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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ACANTHUS AND WILD GRAPE ***

Acanthus and Wild Grape

By

F. O. Call

Author of "In a Belgian Garden"

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FOREWORD

Poetry has been defined as "Thought touched by Emotion," and I know no better working definition, although no doubt more scientific and accurate ones could be found. The best poets of all ages seem to have had this ideal plainly before them, whether consciously or unconsciously, and I cannot see how modern poets can dispense with either thought or emotion if they are to write real poetry. For one is not enough without the other. Take for example the first lines of

Master's "Spoon River Anthology."

"Where are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley,
The weak of will, the strong of arm, the clown, the boozier, the fighter?
All, all, are sleeping on the hill,
One passed in a fever,
One was buried in a mine,
One was killed in a brawl,
One died in a jail,
One fell from a bridge toiling for children and wife,
All, all are sleeping on the hill."

This sounds tragic indeed, but seems to have aroused no emotion on the part of the poet and excites none in his readers. In fact, through the whole poem, emotion is held in check with a strong hand, and only allowed to show itself in some distorted cynicism.

Let us take an example of the opposite extreme where emotion, whether real or fancied, has stifled thought.

O World! O Men! O Sun! to you I cry,
I raise my song defiant, proud, victorious,
And send this clarion ringing down the sky:
"I love, I love, I love, and Love is glorious!"

The definition chosen need not hamper the most "modern" poet nor restrict his choice of subject, for there are few things that cannot awaken both thought and emotion if looked at in the right way. An iron foundry and a Venetian palace have immense possibilities of arousing both elements, and perhaps the foundry has the greater power.

The modern poet has joined the great army of seekers after freedom, that is, he refuses to observe the old conventions in regard to his subjects and his method of treating them. He refuses to be bound by the old restrictions of rhyme and metre, and goes far afield in search of material on which to work. The boldest of the new school would throw overboard all the old forms and write only in free verse, rhythmic prose or whatever he may wish to call it. The conservative, on the other hand, clings stubbornly to the old conventions, and will have nothing to do with vers libre or anything that savours of it.

But vers libre, like the motor-car and aeroplane, has come to stay whether we like it or no. It is not really a new thing, although put to a new use, for some of the greatest poetry of the Hebrews and other Oriental nations was written in a form of free verse. At the present time the number of those using it as medium of expression is steadily increasing. In France, Italy, the United States, and even in conservative England, the increase in the number of poems recently published in this form has been remarkable. The modernists hail this tendency as the dawn of a new era of freedom, while the conservatives see poetry falling into decadence and ruin. The right view of the case probably lies, as it generally does, between the extremes. There is much beauty to be found in walking in beaten paths or rambling in fenced-in fields and woods, but perhaps one who sails the skies in an aeroplane may see visions and feel emotions that never come to those who wander on foot along the old paths of the woods and fields below.

But it seems to me that it matters little in what form a poem is cast so long as the form suits the subject, and does not hinder the freedom of the poet's thought and emotion. And I am old-fashioned enough to expect that beauty will be revealed as well. Out of this union of thought, emotion and beauty, we could scarcely fail to get strength also, which term many modern poets use to cover an ugliness that is often nothing but disguised weakness. But form alone will not make even a semblance of poetry as the following lines, unimpeachable in form, from Sir Walter Scott plainly show:

"Then filled with pity and remorse,
He sorrowed o'er the expiring horse."

Nor can I conceive of more beautiful poetry than the following, by Richard Aldington, although rhyme and regular metre are absent:

"And we turn from the music of old,
And the hills that we loved and the meads,
And we turn from the fiery day,
And the lips that were over-sweet;
For silently
Brushing the fields with red-shod feet,
With purple robe
Searing the grass as with a sudden flame,

Death,
Thou hast come upon us."

And this brings me to the real purpose of this Foreword—the explanation of the title of this book. On the hills and plains of Southern Europe there grows a plant with beautiful indented leaves—the Acanthus. The Greek artist saw the beauty of these leaves, and, having arranged and conventionalized them, carved them upon the capitals of the columns which supported the roofs and pediments of his temples and public buildings. Since that time, wherever pillars are used in architecture, one does not have far to look to find acanthus leaves carved upon them. In the Roman Forum, in Byzantine churches like Saint Sophia or Saint Mark's, in the Mediæval Cathedrals of France, England and Spain, in the Renaissance buildings scattered throughout the world, and even in the most modern office-buildings of our great cities, this decoration of acanthus is to be found. And the reason is not far to seek.

"A thing of beauty ... will never
Pass into nothingness."

I recently saw a picture of a Corinthian column of a ruined Greek temple standing against the sky, and broken fragments of its fellows lying at its foot, with wild vines climbing over them. And who could say that one was more beautiful than the other? The carved acanthus leaves upon the column were beautiful because of their symmetry, harmony of light and shade and clear-cut outline, but the wild grape was perhaps more beautiful still in its natural freedom.

So in this little book will be found some poems in the old conventional forms and some others in free rhythms, in which the author has tried in a humble way, to mingle elements of thought, emotion and beauty.

