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by James E. Pickering**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CALL OF THE MOUNTAINS, AND
OTHER POEMS ***

The Call of the Mountains
and other Poems

By

James E. Pickering

Author of

"The King's Temptation," "The Cap of Care," etc.

London

A. C. Fifield, Clifford's Inn, E.C.

1913

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PLYMOUTH

The Cap of Care

By

James E. Pickering

"Mr. Pickering's metrical faculties are as deft and cunning as those of anyone now writing verse."—*Athenæum*.

A. C. Fifield, 13 Clifford's Inn, E.C.

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The Call of the Mountains

Under the shade of the Kursaal veranda
Idly I follow the flight of the seagulls,
Gleaming like snow when their wings catch the sunshine,
While from the palm-house adjacent is wafted
Music half drowned in a babel of voices,
Fitting the mode of this temple of follies.

Far though the mountains, their influence, ever
Changeful in temper, from sombre to smiling,
Constant in wileful and mystic allurements,
Rouses unrest and a strange fascination.

Limpid and blue are the waters of Lemman
Clear in the deepness, translucent and shining,
Blue as the ether's ineffable azure,
Bright in the glow of the midsummer sunshine.
Cleaving the air with their palpitant pinions,
Wheeling and drifting, the beautiful seagulls
Fly with the grace of unconscious perfection,
Crying exultant and wild in a chorus.

Are you not fit for the realm of immortals,
To float on the winds of the gardens Elysian?

Or must you hover a little while longer—
Wandering souls in a state of probation—
Half-way uplifted beyond our defilement,
Half-way removed from the land of the blessed?

Far in the distance beyond the blue water,
Rises the hoary old father of mountains,
Rugged and scarred with antiquity's furrows,
Crowned with the snows of a million winters.
Low in the shade of his ponderous presence,
Dappling the slopes, are the homesteads of peasants,
Each with its cloud of blue vapour ascending:
And sweetly the bells across the green pastures
Answer each other with voices persistent,
Telling the herdsman the tale of his charges.
Grim is the smile of the white-headed mountain
For toilers below in the slumbering valley,
Grim is the glance with a touch of derision,
Seeming to say to his towering brothers—
Catogne and the broad-shouldered heights of the Midi,
"Iguanodon,—Mastodon,—Man,—in their passing
Serve but as signs on the path of the ages."
Softly the splash of the waters of Lemane
Sounds from the rough-tumbled stones at its margin:
Gently the zephyrs play over its surface,
Making it glitter with myriads of sparklets.
Swiftly the barques trim their sails in the sunshine—
Sails high and slender that swell to the breezes,
White as the snow on the breast of the Jungfrau—
Mirrored in whiteness upon the blue water.

As I sat watching the lake and the mountains,
Slowly a haze like a curtain of muslin,
Flimsy and fine like a texture of cobweb,
Drifted and rose till it shut out the bases
And bulk of the mountains across the still water,
Whilst high above it the crests and sierras
Stood out as castles and walls of enchantment,
Raised in the air like king Solomon's city,
Held up aloft by invisible genii.
Then in the faintly drawn lines of escarpment,
Battlements, pinnacles, turrets and bastions
Sprang into being, and fancy, untrammelled,
Pictured a palace with walls, and a fortress
Beleaguered and stormed by a shadowy army,
Massed under pennons seen dim through the vapour.

Over the drawbridge a desperate sortie
Made by the knights of the castle invested
Brings the foes quickly in conflict together.
Plumes white and restless like foam on the breakers
Drift to and fro with the tide of the battle;
Falchions and maces and curtaxes gleaming
A moment aloft, strike sparks in descending
On corslet and casque and dented escutcheon,
Whilst out of the contest, with stumbling footsteps
The wounded are led sore stricken and helpless.
Ladies in saracenet, arabesque brodered
With blossoms that climb fantastic in colour,—
Stiff flowers of blazonry's formal convention
That rise from the hem to the throat in profusion,
Where carcanets flash on bosoms unquiet,—
Look from their casements with eyes full of wonder,
Down on the conflict that rages below them,
Fierce in the shock and the heat of encounter,
Hearing the war-cries and clashing of weapons,
Winding of horns, and the groans of the dying.
Till all was lost in the thickening curtain,
Veiled by the mist were my golden romances.

Once when a snowstorm swept over lake Lemane
Filling the distance with wildly tossed snowflakes,
I pictured a scene in the heart of the mountains,
Hidden in shadows, unknown to the climber,
Out of the range of Humanity's footsteps.

