloquence,
 Lightning-like, of love and law:
 Round her, with majestic hips,
 Lay the giant mountains; there
 Near her, cataracts tossed their hair,
 God and thunder on their lips.—
 Oft an eagle, or a hawk,
 Or a scavenger, we knew
 Winged through altitudes of blue,
 By its shadow on the rock.
 Or a cloud of templed white
 Moved, a lazy berg of pearl,
 Through the sky's pacific swirl,
 Shot with cool cerulean light.
 So we dreamed an hour upon
 That warm rock the lichens mossed,
 While around us foliage tossed
 Coins, gold-minted of the sun:
 Then arose; and a ravine,
 Which a torrent once had worn,
 Made our roadway to the corn,
 In the valley, deep and green;
 And the farm house with its bees,
 Where old-fashioned flowers spun
 Gay rag-carpets in the sun,
 Hid among the apple trees.
 Here we watched the twilight fall;
 O'er Wolf-Mountain sunset made
 A huge rhododendron rayed
 Round the sun's cloud-centered ball.
 Then through scents of herb and soil,
 To the mining-camp we turned,
 In the twinkling dusk discerned
 With its white-washed homes of toil.
 Ah, those nights!—We wandered forth
 On some haunted mountain path,
 When the moon was late, and rathe
 The large stars, sowed south and north,
 Splashed with gold the purple skies;
 And the milky zodiac,
 Rolled athwart the belted black,
 Seemed a path to Paradise.
 And we walked or lingered till,
 In the valley-land beneath,
 Like the vapor of a breath
 Breathed in frost, arose the still
 Architecture of the mist:
 And the moon-dawn's necromance
 Touched the mist and made it glance
 Like a town of amethyst.
 Then around us, sharp and brusque,
 Night's shrill insects strident strung
 Instruments that buzzed and sung
 Pixy music of the dusk.

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And we seemed to hear soft sighs,
And hushed steps of ghostly things,
Fluttered feet or rustled wings,
Moved before us. Fire-flies,
Gleaming in the tangled glade,
Seemed the eyes of warriors
Stealing under watching stars
To some midnight ambuscade;
To the Indian village there,
Wigwamed with the mist, that slept
By the woodland side, whence crept
Shadowy Shawnees of the air.
When the moon rose, like a cup
Lay the valley, brimmed with wine
Of mesmeric shade and shine,
To the moon's pale face held up.
As she rose from out the mines
Of the eastern darkness, night
Met her, clad in dewy light
'Mid Pine Mountain's sachem pines.
As from clouds in pearly parts
Her serene circumference grew,
Home we turned. And all night through
Dreamed the dreams of happy hearts.

[82]

A Confession

[83]

These are the facts:—I was to blame:
I brought her here and wrought her shame:
She came with me all trustingly.
Lovely and innocent her face:
And in her perfect form, the grace
Of purity and modesty.

I think I loved her then: 'would dote
On her ambrosial breast and throat,
Young as a blossom's tenderness:
Her eyes, that were both glad and sad:
Her cheeks and chin, that dimples had:
Her mouth, red-ripe to kiss and kiss.

Three months passed by; three moons of fire;
When in me sickened all desire:
And in its place a devil,—who
Filled all my soul with deep disgust,
And on the victim of my lust
Turned eyes of loathing,—swiftly grew.

One night, when by my side she slept,
I rose: and leaning, while I kept
The dagger hid, I kissed her hair
And throat: and, when she smiled asleep,
Into her heart I drove it deep:
And left her dead, still smiling there.

Lilith

[84]

Yea, there are some who always seek
The love that lasts an hour;
And some who in love's language speak,
Yet never know his power.

Of such was I, who knew not what
Sweet mysteries may rise
Within the heart when 't is its lot
To love and realize.

Of such was I, ah me! till, lo,
Your face on mine did gleam,

And changed that world, I used to know,
Into an evil dream.

That world wherein, on hill and plain,
Great blood-red poppies bloomed,
Their hot hearts thirsty for the rain,
And sleepily perfumed.