F.O.C.

BISHOP'S COLLEGE
LENNOXVILLE, QUE.

ACANTHUS

ACANTHUS

Beneath the sculptured marble portico
Of a Greek temple, white against the sky,
Carved capitals on pillars rising high
Gleam like great blossoms in the noonday's glow.
Proudly each column in the stately row
Its crown of beauty wears; the sunbeams die
Among acanthus leaves that nestling lie
Where they were carved two thousand years ago.

Eternal Beauty, thou wilt not be bound
By time-forged fetters, but dost find a home
Where Gothic pillars rise acanthus-crowned
Beneath gray northern spires or southern dome,
Eternal Beauty, Everlasting Truth,
Thou hast the secret of undying youth.

THE OLD GODS

Old gods are dead; their broken shrines are lying
Profaned with blood and trampled to the ground;

I see lost beauty with each sunset dying,
I hear lost music in each echoing sound.
Old gods are dead; triumphant stands the scoffer
Beside old altars where our offerings lay,—
False gods perhaps,—but what have you to offer
Who batter down old temples in a day?
Old gods are dead; but still the sunset lingers,
The moonlight still its store of treasure yields,
Dawn touches darkness with its magic fingers,
And bluebirds wing their flight across green fields,
The sea-tides ebb and flow, stars shine above,
And human hearts still long for human love.

THE OBELISK

(Place de la Concorde, Paris)

There rise the palace walls as fair to-day,
As when with arms and banners gleaming bright,
The pageantry of royal pomp and might
Passed through the guarded gates and went its way.
The blue, translucent beams of morning play
On arch triumphal, veiled in silver light;
And here, where blind red fury reached its height,
An ancient column rises grim and gray.

Slumbering in mystic sleep it seems to be,
And dreaming dreams of Egypt long ago,
Unmindful of the ceaseless ebb and flow
About its feet of life's unresting sea;
But 'mid the roar, I hear it murmur low:
Poor fools, they know not all is vanity!

GRAY BIRDS

Gray birds of passage from another sky
Are those long hours I sit and wait for you;
Borne by strong wings across the sunlit blue
They go—dark flecks of shadow drifting by.
Sometimes they bring a song—a joyful cry,
As morn and eve your coming used to do;
But sometimes plaintive notes of sorrow too,
Amid the joyful echoes wail and die.

Then as I watch the beating of the wings
That seek a haven by far northern lakes,
And catch the note of some bird-heart that sings,
Or hear the plaintive cry of one that breaks,
I turn once more to half-forgotten things,
And the old longing in my heart awakes.

AFTER TEA

See how the aged trembling hands of Day
Spill over the white cloth and tea-cups blue,
Red wine from his last goblet poured away;
So let me by the window sit with you,
And watch the sun drop down behind the trees,

Or gleam across the snow—a crimson bar;
For in still, mystic moments such as these
Down unknown by-ways we may wander far.
The crimson turns to purple on the snow,
The orange sky grown gray, and glimmering lights
Of scattered star-lamps through the darkness glow;
But neither Night nor Death my soul affrights,
For clear there gleams, all earthly dark above,
The ever-burning star-lamp of your love.

THROUGH A LONG CLOISTER

Through a long cloister where the gloom of night
Lingers in sombre silence all the day,
Across worn pavements crumbling to decay
We wandered, blindly groping for the light.
A door swung wide, and splendour infinite
Streamed through the painted glass, and drove away
The lingering gloom from choir, nave and bay,
And a great minster's glory met our sight.

Blindly along life's cloister do we grope,
We seek a gate that leads to life immortal,
We see it loom before us dim and vast,
And doubt's dark shadow's veil the light of hope:
When lo, Death's hand flings wide the sombre portal,
And light unfading meets our gaze at last.

CATHEDRAL VESPERS

The gloom of night creeps down the shadowy choir,
But through the great rose-window's gorgeous bloom
Red shafts of sunset fall upon a tomb,
And makes the gray stone burn—a crimson pyre.
The creeping tide of darkness rises higher,
Tall ghostly pillars through the shadows loom,
And from dim altars through the minster's gloom,
Pale yellow gleams the guttering candles' fire.

Sudden from out the shadow streams a song,
—A sword of sound that cleaves the dark in twain—
And rings and glows triumphant, swift and strong,
Victorious over sorrow, death and pain;
And golden visions pass before my soul
As through dim arches the last echoes roll.

THE LOTUS-WORSHIPPERS

With silent feet in trailing robes of white
They crept from shadowy temples, far beyond
Tall bamboo groves, to seek the lotus-pond
That gleamed like some dark jewel through the night
Upon great Buddha's breast. The crimson height
Echoed their chanting as the morning dawned,
And each bud, breaking from its silver bond,
Lifted its cup to catch the golden light.

And here beside this mist-bound northern lake,

Encircled by tall spires of Gothic firs,
The ancient beauty-worship wakes and stirs
Within me, as I watch the morning break
Upon white lily-buds, whose lips agleam
Whisper the secret of the world-old dream.