There is the cave where the slumbering ice god
Hides from the gaze of the wandering stranger,
Shut in the depths of the mountain's recesses,
Rent long ago by the force of upheavals
In the wild turmoil and labour of earthquake.
There sits the god of the cold everlasting,
Guarding the spirits of men who have perished
In their endeavours to master the secrets
Of paths that have never by footsteps been trodden.
In the ice temple his figure majestic
Looms from a throne that through aeons uncounted
Has stood in the gloom and the silence eternal.
Weird is the throng of the spirits in thralldom:
Silent they steal from their icy sepulture,
Slow-pacing figures unchanged and unchanging:
By violent death, swift, ruthless and lonely,
Sentenced to wander for ever in darkness,
Pent in the masterful ice god's dominion.
Primitive hunters with flint-headed arrows,
Whose limited minds ignored the distinction
Engendered by knowledge, of good and of evil:
Acting by impulse and guided by instinct:
Living in caves like the bears and the foxes,
Facing with cunning and courage their quarry,
Guarding their women and feeding their children,
Almost as fierce as the creatures they hunted.
Men who came later throughout the long ages,
Wandering fugitives driven by fortune
Far from their homes to the wild desolation,
Slaves of illusion that lures to destruction:
Some with a love for adventure and daring,
Some to escape from the ills that pursued them,
Some in response to the strong fascination
That calls from the heights of the untrodden mountains,
All destined by fate, that watches unceasing,
To die in the darkness forgotten for ever,
Pent in the ice god's immutable kingdom.

Wafted by breezes, my white-sailed felucca
Slipped through the blueness to where the grim stronghold
Of Chillon keeps ever in grateful remembrance
The patriot Bonivard, champion of freedom.
The pillar of pain where, writhing in torment,
The captives were scourged at cruelty's bidding,
Is still to be seen, an eloquent witness.
Tenantless now is the cavernous dungeon
Where wretches awaited through darkness unending
The dawn of their last and dreaded to-morrow.
Stripped of its horrors, the chamber of torture
Echoes no more to the shrieks of its victims,
And death's grim abode where agony ended
Is free from the crimes that redden its records.
There by the column of stone in the dungeon
Where Bonivard lay to pine through the seasons
Of six weary years, I mused on his story.
Undaunted by death's ever-threatening shadow,
Unconquered though insolent tyranny triumphed,
Chilled in the summer and frozen in winter,
Famished, neglected and loaded with fetters,
Yet borne up within by courage unflinching,
Supported by Faith when Hope had departed,
Scorning to murmur, he waited with patience.
Morning's faint light through the narrow embrasure,
The wandering cry of a sea-mew in freedom
Heightened the gloom of his roughly hewn prison,
Making a summons to death a deliverance.
Night fell about him in Stygian darkness,
While the faint lap of the waters of Leman,
Beating the ramparts with maddening persistence,
Whispered despair in the still isolation.
What were his thoughts when the vault of his prison
Rang with glad cries in the glare of the torches?
Breaking the silence, dispelling the shadows
That darkened his life and threatened his reason,
What were his thoughts at the moment of freedom?

When round him a tempest of passion was raging,
An unloosened storm of passionate feeling,
When men incoherent and hoarse from the conflict
Fought for the honour of breaking his fetters,
Leaving him breathless with hearty embraces,
Weak and unmanned in the sudden revulsion,
Carried away by the flood of emotion,
With something unknown that stifled expression,
That silenced his voice and heaved in his bosom.

Strong is the spell of the dream-haunted mountains,
Ruddy with gold in the glory of sunrise,
Purple and silver and blue in the daytime,
Tinged by the amethyst splendours of sunset,
Gloomy, majestic and dark in the twilight,
Mystic by moonlight, ethereal, airy,
Changeful and fickle in hues as the opal,
Under the mutable lights and the shadows,
Ever alluring with subtle attraction.

Far, far away are the waters of Leman
Whence I have fled at the call of the mountains.
Here in the valley where rushes a torrent,
Constant and cold, be it summer or winter,
A village lies hid and hither the climbers,
Strangely alike in their eager impatience,
Wearing the look of enwrapped expectation,
Pause ere they start on their perilous journey.
Hemming me round, the implacable mountains
Shut out the world and confine me in durance,
Bending my soul to the yoke of their bondage,
Dwarfing my self and my little emotions,
Waking desire to escape limitations
And barriers imposed by narrow horizons.
Rugged, majestic, they tower above me,
As lonely and pensive I gaze in the torrent,
Wondering now at the summons insistent,
No longer in dreams and roving of fancy,
But weighted with impulse, defying resistance,
Rousing unrest like a spirit of evil.
So, as I linger awhile in the village,
Completely I know each day brings me nearer
To what lies beyond, in the regions of silence.

Now it is over. The lights of the village,
The children at play, the clink from the smithy,
The gurgle and rush of the hurrying torrent,
The rattle of wheels, the tinkle of cowbells,
The inn's open window whence converse in fragments
Floats out with the odours of beer and tobacco,
All welcome me back with familiar voices.
Here time moves onward with rhythmic precision:
Breakfast and dinner, and bed for the darkness,
With Sunday to part one week from another:
Spring time and winter, the snow and the sunshine,
And sooner or later a cross in the churchyard.
Time lacks proportion away in the mountains.
What is a day or an hour or a lifetime
Gauged by the ebb and the flow of the ages
Shown in the tidemarks on crags prehistoric?
If, as men say, time is measured by heartbeats,
I wandered through years of vivid emotions.
Pelion and Ossa, by arrogant Titans
Profanely uplifted to challenge Olympus,
Repeated themselves in the blueness above me.
Sunsets and dawns such as glowed on the marshes,
Silurian haunts of the early creation,
Long ere the age of humanity's advent,
Gleamed through the vapours and red exhalations
Rising from bottomless pits to encolour
Weirdly the matrix, volcanic, primeval,
Riven and torn in the birth-throes of Cosmos.
Slippery ledges uneven and narrow,
Through rarefied air that maddens the pulses,
Traacherous footpaths inviting destruction,