Above, below, on every part
A crimson shadow lay,
As if the red sun streamed athwart
And sunset was always.

I know not how, I know not when,
I only know that there
She met me in the haunted glen,
A poppy in her hair.

Her face seemed fair as Mary's is,
That knows no sin or wrong;
Her presence filled the silences
As music fills a song.

And she was clad like the Mother of God,
As 't were for Christ's sweet sake,
But when she moved and where she trod
A hiss went of a snake.

Though seeming sinless, till I die
I shall not know for sure
Why to my soul she seemed a lie
And otherwise than pure.

Nor why I kissed her soon and late
And for her felt desire,
While loathing of her passion ate
Into my soul like fire.

Was it because my soul could tell
That, like the poppy-flower,
She had no soul? a thing of Hell,
That o'er it had no power.

Or was it that your love at last
My soul so long had craved,
From the sweet sin that held me fast
At that last moment saved?

[85]

Content

[86]

When I behold how some pursue
Fame, that is care's embodiment,
Or fortune, whose false face looks true,—
A humble home with sweet content
Is all I ask for me and you.

A humble home, where pigeons coo,
Whose path leads under breezy lines
Of frosty-berried cedars to
A gate, one mass of trumpet-vines,
Is all I ask for me and you.

A garden, which, all summer through,
The roses old make redolent,
And morning-glories, gay of hue,
And tansy, with its homely scent,
Is all I ask for me and you.

An orchard, that the pippins strew,
From whose bruised gold the juices spring;
A vineyard, where the grapes hang blue,
Wine-big and ripe for vintaging,
Is all I ask for me and you.

A lane, that leads to some far view
Of forest and of fallow-land,
Bloomed o'er with rose and meadow-rue,
Each with a bee in its hot hand,
Is all I ask for me and you.

[87]

At morn, a pathway deep with dew,
And birds to vary time and tune;
At eve, a sunset avenue,
And whippoorwills that haunt the moon,
Is all I ask for me and you.

Dear heart, with wants so small and few,
And faith, that's better far than gold,
A lowly friend, a child or two,
To care for us when we are old,
Is all I ask for me and you.

Berrying

[88]

I.

My love went berrying
Where brooks were merrying
And wild wings ferrying
 Heaven's amethyst;
The wildflowers blessed her,
My dearest Hester,
The winds caressed her,
 The sunbeams kissed.

II.

I followed, carrying
Her basket; varying
Fond hopes of marrying
 With hopes denied;
Both late and early
She deemed me surly,
And bowed her curly
 Fair head and sighed:

III.

"The skies look lowery;
It will be showery;
No longer flowery
 The way I find.
No use in going.
'T will soon be snowing
If you keep growing
 Much more unkind."

[89]

IV.

Then looked up tearfully.
And I, all fearfully,
Replied, "My dear, fully
 Will I explain:
I love you dearly,
But look not cheerly
Since all says clearly
 I love in vain."

V.

Then smiled she airily;
And answered merrily
With words that—verily
 Made me decide:
And drawing tow'rd her,

I there implored her—
I who adored her—
 To be my bride.

VI.

O sweet simplicity
Of young rusticity,
Without duplicity,
 Whom love made know,
That hearts in meter
Make earth completer;
And kisses, sweeter
 Than—berries grow.

To a Pansy-Violet

[90]

Found Solitary Among the Hills.

I.

O pansy-violet,
With early April wet,
How frail and pure you look
Lost in this glow-worm nook
Of heaven-holding hills:
Down which the hurrying rills
Fling scrolls of melodies:
O'er which the birds and bees
Weave gossamers of song,
Invisible, but strong:
Sweet music webs they spin
To snare the spirit in.

II.

O pansy-violet,
Unto your face I set
My lips, and—do you speak?
Or is it but some freak
Of fancy, love imparts
Through you unto the heart's
Desire? whispering low
A secret none may know,
But such as sit and dream
By forest-side and stream.

III.

