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THE DARK AGES AND OTHER POEMS

By "L."

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CONTENTS

p. v

| | | PAGE |
|-------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| I. | THE DARK AGES | 1 |
| II. | THE BELLS OF VENICE | 4 |
| III. | AN ANCIENT CHURCH | 5 |
| IV. | TO THE ENGLISH GIPSIES | 6 |
| V. | AUTUMN DYING | 9 |
| VI. | THE DEPARTURE FOR CYTHERA | 10 |
| VII. | THE VILLAGE CHURCH | 13 |
| VIII. | LADY DAY NEAR BIGNOR | 14 |
| IX. | A COTTAGE INSCRIPTION | 16 |
| X. | A MEMORY OF IRELAND | 18 |
| XI. | "TIR NAN ÓG" | 19 |
| XII. | A HIGHLAND DAY | 21 |
| XIII. | TO THE FIRS | 23 |

| | | |
|----------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| XIV. | GOOD-BYE | 24 |
| XV. | THE FAIRY GLEN REVISITED | 26 |
| XVI. | WAITING | 28 |
| XVII. | NEAR HAARLEM | 30 |
| XVIII. | THE TOMB OF SAINT AUGUSTINE AT PAVIA | 31 |
| XIX. | MODERN FLORENCE | 32 |
| XX. | TO DANTE | 33 |
| XXI. | TO PETRARCH | 34 |
| XXII. | TO A LADY OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY | 35 |
| XXIII. | THE "LIBERAL" DIVINE | 37 |
| XXIV. | THE QUARREL | 38 |
| XXV. | THE OLD FOUNTAIN | 40 |
| XXVI. | LOVE AND DEATH | 41 |
| XXVII. | VIOLETS | 43 |
| XXVIII. | THE GARDENS OF THE SOUL | 44 |
| XXIX. | A MAN TO CHILDISH THINGS | 46 |
| XXX. | THE KNIGHT | 47 |
| XXXI. | HOPES | 48 |
| XXXII. | THE PATH | 50 |
| XXXIII. | THE CALL TO BETHLEHEM | 52 |
| XXXIV. | A CHRISTMAS LULLABY | 53 |
| XXXV. | TO THE HOLY CHILD | 55 |
| XXXVI. | MATER AMABILIS | 56 |
| XXXVII. | SAINTE STEPHEN | 57 |
| XXXVIII. | SAINTE JOHN AT EPHEBUS | 59 |
| XXXIX. | THE LITTLE CHILDREN | 61 |
| XL. | THE CIRCUMCISION | 63 |
| XLI. | THE RETURN OF THE MAGI | 64 |
| XLII. | ATONEMENT | 66 |
| XLIII. | CALVARY | 67 |
| XLIV. | "THE DESERT SHALL BLOSSOM" | 68 |
| XLV. | RESURRECTION | 69 |
| XLVI. | THE ASCENSION | 71 |
| XLVII. | A HYMN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT | 73 |
| XLVIII. | "ADORA ET TACE" | 76 |
| XLIX. | THE REFUGE OF THE WANDERING | 77 |
| L. | THE LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER | 79 |
| LI. | THE LIGHT INVISIBLE | 81 |
| LII. | ONWARD | 83 |
| LIII. | THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED | 84 |
| LIV. | LETHE | 86 |
| LV. | AVE ATQUE VALE | 88 |

p. vi

p. vii

I THE DARK AGES

p. 1

MEN call you "dark." What factory then blurred the light
Of golden suns, when nothing blacker than the shades
Of coming rain climbed up the heather-mantled height?

While the air
Breathed all the scents of all untrodden flowers,
And brooks poured silver through the glimmering glades,
Then sweetly wound through virgin ground.
Must all that beauty pass?
And must our pleasure trains
Like foul eruptions belch upon the mountain head?
Must we perforce build vulgar villa lanes,
And on sweet fields of grass
The canting scutcheons of a cheating commerce spread?
Men call you "dark." Did that faith see with cobwebbed eyes,
That built the airy octagon on Ely's hill,
And Gloucester's Eastern wall that woos the topaz skies,
Where the hymn
Angelic "Glory be to God on high,
And peace on earth to men who feel good will,"
Might softly sound God's throne around?
Is that a perfect faith
Which pew-filled chapels rears,
Where Gothic fronts of stone mask backs of ill-baked bricks,
And where the frothy fighting preacher fears,
As peasants fear a wraith,
His deacon's frown or some just change in politics?
Men call you "dark." Was Chaucer's speech a muddy stream,
The language born of Norman sun and Saxon snow?
Was Langland's verse or Wyclif's prose mere glow-worm's gleam?
And the tales
Of Arthur's sword and of the holy Grail,
And Avalon, the isle where no storms blow:
From such romance did no light glance?
Have we not heard a tongue,
Whose words the Saxon thralls
Would scorn to speak above their muck-rake and their fork,
The speech of barrack-rooms and music-halls,
Where every fool has flung
The rotten refuse of Calcutta and New York?