Where fear in the heart disorders the senses.
Vertiginate chasms, abysmal, terrific,
Unfathomed and sheer with never a foothold,
Compelling the gaze with cold fascination.
Stretches of billowy acres of whiteness
Dimming the eyes with their endless expanses;
Ridges upstanding in ice walls cemented
By glacial pressure of slow-moving masses.
Caverns with ice shapes, blue-tinted, translucent:
Columns and altars and figures fantastic,
Imagined in dreams or pictured in fever,
Softly illumed by the moonlight's reflection.
There is the haunt of the evil ice maidens,
The servants of Death, who lure with their beauty,
Who bathe in the stream of the glacier water,
The glacial water that flows through the caverns,
Silent and deep as the river of Lethe.
These memories hold me. I live in a fever.
The air that I breathe, the influence round me
Are charged with a strange and volatile essence
That throbs in my veins and quickens my breathing.
Held by the mountains, I languish in bondage
Under the masterful sway of their presence.
Restless though weary I dream of their perils,
Slipping down chasms with death at the bottom,
Or over the desolate ice fields I wander,
Hopeless, forgotten and lost in the snowdrifts,
Wandering ever past hope of redemption.
Sometimes I swing with a pendulum's measure,
Fitfully swayed by the wind o'er a chasm
That gapes far below, relentless and cruel,
Conscious of all in the terrible moments
That pass till I drop to the doom that is waiting
Far in the depths of the yawning crevasses,
And wake at the instant supreme of destruction.

To-morrow at dawn I fly from the village
Back to the peace of the waters of Leman.

Gone, gone at last, is the morbid obsession!
Gone to the shade in the regions of Limbo.
Far, far away, o'er the waters of Leman,
Mistily outlined and faint in the distance,
Threatening no longer, the dream-haunted mountains
Lazily whisper of rest and contentment.

Softly the splash of the glittering fountain
Falls on the night with the scent of mimosa,
Mingled with polyglot phrases and laughter,
Marking the pause 'twixt a waltz and mazurka.
Soft are the lamps in the Kursaal rotunda
Lighting discreetly the hall of lost footsteps
Whose gleaming mosaics are painted with garlands,
Blossoms exotic, luxuriant, languid,
Red as the souls of the people about them,
Hinting at passions through crimson and purple,
Fitting the vogue of this temple of pleasure.
On a divan in the hall where the idlers
Promenade slowly, in converse together,
I sit all alone in calm contemplation,
Hearing the orchestra faint in the distance
And the croupier's voice from his chamber seductive,
Parrot-like crying in stale iteration,
Summons and challenge across the green table.
Keen-eyed old gamesters who prowl round the players,
Seeking a pigeon to pluck at their leisure:
Black-whiskered barons with blurred reputations
Smirking at B. and his girls from Chicago:
Swaggering captains at best detrimental:
A country-bred youth just come to a fortune,
Trying in vain to conceal his amazement:
Couples awaiting the Absolute's fiat,
Now in pursuit of a flying illusion:
Hebrews from Frankfort and bankers from Paris
Chatting to ladies resplendent in diamonds;

A burghess of London whose wife says: "Disgraceful,"
But lingers to study Parisian fashions:
Gamblers inveterate bent to a system,
Silent, unheeding, absorbed in their figures:
Well-groomed young fellows, light-hearted and careless,
Come for the dance and the fun of flirtation,
Bright-eyed and merry, unconsciously breathing
The poisonous air of sepulchres whited.
Perdita, watchful and guardedly smiling,
Trying to lessen the distance between us,
Wafts me a sign with a spray of verbena.
Is she an angel, a beast or a demon,
Or spirit incarnate that onward is passing
To higher avatars by long transmigration?
Ah! how it warms one, this human deflection,
This touch with familiar follies and foibles,
After the limitless space of the aeons,
Out of the measure of time as we know it,
Far in the distant and echoless ages,
Austere, and untouched by our passing emotions,
Where I have wandered in lonely remoteness
Under the passionless spell of the mountains.

Cold and relentless, eternally lasting!
Silent inscriptions in cryptical cipher!
Unbroken record of time since creation,
Whose secret is hid from human conception.
How small are the things humanity prizes,
The feverish joys of passion and pleasure,
That pass like a dream to dusky oblivion!
How short is man's life compared with the ages
That frown from the face of the mystical mountains,
Far in the blue o'er the waters of Leman.

The Old Manor House

The rusted gates whose forgings fine
Enlace a gilded coronet,
Now dim in lustreless decline,
Groaned as I passed the lichened shapes
Of rampant griffin on each side,
Stiff with heraldic, stony pride.
Then through the grass-grown drive I passed
With ancient oaks on either hand,
Throwing their shadows dark and vast
Upon the bracken at their feet
Where rabbits peeped in fear and ran
From the rare sound of living man.
For here no more the sumptuous train
Displays the pomp of falconry;
No more, besprent with mire and rain,
The messenger-at-arms rides in:
Nor, with his retinue of knights
Some great man at the house alights.