O pansy-violet,
O darling floweret,
Hued like the timid gem
That stars the diadem
Of Fay or Sylvan Sprite,
Who, in the woods, all night
Is busy with the blooms,
Young leaves and wild perfumes,
Through you I seem t' have seen
All that such dreams may mean.

[91]

IV.

O pansy-violet,
Long, long ago we met—
'T was in a Fairy-tale:
Two children in a vale
Sat underneath glad stars,
Far from the world of wars;
Each loved the other well:
Her eyes were like the spell

Of dusk and dawning skies—
The purple dark that dyes
The midnight: his were blue
As heaven the day shines through.

[92]

V.

O pansy-violet,
What is this vague regret,
This yearning, so like tears,
That touches through the years
Long past, when Myth and Fable
In all strange things were able
To beautify the Earth,
Things of immortal worth?—
This longing, that to me
Is like a memory
Lived long ago, of those
Fair children who, it knows,
Loved with no mortal love;
Whom smiling heaven above
Fostered, and when they died
Laid side by loving side.

VI.

O pansy-violet,
I dream, remembering yet
A wood-god-guarded tomb,
Out of whose moss a bloom
Sprang, with three petals wan
As are the eyes of dawn;
And two as darkly deep
As are the eyes of sleep.—
O flower,—that seems to hold
Some memory of old,
A hope, a happiness,
At which I can but guess,—
You are a sign to me
Of immortality:
Through you my spirit sees
The deathless purposes
Of death, that still evolves
The beauty it resolves;
The change that aye fulfills
Life's meaning as God wills.

[93]

Heart of my Heart

Here where the season turns the land to gold,
Among the fields our feet have known of old,—
When we were children who would laugh and run,
Glad little playmates of the wind and sun,—
Before came toil and care and years went ill,
And one forgot and one remembered still,
Heart of my heart, among the old fields here,
Give me your hands and let me draw you near.
Heart of my heart.

[94]

Stars are not truer than your soul is true—
What need I more of heaven than than you?
Flowers are not sweeter than your face is sweet—
What need I more to make my world complete?
O woman nature, love that still endures,
What strength hath ours that is not born of yours?
Heart of my heart, to you, whatever come,
To you the lead, whose love hath led me home.
Heart of my heart.

Witnesses

I.

You say I do not love you!—Tell me why,
When I have gazed a little on your face,
And then gone forth into the world of men,
A beauty, neither of the Earth or Sky,
A glamour, that transforms each common place,
Attends my spirit then?

II.

You say I do not love you!—Yet I know
When I have heard you speak and dwelt upon
Your words awhile, my heart has gone away
Filled with strange music, very soft and low,
A dim companion, touching with sweet tone
The discords of the day.

[95]

III.

You say I do not love you!—Yet it seems,
When I have kissed your hand and said farewell,
A fragrance, sweeter than did flower yet bloom,
Accompanies my soul and fills, with dreams,
The sad and sordid streets, where people dwell,
Dreams of spring's wild perfume.

Wherefore

I would not see, yet must behold
The truth they preach in church and hall;
And question so,—Is death then all,
And life an idle tale that's told?

The myriad wonders art hath wrought
I deemed eternal as God's love:
No more than shadows these shall prove,
And insubstantial as a thought.

And love and labor, who have gone,
Hand in close hand, and civilized
The wilderness, these shall be prized
No more than if they had not done.

Then wherefore strive? Why strain and bend
Beneath a burden so unjust?
Our works are builded out of dust,
And dust their universal end.

Pagan

[96]

The gods, who could loose and bind
In the long ago,
The gods, who were stern and kind
To men below,
Where shall we seek and find,
Or, finding, know?

Where Greece, with king on king,
Dreamed in her halls;
Where Rome kneeled worshiping,
The owl now calls,
And whispering ivies cling
To mouldering walls.

They have served, and have passed away

From the earth and sky,
And their Creed is a record gray,
Where the passer-by
Reads, "Live and be glad to-day,
For to-morrow ye die."