THE BROKEN MAST

It lies alone upon a tide-swept shore,
Above a crescent beach of silver sand,
Flung high upon the rocks by some great hand
Stretched from the dark, whose fingers clutched and tore
The main-mast from the ship. Above it soar
White gulls, and near in wild-rose tangle stand
Old twisted pines, where song-birds of the land
Mingle soft singing with the ocean's roar.

And through long summer days it dreams old dreams
Of far-off southern forests, and the sighing
Of wind-blown boughs above bird-haunted streams;
But when the storm sets the white spindrift flying
It thrills and trembles with the old unrest,
And shakes the wild-rose petals from its breast.

THE LACE-MAKER OF BRUGES

Her age-worn hands upon her apron lie
Idle and still. Against the sunset glow
Tall poplars stand, and silent barges go
Along the green canal that wanders by.
A lean, red finger pointing to the sky,
The spire of Notre Dame. Above a row
Of dim, gray arches where the sunbeams die,
The ancient belfry guards the square below.

One August eve she stood in that same square
And gazed and listened, proud beneath her tears,
To see her soldier passing down the street.
To-night the beat of drums and trumpets' blare
With bursts of fiendish music smite her ears,
And mingle with the tread of trampling feet.

AUGUST, 1915.

RHEIMS

In royal splendour rose the house of prayer,
Its mystic gloom arched over by the flight
Of soaring vault; above the nave's dim night
Rich gleamed the painted windows wondrous fair.
Sweet chimes and chanting mingled in the air;
Blue clouds of incense dimmed the vaulted height;
And on the altar, like a beacon light,
The gold cross glittered in the candles' glare.

To-day no bells, no choirs, no incense cloud,
For thou, O Rheims art prey of evil powers;
But with a voice a thousand times more loud

Than siege-guns echoing round thy shattered towers,
Do thy mute bells to all the world proclaim
Thy martyred glory and thy foeman's shame.

JUNE, 1916.

CALVARY

The women stood and watched while thick, black night
Enclosed the awful tragedy. Afar
Three crosses stood, against a single bar
Of crimson-glowing, black-encircled light.
No hint of Easter dawn. In all the height
Of that dark heaven, not a single star
To whisper;—Love and Life the victors are.
It seemed to them that wrong had conquered right.

O ye who watch and wait, the night is long.
A curtain of spun fire and woven gloom
Across the mighty tragedy is drawn.
But soon your ears shall hear a triumph song,
And golden light shall touch each sacred tomb,
And voices shout at last—The Dawn! The Dawn.

AUGUST, 1916.

GONE WEST

Dedicated to Lieutenant Rodolphe Lemieux, killed in action August 29, 1918.

I do not think of them—our glorious dead—
As laying tired heads upon the breast
Of a kind mother to be lulled to rest;
I do not see them in a narrow bed
Of alien earth by their own blood dyed red,
But see in their own simple phrase—Gone West—
The words of knights upon a holy quest,
Who saw the light and followed where it led.

Gone West! Scarred warrior hosts go marching by,
Their longing faces turned to greet the light
That glows and burns upon the western sky.
Leaving behind the darkness of the night,
The long day over and the battle won,
They seek for rest beyond the setting sun.

PEACE

Now Peace at last is hovering o'er the world
On silver wings, and golden trumpets blow.
Home from the long crusade the warriors go,—
Victorious knights with banners wide unfurled,
Bow down your head, for these have passed where swirled
Great tides of darkness ebbing too and fro;
Their eyes have seen, 'mid fiery tempests' glow,
How youth at Death its dauntless challenge hurled.

And these are they who saw the Holy Grail,
Brimming with youthful blood like ruddy wine
Poured out in sacrifice. The light divine
Before whose awful glow they did not quail
Now beckons us; and shall our footsteps fail
To follow where they set the blood-stained sign?

NOVEMBER, 1918.

HIDDEN TREASURE

O sun-browned boy with the wondering eyes,
Do you see the blue of the summer skies?
Do you hear the song of the drowsy stream,
As it winds by the shore where the birches gleam?
Then come, come away
From the shadowy bay,
And we'll drift with the stream where the rapids play;
For we are two pirates, fierce and bold,
And we'll capture the hoard of the morning's gold.

A roving craft is our red canoe,
O pirate chief with the eyes of blue;
So hoist your flag with the skull on high,
And out we'll sail where the treasures lie.
For in days of old
Came pirates bold,
With a Spanish galleon's captured gold;
And their boat was wrecked on the river strand,
And its treasures strewn on the silver sand.

Now steady all as we dash along,
The rapids are swift but our paddles are strong;
And soon we'll drift with the water's flow
Where the treasure lies hid in the shallows below.
O, cool and dim,
'Neath its foam-flecked brim,
Is the pool where the swallows dip and skim;
So we'll plunge by the prow of our red canoe
For the treasure that lies in the quivering blue.