Above the portico
Of the great silent house,
The quarterings' tinctures glow,
Blazoning its history,
From the old Sieur de Caulx,
Whose heavy Norman sword
Helped Harold's overthrow,
And whose long line of sons
Stretches, like a shadow,
Thrown in the eventide,
Through the old folio
Where illumined pages
Bravely the records show,
Till the last, lonely heir

Was carried down below,
To the cold marble vaults
A century ago.

A gallery o'erlooks the hall,
A gallery where minstrels played
And with their lutes sweet music made,
While from the weapons on the wall,
Reflected shone the lights that glowed
Above the hospitable board
When each successive, generous lord
His loyalty or grandeur showed.
Kings feasted there with stately dames,
Ambassadors and Cardinals
Who, cheered with wine and madrigals,
Fed with their fancies amorous flames.
And at some great eventful scene
Full many a dance the chamber graced,
Pavanes and sarabands were paced,
And minuets when Anne was queen.

My footsteps echoing from the panelled walls,
Stayed the long sleep of years,
Stirring the thick, accumulated dust
To movement in the ray of light that falls,
From a half-shuttered oriel which appears
Between the rafters, just
Where a stone mullion its carved apex rears.
Faint voices whispered round me as I stood
Spellbound and listening there:
The ghostly strains of melodies forgot,
The happy laughter of fair womanhood:
Children in noisy play, without a care:
Fierce cries with passion hot,
Triumphant some, and some wild with despair.

Leaving the chamber so haunted by voices,
Fearful, I hastened to where the great staircase
Rears its proud height in a double ascension
Till it is hid in the deepening shadows.
Stiffly upstanding on each chief baluster,
Absently gaze the historical griffins,
Plunged in their silent and deep meditation.
Many a Caulx have they seen pass before them,
Long generations in motley procession,
Halting and feeble, the sick and the aged:
Sanguine and joyous, the young and the hopeful:
Manhood triumphant, crestfallen or thoughtless:
Urbane and discreet, my lady's confessor:
Stealthily creeping, the villainous traitor:
Quick and impatient, the fortunate lover:
Children unconscious of aught but their playthings:
Nobles in ermine, and simpering ladies:
Then, the one end of all human emotions,
Slow-pacing figures who bear on their shoulders,
Silenced for ever, some lord of the staircase.

The steward, from the all-pervading gloom,
Flung wide the shutters of the drawing-room,
Showing a terrace graced with urn and faun
And steps that led to a neglected lawn,
Whilst rounded hill and valley far were seen
Lit by the summer's radiating sheen.
The room's magnificence, its noble size
And faded splendour filled me with surprise.
A costly pierglass in its tarnished frame,
Which once reflected gallant squire and dame,
Now with fidelity displayed the clear
And gleaming lustres of the chandelier,
Pendent, with ten score sconces silver chased,
From the high ceiling which a master graced
With courtly scenes wherein could be descried
Ancestral figures in their pomp and pride.
The sunlight played on gilded girandole,
On silver candlestick and stiff console,

All of that period when here befell
The scene on which the steward loves to dwell,
Showing the floor's dark stain of sombre red
And how it came about that blood was shed.
I marked the punchbowls, full of leaves and dust,
A slim sword, silver-hiked, flecked with rust:
A daintily escutcheoned chiffonier,
Inlaid with shell and finished with veneer:
Timepieces silent, set in ormolu:
The damask screens of faded red and blue.
And, to enhance the chamber's stately air,
Great Chippendale had made each slender chair.
The stream of life, arrested, seemed to wait
A magic word to set it flowing straight.

Heated by wine and ombre-play,
Two hundred years ago or more,
Three gamblers, on a morning gray,
Quarrelled about a questioned score.

Two blades were soon engaged. A tierce,
Ill parried, stretched a swordsman low,
Who lunged with failing point but fierce,
And dying, dropped before his foe.

And when the growing light of morn
Lit the Venetian mirror's face,
He died, 'twixt pain and passion torn,
And left a curse upon the place.

And from that day the records show
A slowly creeping, sure decline
That, just a hundred years ago,
Ended the once illustrious line.

Sometimes upon the dusky hour
That comes before the sun's first rays,
When things occult display their power,
A strange light on the chamber plays

That is not of the earth or sky,
While hurrying footsteps come and go
And then into the silence die
With whispered mutterings hoarse and low.

A sliding panel, by the wainscot hid,
Showed, in the unmarked thickness of the walls,
A narrow passage and a secret stair
That brought us to the level of the moat.
Long dry and choked with bracken and with brier,
It made a rugged pathway to a court
Where stands the ruin of an ancient tower,
Fenced in with walls pierced by an entrance low.
"Here," said my guide, "when James the first was king,
"A daughter of the house, through three long years,
"Was by her father close a prisoner kept
"Because she would not wed the man he chose.
"Stern and unyielding, as became her race,
"She set her will against her father's strength.
"Through all the time she saw no living face:
"No sound of human voice, except her own,
"Fell on her ear. She nothing saw but clouds
"That swept athwart the cold and pitiless sky,
"And blinking stars at night that rose and set
"Across the little window in the roof:
"Then she went mad and on the stony walls
"One day beat out her life in frenzied rage,
"And refuge found beyond her father's power."