p. 2

Men call you "dark." But *chivalry* and *honour* stand
As words that you, not we, did fashion, when the need
Of food beyond the price of gold awoke our land.
For you taught
Inconstancy is like a standard lost;
And we who prove untrue in love or deed
Will doubly shame an ancient name.
Your robes were not all white,
Your soul was not a sea
Where all the crystal rivulets of God found room:
But we must often to your lessons flee,
Our truth with yours unite,
Before we meet the holy dayspring of the doom.

p. 3

II THE BELLS OF VENICE

p. 4

RING out again that faltering strain,
Cease not so soon,
Sweet peal that brought to me the thought
Of some deep shadowed English lane
Across the blue lagoon.

The water street where oarsmen meet
And shout ahead,
The glowing quay, all noise and glee,
Seemed hallowed as when angels' feet
Touched Jacob's stony bed.

On pearly dome and princely home
Day's glory dies:
Once more the bells' low murmur tells
That faith is not a line of foam

III AN ANCIENT CHURCH

So little dost thou seem of common earth,
So much of spirit doth thy fabric show,
That we, who watch thee through the azure glow,
Might deem that with the stars thou cam'st to birth.

So sweet and true the voices from thy spire,
Which bless the day's betrothal unto night,
That when they falter with the fading light,
We well might think an angel touched his lyre.

If chiselled stone and molten bronze instil
Hopes deeper than the fountains of my tears,
And love that hungers for eternity,

God, I believe Thou hast some use for me;
Leave me no life of dumb and sluggard years,
But cut or melt me till I speak Thy will.

IV TO THE ENGLISH GIPSIES [6]

ROUGH swarthy Gipsy folk,
Would that my voice could once forget to falter,
And sing a song as free as swallows' wings
Of ancient Gipsies, and their "dukes" and "kings,"
The men who braved the branding-rod and halter,
Because like birds they nimbly came and went,
And loved the stars and road, and crouching tent
Beneath a grove of oak.

In ages long ago
The Brahman priests pursued you with their curses,
Because you found life sweeter at the core
Without the mumbling of their magic lore.
And you have lived to see their Sanskrit verses
Fall dead; and Brahmans, like mere Romany,
Now tempt their gods by trusting to the sea,
Though trembling while they go.

Then hardened against fear
You looted caravans of gold-shot dresses
And gems upon their way to bright Baghdad,
And drove the Moslem Khalif rampant mad,
When pearls culled from the ocean for the tresses
Of his Circassian, in your pouches fell,
As trifles to adorn the dusky shell
Of some black virgin's ear.

Next Greece and Thessaly
Became the home of many a jocund roamer,
Who gaily danced, or begged with mien forlorn,
And patched his Indian speech where it was torn
With remnants from Demosthenes and Homer,
Until you struck your blackened tents again
And tattered pageants crossed the endless plain
Of fertile Hungary.

'Tis even said you planned
To trick the Pope with penitential moaning,
And gained his leave to wander seven years
Towards the melancholy North, with tears
The sin of feigned apostasy atoning:
Thus fortified against enquiring foes,
You, with the budding of the Tudor rose,

Alighted on our land.

Who says it was not good
To see your handkerchiefs of red and yellow,
And silver rings and basket-laden carts,
And hear the honey-lipped prophetic arts
Of wheedling witches, or a clean-limbed fellow
Who fiddled by the hedgerow in the smoke,
And roused the antique Gipsy song that woke
The silence of the wood?

Now that your blood must fail,
What artist soul revengefully remembers
You raided the domain of chanticleer,
Or deftly poisoned pigs to swell your cheer
Of hedgehogs cooked in clay amid the embers?
Who says you sometimes wedded art to force,
Or made the worse appear the better horse
Before a coming sale?