Now home once more to the shadowy bay,
For we've captured the gold of the summer's day,
And emeralds green from the banks along,
And silver bars from the white-throat's song.
No pirates bore
Such a glittering store
From the treasure ships of the days of yore,
As the spoils we have won on the shining stream,
While we drifted along in a golden dream.

A RIVER SUNSET

Red sunlight fades from wood and town,
The western sky is crimson-dyed,
Gaunt shadow-ships drift silent down
Upon the river's gleaming tide.

The hills' clear outlines melt away
Or veil themselves in purple light,
And burning thoughts that vexed the day
Become fair visions of the night.

THE MADONNA

She shivered and crouched in the immigrant shed
In the midst of the surging crowd;
Her hands were warped with the years of toil,
And her young form bent and bowed.

Her eyes looked forth with a frightened glance
At the throng that round her pressed;
But her face was the face of the Mother of God
As she looked at the babe on her breast.

AN IDOL IN A SHOP WINDOW

Old Lohan peers through the dusty glass,
From a jumble of curios quaint and rare;
And he watches the hurrying crowds that pass
The whole day long, through the ancient square.

Wrapped in his robe of gold and jade,
Here by the window he patiently waits
For the sound that the gongs and the conches made,
In the days of old at the temple gates.

He heaves no sighs and he sheds no tears,
For his heart is bronze, and he does not know
That his temple has been for a thousand years
But a mound of dust where the bamboos grow.

So here he sits through the nights and the days,
And the sun goes up and down the sky;
But he often looks with a wistful gaze
At the crowds that always pass him by.

And his eyes half closed in a mystic dream
Of his poppy-land of long ago,
Turn back to the shores of the sacred stream
And the kneeling throng he used to know.

But he sometimes smiles as he sees the crowd
Of human folks that pass him by;
Then he wraps himself in his mystic shroud,—
And the sun once more goes down the sky.

IN A FOREST

Silver birch and dusky pine,
Reaching up to find the light
From the forest's gloomy night,
From the thicket where entwined
Stunted shrub and creeping vine,
From the damp where witch-fire glows
And the poison fungus grows,
High you lift your heads, O trees,
To the kisses of the breeze,
To the far-off vaulted sky,
To the clouds that pass you by,
To the sun that shines on high.

From the dusk of earthly night

Strive, O soul, to reach the light.

THE GOLDEN BOWL

On seeing a picture of a boy gazing at a golden bowl which among Eastern nations was a symbol of life.

In a dream he seems to lie
Gazing at the golden bowl,
Where dim visions passing by
Whisper vaguely to his soul.

Restless phantoms come and go
Crowned with cypress or with bay;
Sad or merry, swift or slow,
Tread they down the winding way.

Still the pageant winds along,—
Youth and age and love and lust,
Till at last the motley throng
Fades and crumbles into dust.

All in vain upon the bowl
Gaze the wondering, boyish eyes;
He shall read its hidden scroll
Only when it shattered lies.

For a wondrous light shall gleam
From the scattered fragments born.
Boy, dream on, for life's a dream,
Followed by a golden morn.

ON A SWISS MOUNTAIN

Lad, the mighty hills are calling,
Hills of promise gleaming bright,
And the floods of sunshine falling
Fill their deepest vales with light.

There the young dawn's golden fire
Beckons to a brighter day,
Untrod paths of youth's desire,
Heights unconquered far away.

Steep and dark and spectre-haunted
Winds the pathway to the height;
Sturdy youth with heart undaunted
Deems the toiling short and light.

Short or long, an easy Master,
Gives each tired toiler rest,
Counts not failure or disaster
If the striving be the best.

Go lad, go, 'tis Life that calls you,
Mates of old must soothe their pain,
Mindless of whate'er befalls you
If but honour still remain.

THE NUN'S GARDEN

They have made me a lovely garden
With walls that are rugged and gray;
They have filled it with pinks and roses
And lilies that bloom but a day;
But the walls are so high and frowning,
And the paths are so smooth and straight,
And even their smallest winding
Leads straight to the chapel gate.

I have planted a bed of pansies
Along by the chapel wall,
But though I have watered and weeded
They never have blossomed at all.
The sunshine of God cannot fall there,
For the chapel tower is too high;
So under its cold, gray shadow
My poor little blossoms die.

The Mother of God—in marble—
Gleams white where the willows toss,
And at the far end of the pathway
The dear Christ hangs on the cross;
And when the vespers are over,
If I have not sinned all day,
I may walk to the end of the garden
And kneel by the cross and pray.

But oh, for the wild, wild garden
That I knew in the days gone by,
Where the birches and elms and maples
Stretched up to the wind-swept sky;
Where, murmuring silver music,
The brook through the ferny dell
Ran down to the fields of clover,—
But hush, there's the vesper bell!

YOU WENT AWAY IN SUMMERTIME

You went away in summertime
When leaves and flowers were young,
And birds still lingered in the fields
With many songs unsung.

I'm glad it was in summertime
When skies were clear and blue,
I could not say good-bye to you
And bear the winter too.