Time passed, and it was late
When once again I stood
Outside the ancient gate,
Where the stone griffins ramped,
Cold as relentless fate
Changeless as destiny.

And I said: "'Tis in vain,
Guardians impassible,
That ye your watch maintain
Over the ghosts of Caulx,
While the years wax and wane
Century by century.

"For behold! I have been
Among them and have heard
Their voices, I have seen
With swift-discerning eyes
Over their wide demesne
Of human history."

The Science Master

"We build," he said, "on elemental things!"
And paused to glance around the silent class.
"On facts well ascertained which insight brings,
"And which in due development must pass
"From the first phase, remote, removed,
"To the Effect. Thus, link by link, we trace
"The lengthening chain of Verity, full proved
"By Knowledge, Reason, Logic, each in place."
It seemed conclusive to us students then.
The man's prestige had weight. Authority
Made him for us above all other men;
He was the head of our academy.
His calm assumption and incisive way,
Admitting no alternative nor doubt,
As he intoned his long familiar lay,
Made his pronouncements clear as if cut out
Of crystal, cold with mathematic test,
Through which he viewed complacently the span
And limit of all scientific quest,
Quite heedless of the growing range of man.
His narrow field so finished and complete,
His standards and his logic's hampering line
Look small where now the long perspectives meet,
Converging in a new horizon's shine.
All this was years ago. What would he say,
I wonder, if he could revisit us
And, with the knowledge of the present day,
See space and pain reduced to minimus,
Electric currents hand in hand with steam,
Men borne in ships across the trackless air,
The widening story of the earth's old scheme
Told in its strata, and, with arduous care,
The age of man thrust back unfathomed years,
New elements, a new chronology
And growing lore that year by year appears
To show how distant is finality?
It sets my fancy roving and I try
In idle hours to think what may befall.
Naught seems impossible, no thought too high,
No dream too mad, to realise it all.
What, for example, is the human mind?
Whence comes it, great or small, at some man's birth?
A fool's or sage's, base or all refined!
What holds it till his body turns to earth?
And whither goes it with the failing breath?
And is the Aura's essence to remain
Ever elusive at the hour of death,
To perish or another home attain?
Or, with close knowledge of man's growing germ,
Shall we not train it and direct its course,
As now we cultivate the floral sperm,
And simple weeds to complex beauty force?
Life is a thing of phases manifold,

By shades diminishing from high to low,
Man, protoplasm, beast, all we are told,
To perish in an equal overthrow.
Our view of life at best is incomplete.
We judge by its effect and action, blind
To its real essence, as to that we meet,
Acting unseen, when wire to wire we bind.
Think of what might be, once this secret known,
Full knowledge of Life's spark, and with the power
To rescue from Death's dark and silent zone
The souls of some great men whose natures tower
Above their fellows and can ill be spared
From some great task far-reaching and benign.
I hear a reader say: "This man has dared
"To claim for us an attribute divine!
"Our times are in God's hands." And I reply:
We do not hesitate to take a life,
The claims of social law to satisfy,
And punish men whose minds with crime are rife.
What then more fitting, given the knowledge there,
To lengthen lives that worthy ends fulfil,
And measure by new standards just and fair
The worth of life as it is good or ill?
Have we exhausted chemistry's domain?
Squeezed dry the elements we say we know?
And does the spinning universe contain
No more our theories to overthrow?
How far does gravitation serve our needs—
The force that keeps each planet in its place,
Resistless, constant, yet with varying speeds,
For ever acting in unbounded space?
Some day perhaps pent man will learn to brave
An alien atmosphere, and, from afar,
Of weight and distance master, not the slave,
Bring us new wisdom from some distant star.

Through the Centuries

While yet the Saxons ruled, a puissant Thane
Made with his unkempt band of mounted spears
A seizin of a hide of forest land
Whereon he built a house of ample size,
With dining-hall and bowers and sleeping-lofts,
And stables shutting in a stone-paved yard:
And round the whole he set a ponderous fence
Of sharpened stakes fast bound with metal bands.
And "Yan, the Wulf," for thus the Thane was known,
Called the place "Wulfden" in his savage tongue.
And here, year after year, he lived at ease,
Oft making sallies for a cattle raid,
Or fighting with some other such as he,
To come back weary at the fall of night,
Driving a herd before him, and his men
Sweating beneath the spoil of plundered foes.
Once as he sat at supper in his hall,
Bemused with mead and satisfied with food,
There came a wandering bedesman to his gate
Craving permission "in Fayre Jesu's name"
To build a church of stone within the shade
Of his protection. And, in generous mood,
The Thane gave gruff assent; and time slipped by.