You soon will pass away;
Laid one by one below the village steeple
You face the East from which your fathers sprang,
Or sleep in moorland turf, beyond the clang
Of towns and fairs; your tribes have joined the people
Whom no true Romany will call by name,
The folk departed like the camp-fire flame
Of withered yesterday.

p. 8

V

AUTUMN DYING

p. 9

AUTUMN shakes in golden raiment,
Gashed with red;
None can ransom him by payment
From the dead.

They have shorn his strength with reaping,
Left him cold;
Now he wakes each morning weeping,
Weak and old.

And last night he sought my casement,
Came and fled;
Wailed for aid from roof to basement,
Touched my bed.

Though I cannot find his ransom,
Ere he dies;
I will pay all that I can—some
Hopes and sighs.

VI

THE DEPARTURE FOR CYTHERA

p. 10

ERE they parted for Cythera
When the spring had reached its bloom,
Phyllis, Doris and Neaera
Peeped into their pictured room,
Wished to go, yet wished to linger,
Lifted each a taper finger,
Threw a kiss towards their portraits set in walls of rose brocade.

Where the beeches lift a curtain
Over shifting sunlit scenes,
They with footsteps light and certain
Used to dance like fairy queens;
Now they speed beneath the beeches
Till the path the water reaches

And the bay just softly ripples by a marble balustrade.

Purple were the sails that beckoned
And the deck was ivory,
Love stood smiling there and reckoned
His embarking company;
Every mast wore silver sheathing,
Music in the air was breathing,
In the rigging little laughing cupids upwards climbed and strayed.

p. 11

On they sailed through fields of azure,
White was all their furrowed way,
Melting in a blue erasure,
Melting fast like yesterday;
Radiant Hope still steered them hoping,
Steered them past the woodlands sloping,
Where the doves descend and flutter on an ancient colonnade.

On they passed through golden hazes,
Watching distant peaks of snow,
On through shadowed island mazes,
Where the dreamy spices blow;
Till the moon herself was setting,
And the dew fell fast and wetting,
And the silver masts no image on the blackening waves displayed.

Frayed are now the rose-red panels
Filled with squares of rare brocade,
In the ceiling Time carves channels
Where the frescoes slowly fade;
Chipped are now the scrolls of plaster,
Which a skilled Italian master
Moulded all along the cornice, and with tips of gold o'erlaid.

p. 12

But the shallow oval spaces
Underneath the white festoons,
Hold the tender pastel faces
Waiting endless afternoons;
For they never touched Cythera,
Phyllis, Doris, and Neaera,
And again they never landed by the marble balustrade.

VII THE VILLAGE CHERUB

p. 13

Up at the church at the edge of the moor,
Flat on the pathway that leads to the door,
Worn by the tread of the mourning and poor,
There is a face that is fit for God's floor.

How could a mason create in his brain
Just such a cherub to sob in the rain?
How could the pride of the dying but vain
Want such a cherub to blow a refrain?

This one had ankles with which he could run—
Is it a fact that a cherub has none?
This one had love-locks that flashed in the sun,
Yes, and his lips often pouted in fun.

Who was the angel that played on the street;
Whose was the face I can't soil with my feet?
Nobody knows; but I hope I shall meet
One such a cherub in front of God's seat.

VIII LADY DAY NEAR BIGNOR

p. 14

SOUTH-EASTWARD where the waving line of hills

Bears up the clouds that speed like passing boats,
On one sweet spot which distant sunlight fills
A sudden silver haze descends and floats.

The trees below like lace veil glistening streams,
The gorse puts on its tiny gloves of gold,
The cattle move as though they fed in dreams,
And timid lambs are bleating in the fold.

Though tangled bracken like an old man's beard
Blends autumn's ruddy brown with winter's grey,
Soft blows the breeze that through the pines is heard,
Green moss and yellow primrose deck the way.

The Roman villa level on the grass,
With wrestling cupids on the floor within;
The church where first a Norman priest said mass,
The ivied chimneys of the Georgian inn:

These have their message. All things tell the change
Of seasons, races, and of man's estate:
All bid us mark within how small a range
There moves a story tragically great.

p. 15

The hills abide, and that mysterious Breath
Which brooded on the slowly shaping earth,
And came to-day like dew to Nazareth
To fashion our Redeemer's Virgin-birth.