TO A MODERN POET

Why must you sing of sorrow
When the world is so full of woe?
Why must you sing of the ugly?
For the ugly and sad I know.
Why will you sing of railways,
Of Iron and Steel and Coal,
And the din of the smoky cities?
For these will not feed my soul.

But sing to me songs of beauty
To gladden my tired eyes,—
The beauty of waving forest,

Of meadows and sunlit skies;
Sing me of childish laughter,
Of cradles and painted toys,
Of the sea and the brooks and the rivers,
And the shouting of bathing boys.

For the earth has a store of beauty
Deep hid from our blinded eyes,
And only the true-born poet
Knows just where the treasure lies.
So lead me from paths that are ugly,
From the dust of the city street.
To paths that are fringed with flowers,
Where the sky and the meadows meet.

And though Sorrow may walk beside me
To the far, far end of the road,
If Beauty but beckon me onward,
Less heavy will seem my load;
And led in the paths of beauty,
The world from its strife will cease;
For I know that the paths of beauty
Lead on to the paths of peace.

THE MYSTIC

The mystic sits by the sacred stream
Watching the sun as it mounts the sky;
And life to him is a haunting dream
Or a motley pageant passing by.

Sorrow and joy go on their way,
Passion and lust and love and hate;
Only a band of mummers they,
Blindly led by the hand of fate.

Though the pageant is real and himself the dream,
Though men are born and strive and die,
Yet the mystic sits by the sacred stream
Watching the sun go down the sky.

AD EPISCOPI COLLEGIUM

Here in the beautiful valley, here where the fair rivers meeting,
Mingle their waters in silence and wander afar to the sea,
Now does thy son returning offer thee homage and greeting,
Now do my wandering footsteps turn, O Mother, to thee.

Gleam in the light of the sunset cross and turret and tower,
Mirrored majestic and silent down by the willow-clad shore;
Far through the valley resounding, telling the evensong hour,
Echoes the old bell's tolling, calling me back once more.

Here in the halls where I lingered, there in the woods where I wandered,
On campus and river and hillside other young lives are aglow,
Dreaming the dreams that I dreamed, thinking the thoughts that I pondered
Deeming the pathway long and the swift-footed hours slow.

Rejoice young hearts in your youth, morn is the time for gladness,
Time to sow for a harvest which all too soon you must reap;
Bright be the hour of your noontide with never a shadow of sadness,
Golden the gleam of your evening with silence and rest and sleep.

Glows the west crimson and gold far down the glorious river,

Cross and tower and turret fade in the gloom of the night;
Yet will my heart remember both Mother and sons forever,
Far though the pathway may lead me, swift though the years in their flight.

A SONG OF THE HOMELAND

I'll sing you a song of the Homeland,
Though the strains be of little worth,
A song of our own loved Homeland,
Of the noblest land upon earth;
Where the tide of the sea from oceans three
Beats high in its triple might,
Where the winds are born in a southern morn
And die in a polar night.

I'll sing you a song of the Eastland,
Of the land where our fathers died,
Where Saxon and Frank, their feuds long dead,
Are sleeping side by side;
Where their sons still toil on the hard-won soil
Of the mighty river plain,
Where the censer swings and the Angelus rings,
And the old faith lives again.

I'll sing you a song of the Westland
Where the magic cities rise,
And the prairies clothed with their golden grain
Stretch under the azure skies;
Where the mountains grim in the clouds grow dim
Far north in the arctic land,
And the northern light in its mystic flight
Flares over the golden strand.

And I'll sing of the men of the Homeland
From the north and east and west,
The men who went to the Homeland's call,
(Ah, God, we have given our best!)
But not in vain are our heroes slain
If under the darkened skies,
All hand in hand from strand to strand
A sin-purged nation rise.

THE MIRROR

Your mirror, love, reflects your smile
As morn-flushed skies the coming dawn,
But oh, how blank the weary while
When you are gone!

My life's a mirror; with you near
'Tis filled with joy the live-long day,
But oh, how meaningless and drear
With you away!

I MADE A LITTLE SONG

I made a little song to-day,
And then I wandered down Broadway,

And saw the strange mad people run
And dance about me in the sun,
Or dive into the Underground
Like rabbits frightened by the sound
Of their own scampering through the grass;
I watched a thousand people pass,
But not a one did I hear say—
I made a little song to-day.

I made a little song to-day,
It sang beside me all the way
Until I reached the lower town,
Where crowds went surging up and down.
Their eyes were hard and faces white,
But some of them looked glad and bright,
Because the Bulls—or was it Bears?—
Had brought them gold for worthless shares;
But I was happier than they;—
I made a little song to-day.

BIRDS

I lie beneath a dark green pine
Where sunbeams scarcely ever shine,
And if I'm still as still can be
Shy forest birds come down to me.

Brown thrushes run along the ground,
Goldfinches flit without a sound,
And humming-birds with ruby throats
Alight to smooth their emerald coats.

And when some day alone I lie
Beneath the ever-changing sky,
I'm glad to know the birds will come
To welcome me to my new home.