Then William swept the land, and, to reward
One of his knights, gave him the Wulf's demesne
To hold in fee, and on the Saxon's land
Arose a fortress with embattled walls,
With donjon, keep and moat and tilting-yard,
To hold in thralldom all the country-side.
But still was left the little Saxon church,

Unchanged save that the Norman owner gave
New consecration in his patron's name,
St. Martinus of Tours, a warrior saint
Who guarded through the centuries his race.

Then in the War of Roses came the crash
That brought extinction to the feudal name
And desolation to its crumbling home.
And yet, though scarred by time and gray with age,
The little church of Saxon days remained
The emblem of a never-dying faith.

The years rolled by and then there came a day
Which gave a new possessor to the place,
A nobleman in favour with that queen
Who loved a witty tongue and ready sword
When coupled with good looks and brave attire.
He built a great Elizabethan pile,
The ground-plan shaped to form the royal E,
Conforming to the fashion of the times
When loyalty spoke even from silent stone.
And he, to please his lady's pious whim,
(Though ten years wed, he called her Sweetheart still)
Forbore to raze the chapel to the ground,
But stayed with flying buttress either side,
Repaired the roof and made it to her mind.
And there they lie, both in one marble tomb
On which their effigies with clasping hands
Bear witness to an everlasting love.

And when vacation brings its hours of rest
I sometimes sit within the Saxon church
And muse upon the changes time has brought
Save to the faith that reared the little shrine,
And still builds churches "in Fayre Jesu's name."

Winter

'Tis winter and the darkening skies
Awake regretful memories
Of wooded hill and sunlit plain,
Ringing with anthems to the sun
Until his arching course was run
And nightingales took up the strain.

The trees, then dense with leaves and flowers,
Stood through the long and smiling hours,
Housing an honest little folk,
Throbbing with life by day and night,
Whose voices, vibrant with delight,
Of happy labour ever spoke.

The trees now spread their haggard arms,
Bared of their pristine, leafy charms,
To cold and unresponsive skies
That neither smile nor weep, but chill
With cold indifference, and kill
Hope that all nature underlies.

A dreary moan floats on the wind
From the gaunt oaks, that, ill defined,
Show spectral shapes against the sky
From which the fleeting day has flown
While dead leaves on the earth are strown
To mark the summer's mortuary.

Where are the thousand things of life
That erstwhile made the place all rife
With busy hum and restless wing
And turmoil of a world of love?

The blackbird on her nest above,
Below, the beetle tunnelling.

Gone with the happiness I knew
Because the heavens were always blue,
While the sun shone from day to day
And winter was not. 'Twas as far
And nebulous as yonder star
That throws its cold and sickly ray

Where once a glorious flood of light
Ceased only with the falling night.
Gloom hovers where triumphant joy
Beatified each passing hour,
For Winter now with ruthless power
Fulfils its mission to destroy.

The Voice of Winter.

"I bring not death but rest to flower and tree,
"And nurse the flame divine, Vitality,
"That burns immortal since primeval night
"When the Creator said: 'Let there be light!'
"And loosed the sun upon his blazing way
"To roll for ever through an endless day."

Pain and Death

Amid the fields of Asphodel
Musing one day by chance,
Imperious Jove
Let memory rove
And turned his gaze austere
To where Arcadian shepherds dwell,
The land of song and dance,
Where Death was not
And Time forgot
To send the rolling year:
Where man, untried by trouble's test,
Found the supreme of life in rest.

Immortal man without a care
Rivalled the gods above:
Free, effortless,
In sheer idlesse
Aping divinity.
So he was made by Jove to share
A mortal life and love
By anguish tried
And purified
For Death's cold sanctity.
Thus 'twas ordained that Death and Pain
Should raise man to a nobler plane.

Switzerland

Land of mountain, lake and river,
Waterfalls, and rushing streams
By the wayside where the cattle
Gather with their bells a-ringing,
In the day's departing beams.

Land of glorious dawns and sunsets,
Glowing shades of every hue,

Mists enchanted, floating, rising,
Fine-spun softness, tints Olympian,
Regal purple, virgin blue.

Tinkling zither, echoing jodel,
Horns that loudly hail the morn
From the upland's stony pathways
Where the snowline meets the outposts
Of the forest, sparse and lorn.

Nether tracts by sunlight heated,
Show the vines in serried rows,
Basking through the drowsy summer
Till their rich and generous vintage
From the wine-press redly flows.

Land of mountain peaks stupendous,
Lakes that fade to meet the sky!
Land for gods, for dreaming poets,
Fit for men of soaring greatness,
Sons of gifted ancestry.

Gods I found not, neither poets,
Only little men who toil
To supply the passing stranger,
Bound upon the wheel of pleasure,
With the produce of the soil.

What would Bonivard or Calvin
Think of you, my little men,
With your minds on money turning,
While you strain with itching fingers
Fast the golden calf to pen?

Yet I love your honest peasants
Dwelling on the mountain slope,
Slow and stolid, yet the children
Of the spirit born of freedom,
Of the patience born of hope.

For among these humble toilers,
From the grasping instinct free,
Still we find the cheerful-hearted,
Earnest, honest Switzer people
With the old simplicity.

Burial at Sea

'Twas midnight in the southern seas
And windless. On the placid deep
Flashed sparkling phosphorescences,
While moonbeams, bright in silver bars,
Lay like a pathway to the stars.