And shall it be so, indeed,
When we are no more,
That nations to be shall read,—
As we have before,—
In the dust of a Christian Creed,
But pagan lore?

"The Fathers of our Fathers"

[97]

**Written February 24, 1898, on reading the latest news concerning
the battleship Maine, blown up in Havana harbor, February 15th.**

I.

The fathers of our fathers they were men!—
What are we who now stand idle while we see our seamen slain?
Who behold our flag dishonored, and still pause!
Are we blind to her duplicity, the treachery of Spain?
To the rights, she scorns, of nations and their laws?
Let us rise, a mighty people, let us wipe away the stain!
Must we wait till she insult us for a cause?—
The fathers of our fathers they were men!

II.

The fathers of our fathers they were men!—
Had they nursed delay as we do? had they sat thus deaf and dumb,
With these cowards compromising year by year?
Never hearing what they should hear, never saying what should
come,
While the courteous mask of Spain still hid a sneer!
No! such news had roused their natures like a rolling battle-drum—
God of earth! and God of heaven! do we fear?—
The fathers of our fathers they were men!

[98]

III.

The fathers of our fathers they were men!—
What are we who are so cautious, never venturing too far!
Shall we, at the cost of honor, still keep peace?
While we see the thousands starving and the struggling Cuban star,
And the outraged form of Freedom on her knees!
Let our long, steel ocean-bloodhounds, adamant dogs of war,
Sweep the yellow Spanish panther from the seas!—
The fathers of our fathers they were men!

"Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin"

[99]

I.

Behold! we have gathered together our battleships near and afar;
Their decks they are cleared for action, their guns they are shotted for
war:
From the East to the West there is hurry, in the North and the South a
peal
Of hammers in fort and shipyard, and the clamor and clang of steel;
And the roar and the rush of engines, and clanking of derrick and crane
—
Thou art weighed in the Scales and found wanting, the balance of God, O
Spain!

II.

Behold! I have stood on the mountains, and this was writ in the sky:—
"She is weighed in the Scales and found wanting, the balance God holds
on high!"

The balance He once weighed Babylon, the Mother of Harlots, in:
One scale holds thy pride and thy power and empire, begotten of sin;
Heavy with woe and torture, the crimes of a thousand years,
Mortared and welded together with fire and blood and tears;
In the other, for justice and mercy, a blade with never a stain,
Is laid the Sword of Liberty, and the balance dips, O Spain!

[100]

III.

Summon thy vessels together! great is thy need for these!—
Cristobal Colon, Vizcaya, Oquendo, and Maria Terese—
Let them be strong and many, for a vision I had by night,
That the ancient wrongs thou hast done the world came howling to the
fight;
From the New-World shores they gathered, Inca and Aztec slain,
To the Cuban shot but yesterday, and our own dead seamen, Spain!

IV.

Summon thy ships together, gather a mighty fleet!
For a strong young Nation is arming, that never hath known defeat.
Summon thy ships together, there on thy blood-stained sands!
For a shadowy army gathers with manacled feet and hands,
A shadowy host of sorrows and shames, too black to tell,
That reach, with their horrible wounds, for thee to drag thee down to
Hell;
A myriad phantoms and spectres, thou warrest against in vain—
Thou art weighed in the Scales and found wanting, the balance of God, O
Spain!

[101]

Her Vivien Eyes

Her Vivien eyes,—beware! beware!—
Though they be stars, a deadly snare
They set beneath her night of hair.
Regard them not! lest, drawing near—
As sages once in old Chaldee—
Thou shouldst become a worshiper,
And they thy evil destiny.

Her Vivien eyes,—away! away!—
Though they be springs, remorseless they
Gleam underneath her brow's bright day.
Turn, turn aside, whate'er the cost!
Lest in their deeps thou lures behold,
Through which thy captive soul were lost,
As was young Hylas once of old.

Her Vivien eyes,—take heed! take heed!—
Though they be bibles, none may read
Therein of God or Holy Creed.
Look, look away! lest thou be cursed,—
As Merlin was, romances tell,—
And in their sorcerous spells immersed,
Hoping for Heaven thou chance on Hell.