For I will lie so still that they
Will linger by me all the day,
And lulled at evening by their song
I shall not find the darkness long.

THE BLUEBIRD'S WING

One day I saw the bluebird's wing
Agleam upon a waving sea
Of emerald-coloured timothy.
We walked together—you and I—
We saw the bluebird gliding by;
He came so near—the mad, wild thing—
We almost touched his sapphire wing,
But ere across our path he flew
He rose and vanished in the blue.

To-day I saw the bluebird's wing;
I heard wood-thrushes round me sing;
Wind-blown across the April sky,
Great swelling cloud-sails drifted by;
And on the sky-line's silver sheen
White birches danced in frills of green,
And all the world was mad with spring.
But you were miles and miles away;
The bluebird's wing was dull and gray.

THE ANSWER

Why do I lie upon the ground
And listen to the silver sound
Of water flowing from a spring?
It sings a song I cannot sing.

Why am I gazing at the sky
To watch the clouds go trailing by?
—Pearl ships upon a sapphire sea—
They seek a land unknown to me.

Why do I listen to the song
Of pine-boughs singing all day long?
The secret that their songs unfold
Ten thousand bards have left untold.

WILD GRAPE

WILD GRAPE

Beneath the crawling shadow
Of a crumbling temple to gods long-forgotten,
The wild grape twines amid the fragments
Of shattered pillars prone upon the ground,
And its dark leaves hide from sight the broken sculptures
Of faun and youth and maiden,
That once stood in the temple pediment,
Young, naked, beautiful.
In wild freedom it climbs over the carved acanthus
leaves of the crumbling columns,
And weaves a funeral wreath over their dead beauty.
The wild bees hum and buzz
Among the grape-flowers, heavy with honeyed perfume,
Under the drowsy noonday sun,
That spills its amber wine from a full goblet over the thirsting hillside.
Wanton and wild,
Like an unhappy lover
Clinging to the breast of his dead mistress,
The vine clings in voluptuous embrace
About the naked, pallid forms,
And mingles there with the eternal beauty
Of youth and age
And life and death.

TO A GREEK STATUE

Beautiful statue of Parian marble,
Dreaming alone in the northern sunlight,
Ivory-tinted, your slender arms beckon;
I follow, I follow.

Slender and white is your beautiful body,

Gleaming against the gray walls that surround you;
Like hyacinth-flowers beneath the snow sleeping
Is the dream you imprison;—

A dream of beauty that lingers forever,
A dream of the amethyst sky of midnight,
A dream of the jacinth blue of still waters,
Reflecting white temples.

Your white arms beckon, I follow, I follow,
My dream goes forth with your dream to wander;
You lead me into a moonlit garden
Beside the Ægean.

White in the moonlight gleams the temple
Cutting the purple sky with its pediment;
Diamonds and sapphires fall from the fountain;
Black are the cypress trees.

The gods are asleep in the silent temple;
Only the lapping of waves on the sea-sand
Mingles its drowsy rhythmical beating
With the bells of the fountain.

Soft lie the panther-skins on the cool grasses,
Not in vain are your white arms lifted;
And my dream of beauty and your dream eternal
Embrace in the moonlight.

OMNIPRESENCE

What are the great pine boughs
That stretch over me so lovingly
Shielding me from the heat?
They are the sheltering arms of God,
Visible
Against white drifting clouds.

And the trailing white clouds,—
What are they?
They are the tattered, worn-out clothes,
Bordered with broken pearls,
Cast off by the angels and archangels,
And by God himself.

MY CATHEDRAL

All my life long I have loved cathedrals;
Their gray, mysterious vaults and arches
Are the home of peace and beauty,
And sometimes, too, of hope.
Their roofs of stone and walls of painted glass
Shut out the noisy world,
And protect tired eyes from the glare of day.
Their singing-boys and organs thrill lonely hearts;
Their blue welling clouds of incense
Bring a pungent smell as of burning flowers,
And their gleaming candles
Beckon like lights of home across the twilight.

And now I have a cathedral all my own.
It has great pine trunks for pillars,
For painted windows red and golden leaves;
White slender birches are the singing-boys,

And the great organ the winds of God
Playing among the pine-boughs.
The prim little spruces are virgin nuns,
Telling their beads in drops of dew;
And the bare broken tree-stumps
Are hooded monks shattered by worldly storms,
But now in a safe refuge beneath my cathedral dome.
The white-throated sparrows chant prime for me;
The wood-thrush rings the vesper bell;
From beds of fern roll perfumed clouds of incense;
And from the great high altar of eternal rock,
God himself looks forth
In the red glory of the dawn.

THE FOUNDRY

Two monsters,
Iron and Coal,
Sleep in the darkness.
A poisonous scarlet breath blows over them,
And they awake hissing and writhing,
And spew forth blood-red vomit
In streams like fiery serpents.
Then from the reeking pools
A monstrous brood is born,
Black, strong, beautiful.
But we turn away our tired eyes,
And try to find the sky above the smoke-clouds.