Tireless, our engines, day and night,
A month had throbbled their endless round
Without a pause to mark time's flight.
We heard it all unconsciously
Till suddenly it ceased to be.

For now the slowing pulse that beat,
Stopped in the vessel's iron breast
And quickly changed my slumber sweet
To wandering and uneasy thought
Of what the midnight might have brought.

Gaining the deck, I looked around
With drowsy eyes and half asleep,
And saw a something wrapped and bound
And weighted. I was standing near

Some hapless seaman's simple bier.

A shapeless form in canvas lay,
Stretched on a wooden grating low,
Waiting the word to pass away
Into the silent depths of sea
And boundless realm of fantasy.

Before the bulwark's opening stood
A group about a lantern's light
Moveless like figures carved in wood,
Whilst one with gruff solemnity,
Read prayers for those who die at sea.

Then at the end, with sudden leap,
That sent the sparkling water high,
The body plunged into the deep
Amid a million points of light
That glittered as it sank from sight.

Scarce had a moment passed, before
The men with silent haste had gone:
The engines plied their task, once more,
The ship her steady course pursued
Across the moonlit solitude.

The morning dawned, the hours passed by
And life on board from day to day
Was changeless as the sea and sky.
And so unreal the memory seemed
I wondered if I had not dreamed.

The Master of the Marionettes

'Twas at the fair of Epinetz,
And all the country-side was there.
Each booth gave out its blatant strains,
And grinning came the sheepish swains,
Who greeted with approving stare
The movements of the marionettes,
While from his place well hid from sight
The master laboured, faint and white.

A villain dark, with cloak and plume,
Through two acts of imbroglio,
Pursued a maid of laughing mien
Who played a ribboned tambourine
And loved a gay incognito,
By whom the villain met his doom,
While Pierrot, in a comic part,
Danced to conceal a breaking heart.

'Twas late. The snow fell thick and still
The market place in silence lay.
The master, tired and overwrought,
For troupe and self a lodging sought.
The inn was full. He went his way
Across the heath; beyond the hill
Dawn found him wrapped from head to feet
In winter's snowy winding-sheet.

And as he sank in deadly sleep,
His spirit, like a floating haze,
Wavered a moment o'er the snow,
A valediction to bestow.
And solemnly, with wistful gaze,
The puppets bowed in reverence deep,
Speeding with farewells and regrets
The master of the Marionettes.

Love's Counterfeit

Old as mankind, yet with immortal youth:
Unyielding, ardent, sinuous and bold,
Alluring ever in the guise of truth.

Where is the fire that warmed me yesterday?
And where the flame that will to-morrow blaze
To leave me shivering by its ashes gray?

The wind that sweetly sings in ocean caves,
Then dallies with the wallflowers on the tower
May fan assassins and sweep over graves.

What pleasure has a kiss that fever brings?
Or one grown cold with satisfied desire?
The love that on the senses fiercely plays,
Comes like a wind and passes like a fire.

The Most Precious Thing

What do men rate at the highest in life?
Diamonds that glow,
The finest in water,
In colour and form:
Such as an eastern king's favourite wife
Wears strung in a row,
Or, as those that in slaughter,
In sack or in storm
Of a citadel's heights,
Are torn from a Khalifah slain in the strife?
No. Diamonds decline when Love claims his own,
And freely are bartered for kisses alone.

Some say that virtue is prized more than all,
Virtue that scorns
The baseness and ill
The decalogue cites
And sternly forbids to great and to small.
But when on the horns
Of dilemma, men kill
Compunction, whose lights
Die in darkness profound,
Where mortals are fated to stumble and fall,
Renouncing for kisses the wisdom of time
To find in the sacrifice something sublime.

Rank, Riches and Fame have, each in their way,
A hold on the mind
That we think is supreme,
And sweep man along
To sated ambition's omnipotent sway:
Till one day we find
They are vain as a dream,
Or a beautiful song
Evanescently grand:
And the value we see of the brave display
Of Riches and Fame and Rank at their best,
Is far below kisses when put to the test.

Autumn

A light mist creeps across the downs:
A gleam through clouds is faintly seen:
The grass is wet with heavy dew:
Sear are the leaves that once were green.
I walk at midday when the sun
Throws still some welcome warmth and light:
A chill comes with the afternoon,
And icy is the air at night.
Summer is dead. Its shrouded form
Lies on the logs that make its pyre,
And fancy sees its ghost ascend,
A shadowy wraith above the fire.

To L

Just at this time of great content
Old memories come between the lights
To chasten with their whispers faint
The passing Christmas merriment.
Yet through it all, one constant note
Chimes with the season's higher sense,
Love's influence unchanged remains,
Fragrant and sweet as frankincense.

Duty

What is a year that comes and goes
Unless it mark a noble deed?
We sow the seed
Of flower or weed:
Thrice happy he who leaves a rose.

What is a life in vainness spent,
That will not bear the common test,
When, laid to rest
In earth's cold breast,
We sleep at last, insentient?

What is a gift bestowed on man,
Unless he spreads abroad its light
And turns its might
To aid the right
And strives to do the best he can?