[102]

There Was a Rose

There was a rose in Eden once: it grows
On Earth now, sweeter for its rare perfume:
And Paradise is poorer by one bloom,
And Earth is richer. In this blossom glows
More loveliness than old seraglios

Or courts of kings did ever yet illumine:
More purity, than ever yet had room
In soul of nun or saint.—O human rose,—
Who art initial and sweet period of
My heart's divinest sentence, where I read
Love, first and last, and in the pauses love;
Who art the dear ideal of each deed
My life aspires by to some high goal,—
Set in the haunted garden of my soul!

The Artist

[103]

In story books, when I was very young,
I knew you first, one of the Fairy Race;
And then it was your picture took its place,
Framed in with love's deep gold, and draped and hung
High in my heart's red room: no song was sung,
No tale of passion told, I did not grace
With your associated form and face,
And intimated charm of touch and tongue.
As years went on you grew to more and more,
Until each thing, symbolic to my heart
Of beauty,—such as honor, truth, and fame,—
Within the studio of my soul's thought wore
Your lineaments, whom I, with all my art,
Strove to embody and to give a name.

Poetry and Philosophy

Out of the past the dim leaves spoke to me
The thoughts of Pindar with a voice so sweet
Hyblæan bees seemed swarming my retreat
Around the reedy well of Poesy.
I closed the book. Then, knee to neighbor knee,
Sat with the soul of Plato, to repeat
Doctrines, till mine seemed some Socratic seat
High on the summit of Philosophy.
Around the wave of one Religion taught
Her first rude children. From the stars that burned
Above the mountained other, Science learned
The first vague lessons of the work she wrought.
Daughters of God, in whom we still behold
The Age of Iron and the Age of Gold.

[104]

"Quo Vadis"

It is as if imperial trumpets broke
Again the silence on War's iron height;
And Cæsar's armored legions marched to fight,
While Rome, blood-red upon her mountain-yoke,
Blazed like an awful sunset. At a stroke,
Again I see the living torches light
The horrible revels, and the bloated, white,
Bayed brow of Nero smiling through the smoke:
And here and there a little band of slaves
Among dark ruins; and the form of Paul,
Bearded and gaunt, expounding still the Word:
And towards the North the tottering architraves
Of empire; and, wild-waving over all,
The flaming figure of a Gothic sword.

To a Critic

[105]

Song hath a catalogue of lovely things
Thy kind hath oft defiled,—whose spite misleads
The world too often!—where the poet reads,
As in a fable, of old envyings,
Crows, such as thou, which hush the bird that sings,
Or kill it with their cawings; thorns and weeds,
Such as thyself, 'midst which the wind sows seeds
Of flow'rs, these crush before one blossom swings.
But here and there the wisdom of a School
Unknown to these hath often written down
"Fame" in white ink the future hath turned brown;
When every beauty, heaped with ridicule,
In their ignoble prose, proved their renown,
Making each famous—as an ass or fool.

AFTERWORD.

[106]

*The old enthusiasms
Are dead, quite dead, in me;
Dead the aspiring spasms
Of art and poesy,
That opened magic chasms,
Once, of wild mystery,
In youth's rich Araby.
That opened magic chasms.*

*The longing and the care
Are mine; and, helplessly,
The heartache and despair
For what can never be.
More than my mortal share
Of sad mortality,
It seems, God gives to me,
More than my mortal share.*

*O world! O time! O fate!
Remorseless trinity!
Let not your wheel abate
Its iron rotary!—
Turn round! nor make me wait,
Bound to it neck and knee,
Hope's final agony!—
Turn round! nor make me wait.*

Transcriber's note

The following changes have been made to the text:

[Page 25](#): Was 'beach' (Of an old **beech**)

[Page 46](#): Was 'marrige' (Her **marriage** eve)

[Page 53](#): Was 'sliighest' (whose **slightest** prick)

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