SWISS SKETCHES

I.—AFTER SUNSET ON JURA

The Alps—
A mighty string of pearls
Which Day has laid aside—
Flaunt their alluring beauty
Upon the purple velvet of deep valleys,
Until night,
Stretching out black greedy fingers,
Steals them one by one.

II.—LUCERNE

From staring eyes
Of hotel windows,
From flaunting rich
And cringing poor,
From men and women
Drunken with wine, passion and money,
From tired Cook's tourists
Doing Switzerland on sixteen pounds,
From shrieking steamers
Tearing the shadow of Mount Pilatus into shreds,
From bands beating out brazen music
Under the twisted plane-trees,
From all that is poor and rich and ugly,
I lift my eyes unto the eternal hills
Which are outlined upon orange and crimson
By a Supreme Master with a brush of sunlight,
And there my soul finds peace.

III.—LAKE LEMAN

Like the High Priest of Jehovah
The lake, for the Festival of Beauty
Puts upon its blue garment
A gorgeous jewelled breast-plate bordered with gold.

Behind the cloudy pillar glows a fire;
My eyes can scarcely bear its glory,
As it burns crimson and scarlet
On jasper and flame-colored sard,
On ruby, red as sunset flame,
And topaz shot with golden lights.
Like the eternal fire of distant stars—
Blue, green and white,
Gleam diamond, emerald, sapphire,
Jacinth and beryl,
Onyx and green-banded agate,
And amethyst purple as wild iris-flowers.
Morning and evening
On the day of the great Festival
The High Priest of Beauty wears his jewelled breastplate,
And the chosen people, blinded by its glory,
Bow down and worship.

VISIONS

I.

I saw a vision of beauty.
My eyes looked through the mists of ages,
Back to the glorious years when Beauty itself was God.
And I saw the waves of the blue Ægean,
Turquoise, sapphire, jacinth and amethyst mingled,
And I heard the singing of the water,
As of playing of distant pipes
By slender shepherd lads among the hills.
Then I turned away from the shore
And I saw the pediment of a great temple
Standing white against the sky,
And beneath the pediment rows of marble columns
Like giant trees in a forest of frozen beauty.
Statues gleamed amid the dark foliage of cypress and olive trees,
Statues of gods and goddesses, youths and maidens,
Horses of ruddy bronze and chariots of beaten brass.
My feet trod the steps of the marble stairway,
And I went a worshipper to the great temple,
Whose burnished doors stood wide ajar
Gleaming like the portal of a dream city;
I lifted my arms in adoration,
And my soul drank its fill
From the pure Greek fountain-head of beauty.

II.

I saw a vision of faith.
My eyes were turned to a mediæval city
Of crowded low-roofed houses,
From which there rose a great cathedral,
With walls of chiselled stone
And spires that pierced into the blue.
Here men had wrought with hands and heart and brain
Long years in wood and stone,
Until they reared a gorgeous temple to do honour to their God.
I entered in,

And saw the walls a gleam with painted glass,
 More brilliant than the jewels of eastern kings;
 I heard the organ like winds sweeping across the sea,
 And the voices of the singing-boys
 Like soft ripples on the velvet sand.
 With golden cross and smoking censers
 And priests in robes of scarlet and purple,
 The procession passed along;
 Then the great sweating throng
 Bowed low upon the stony floor before the Host,
 And when the echoing music
 Had vanished in the soaring vault above,
 The crowd went forth from the gorgeous gloom
 Comforted, into the golden sun-light.
 My soul, too, was comforted,
 For it had drunk deep
 From the pure mediæval well of faith.

III.

I saw a vision of love.
 Upon the field of battle
 Amid dust and smoke and shrouds of poisonous vapour
 Red streams of youthful blood were poured upon the ground,
 Generously,
 Joyfully,
 That the world might not die from its festering wounds,
 But might drink health and life
 From these pure, youthful streams.
 Then I stood awed and dumb,
 For here was love supreme.

IV.

I saw a vision of death.
 Silence held my feet with clinging hands,
 And Darkness put heavy fingers across my eyes.
 Then Darkness raised her hands, and I saw in the gray shadows
 A great night-moth with sable folded wings;
 It seemed asleep upon a purple flower,
 But as I watched,
 Slowly it spread its wings,
 And from them shone a gleam of crimson dawn,
 And all the world was drenched in showers of light.
 Then with his flaming wings outspread
 The great moth sailed away,
 Like a scarlet boat upon a dawn-swept sea,
 Leaving behind a wake of golden light.
 And I know that my vision of death
 Was only a vision of beauty.

JAPANESE PRINTS

I.—THE LADY WITH THE YELLOW FAN

O little lady with the yellow fan
 Why are you so sad?
 Why does a tear stand
 Like a tea-flower bud upon your cheek?
 Your dress is of blue and scarlet silk,
 Your slippers are embroidered with gems,
 A gold and emerald butterfly has lighted in your hair,
 Your serving-maid stands near
 Awaiting your command,
 And if you lifted but one slender finger
 A chariot would come and carry you away to your father's palace.