What matters it if all your toil
Thankless for ever must remain?
When by your pain
One soul will gain
Somewhat to calm its mortal coil.

Sonnets

Glastonbury

Beacon of Christian truth! across the years
Thy flame undying glows in Faith's clear sight,
As once the Holy Grail's effulgence bright
Shone on the pure in heart, the Saints' compeers,
Who knew no more life's bitterness and fears
But dwelt thenceforth upon a nobler height,
Rapt in the radiance of Redemption's light
That still to the elect of God appears.
Each Christmas sees, before thy ancient shrine,
Its sacred thorn burst into glorious flower,
Of Heaven's immortal life a constant sign,
Shown to mankind in graciousness benign,
To make eternal with enlightening power
The revelation of a truth divine.

Galileo

The medieval pomp and civic pride
Which once made Pisa famous, long have lain
Forgotten with her pageants brief and vain
That flashed inconstant on the Arno's tide.
But, toned to softened hues, her walls abide,
Enclosing baptistery, tower, and fane
Wherein yet swings the lamp with brazen chain
That marked the pendulum's time-measured stride
And though the centuries, in lengthening roll,
Show ever fainter through perspective time
The fame depicted in the mouldering scroll,
They cannot dim the shining aureole
Around Galileo's name. Each hourly chime
Proclaims the law that swung the girandole.

Stratford-on-Avon

The hushed repose of some fair temple's shade
Falls on the pilgrim when he treads the ways
Where first the world to Shakespeare's childish gaze
Disclosed its wonders when his footsteps strayed;
Where, fired with love, he roamed the forest glade,
Storing clear memories for other days;
And where, at last, acclaimed and crowned with bays,
He dropped the lyre no other hand has played.
Fame watches o'er the deathless poet's sleep,
Her fanfares echoing still their wild applause,
While sweet Melpomene and Thalia weep,
For theirs no more the grandest flight that soars,
But lower planes where smaller spirits sweep,
Whose whispers sound like waves on distant shores.

To a Daffodil

Bright messenger of life renewed and love,
Joy fills thy golden chalice to the brim,

Fit symbol of the sacred seraphim
Who with their blazing phalanx headlong drove
The Star of Morning from his seat above,
Scattering celestial sparks through voidness dim,
To fall upon our planet's curving rim
And bloom as thy fair flowers in mead and grove.
As victory's anthem stirred the heavenly choir,
Awaking rapture in triumphant praise,
So thou in spring dost mortal souls inspire
With new-born hope and consecrated fire,
Reflected glory from ethereal rays,
To make divine the human heart's desire.

The Appian Way

Road of the dead! whose stately avenue
Of ruined tombs reveals the glorious past,
When proud patrician chariots rolling fast
And litters borne by slaves of ebon hue
Breasted the throng that ever thicker grew
And onward hurried where the portal vast
Showed praetor, tribune and plebeian massed
With traders from afar beyond the blue.
Road of the dead! thy voices haunted me,
Once as I lingered on a starlit night,
Seeing thy restless ghosts in fantasy:
And Peter paused again in act to flee:
With downcast eyes and pale with sudden fright,
Then whispered low: "Quo vadis Domine?"

Note.—Tradition has it that Peter in a moment of weakness fled to escape martyrdom, but was turned back by a vision of his Master. The little church of Quo vadis Domine on the Appian Way commemorates this.

From the Fields

The village chime drifts on the summer breeze,
In softened cadence o'er expanses green,
Across the river, winding slow between
Broad fields of clover where marauding bees
Lighten their toil with murmured harmonies,
Whilst corn in rolling waves of verdant sheen
Lends rhythmic movement to the rural scene
And sighs responsive to the wind-stirred trees.
The mingled voices, like a poet's rhyme,
Link with their music pensiveness and joy:
Yet each has meaning in its wayward time:
The wind of freedom sings in every clime,
The bee, that labour's sweetness cannot cloy,
And life is measured by the warning chime.

Vénus de Milo

Immortal beauty, touched by fire divine
That glows as in thy pristine days, I see
The white-robed priests and virgins joyfully

Bearing their gifts of honey, flowers and wine,
With sounding reed and timbrel, to thy shrine,
Whilst thou, impassive, waitest the decree
Of heaven, to speak with cold solemnity
That which unfolds a deity's design.
Gone are the gods and heroes of the past
To shine in distant stars with pallid gleam,
Subdued and faint beyond the darkness vast,
Their power forgot, their glory overcast;
Yet thou remainest in thy grace supreme
And fadeless splendour that was ne'er surpassed.

Fire

To man primeval, the bright god of day
Seemed lord of all things, and he bent the knee,
To adoration moved unconsciously;
And lo! the instinct which had made him pray,
Showed him the mystic fire that latent lay
Within the drying branches of the tree
And brought the earth, in all its purity,
The essence of the sun's benignant ray.
Of Nature's elements the most refined,
Free from pollution and corruption dire,
Art thou, O strong and changeless spirit kind.
Unfailing source of good, thou wast designed
To be the first, man's reverence to inspire,
And light the pathway of his groping mind.

FINIS

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