Why are you so sad?

It is because the ships beside the shore
Spread their dark sails to the sea-blowing breeze;
The tide is high, and soon will set toward the distant islands,
And there is a gleam of swords and armour,
For the soldiers go to war beyond the seas.

II.—CAGED BIRDS

There are yellow birds within the cage;
Beside its gilded bars there stand the women
Whom the Great Prince loves to honour.
They wear silken robes and jewels in their hair,
And live in a pretty pink and yellow house.
But the women look not at the captive singing-birds,
Nor listen to their song,
Their eyes follow the flight of two white-breasted doves,
Winging their way towards the wind-torn clouds.

III.—WISTERIA

Why do you peer at me, old man,
With eyes half shut,
From underneath the purple lanterns of your wisteria vine?
Your face is but a mask,
Showing neither joy nor sorrow;
But I know you bend your head to listen
When the wild geese go honking towards the south,
And your eyes grow wide with sadness,
When the last petal falls from the wisteria flower.
You, too, love beauty,
Or else why twine the purple wisteria about your door-posts,
Or pin a yellow gem upon your lilac gown?

A VENETIAN PALACE

In quivering translucent light,
Her head resting upon the blue pillow of the sky,
Her feet upon the floor of the smoke-blue water,
Sleeps Beauty,
Turned to stone by a miracle of art.
And though she never stirs,
But slumbers on in a worn and faded robe
Rose-colored and bordered with old lace of ivory white,
We come from far-off cities,
And we turn to her our hungry eyes,
Even away from sunlit sky and sea.

JAPANESE IRIS

A great prince of the ancient days
Once loved a little geisha girl,
Who wore a silken robe,
Blue as the waters of the lily-pond.
But the Great Prince was sent to a distant island,
And the little geisha girl
Never put on her robe of blue again.

And you, O purple iris with the golden bands,

Are the soul of the Great Prince;
And you, O slender one,
Blue as lapis lazuli,
Are the soul of the little dancing-girl;
And you nestle at last
Beside your stately purple Prince,
Here in the sunshine of my northern garden.

JAPANESE LOVE-SONGS

(In the Hokku manner)

I.

The white lotus-flower
Grows in the depths of the pool,
Love grows in my heart.

II.

The peony flames crimson.
My heart's blood is far redder
Than its flame.

III.

Sere iris leaves and dead blossoms.
Mist and drizzle of rain.
Where art thou?

IV.

Darkness. Shadows in my soul.
The vision of your face.
Dawn and music.

V.

Hush of night. Perfumed breath of night.
A moth with flaming wings.
Come beloved.

CUPS OF JADE

The mists lie along the iris-purple valleys;
The little wooden bridge,
Where the waterfall rings its silver bells,
Is a bow of darkness;
The dust of the highway is gray as ashes under our feet;
A cloud of night-birds
Dots the orange sky.

All day our paths have led us side by side
Along the steep hot highways.
It is cool evening now,
And the temple bells call you one way
And the silence calls me another.

We come to the white door-posts of your house,
We leave our dusty shoes beside the little pool among the iris leaves.
We sit upon woven mats and you give me tea to drink
From a cup of sea-green jade.
Now is my tongue heavy with thoughts I cannot utter,
For I know that to-morrow
My path will not lead over the steep hill,

Nor yours down to the deep valley,
For we have drunk together from cups of sea-green jade.

THE LOON'S CRY

Outside the tent
Darkness and giant trees swaying in the wind.
The lake is moaning in its troubled sleep.
And far across the lazy lapping waves,
Above the crooning of the wind,
I hear a wild loon crying,
Like a weary soul alone on the dark water.

Inside the tent
Your gentle breathing,
Untroubled by crooning wind or wailing loon;
Your face is lighted by the embers of the fire.

Fainter and farther away echoes the loon's cry,
But now it is only the voice of Loneliness
Bidding me farewell,
As it passes away into the night.

You stir in your sleep softly
And turn your face to me,—
And the loon cries no more.

PRAYER

I.

A wind-bell hung at the gateway of an ancient temple
And played the music taught it by the wind,
At times soft, like bubbles breaking in a fountain,
When the breeze of summer night caressed it,
Then loud and jangling when the typhoon swept across the sea,
Or low and moaning when the temple gongs sounded for prayer.
And the people,
Who never heard the music of the wind,
Paused to listen to the wind-bell,
And then passed on through the temple gate,
With music echoing in their ears.

O Maker of all music,
Let me be as the wind-bell by the temple.

II.

Beyond the temple gate
A gleaming pool lay among the iris leaves.
At dawn it glowed like a great rose upon the garden's breast,
At sunset flamed like a crimson peony.
And the people,
Who never lifted up their eyes to see the beauty of the sky,
Would linger as they passed from prayer
To watch the sunrise or the sunset fade upon the pool,
And then turn their steps to the gray dusty streets,
With rose and gold and crimson in their eyes.

O Maker of all beauty,
Let me be as the iris-bordered pool.

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