IX

A COTTAGE INSCRIPTION

p. 16

"TIME trieth troth." Who carved the text
Above the narrow cottage door?
Two hundred years of storm have vexed
The words which front the western moor.

Was it a hind who loved the king
That held his court beyond the sea,
A hind who taught his child to sing
Of Stuart rose and Stuart tree?

Was it a swain whose soul adored
A maid who went to London town?
And did she choose some spangled lord
And coldly flout her country clown?

"Time trieth troth." And was he true
Whose chisel carved that rugged line?
And was he loyal till the yew
O'erarched his heart's now silent shrine?

p. 17

Then, though bereft of king or love,
He found the poet's secret gain,
The sympathy of suns above,
The friendship of the falling rain.

X

A MEMORY OF IRELAND

p. 18

WHERE the saints of Holy Ireland sleep
No chancels pen them round,
But the waving trees their vigils keep
Above each verdant mound.

Here they climbed no lofty marble beds
To find a frigid rest,
But a canopy of golden threads
Hangs o'er them in the west.

When the larks have ceased their thankful hymn,
The ocean booms his bell,
And the lamps of heaven swing o'er the rim
Of every holy well.

May the Lord bring back that race of men
Whom charity enticed
To desert the world for some poor glen
And give the people Christ.

XI
"TÍR NAN ÓG" [19]

p. 19

WHEN thou didst die, they say a fairy's pipe
Was heard outside the castle door,
And wee folk thick as August corn that's ripe
Came trooping down the moor,
And bore thy soul with laughter and with light
O'er glen and heathered height.

Friends waked thee till the dawn thrice slanted by
To quench the tapers round thy bier,
And countless decades of the rosary
They numbered with a tear;
But yet they whispered, "She is now a queen,
And clad in rainbow green."

They set thy form near blessed Finnan's side,
And wailed the Gaelic death-lament;
But they believed thee happy as a bride
With long-dreamed joys content
Within the land they name with wistful tongue,
"The land where all are young."

p. 20

XII
**A HIGHLAND DAY
WITHIN SIGHT OF CULLODEN**

p. 21

THE snow-white borders of the grey-green sea
Peep through the mist that veils the strait with dew,
The sun grows bold and smites the landscape free,
The burn, the woods, the rocks of rose-red hue.

The world lies warm upon the heart of day,
The callants push their boat from off the shore,
The white gulls sail and flutter through the bay,
The jet-black daws are calling evermore.

The doves fly wheeling past their mountain wall,
The whispering pine trees weave a ceiling cool,
The rowans redden o'er the foaming fall,
The ferns keep guard around the fairies' pool.

The distant moorland where the tribesmen bled
To win their wandering prince a royal home,
Now wraps a deeper purple on their bed,
While he sleeps cold below St. Peter's dome.

p. 22

The waves turn opal in the waning light,
The rocks exchange for grey their rose-red bloom,
The finite sinks into the infinite,
And sea and sky are wedded in the gloom.

XIII
TO THE FIRS

p. 23

I LOVE the oak-grove where the Druid's knife
Cut down the mistletoe in days of old;
I love the elms around the convent fold
Where souls escape the dust of highway life.

I love to watch the tiny milk-white spires
That on the chestnut branches lift their head;
I love to see the rowan growing red
With clusters bright as frosty winter fires.

But better still I love you, firs that crest
The lonely hill above the moaning firth,
Beside the path where bluebells gently nod.

To your grey arms, ere sunset leaves the West,
I can confide each sorrow at its birth,
For you have known the waves and storms of God.

XIV

GOOD-BYE

p. 24

SING me one more villanelle,
Light as elfin foot that brushes
Through the ferns and foxgloves of the fairy dell.

Come where woodland spices smell,
Where the wild rose faintly flushes,
Sing me one more villanelle.

Rare as snowy heather bell,
Sweet as melody of thrushes
Through the ferns and foxgloves of the fairy dell.

When the shade creeps up the fell
Mid the parting sun's last blushes,
Sing me one more villanelle.

Sing it to the curfew knell,
Where the streamlet plays with rushes
Through the ferns and foxgloves of the fairy dell.

p. 25

Let it breathe no sad farewell,
Only mirth with silent hushes.
Sing me one more villanelle
Through the ferns and foxgloves of the fairy dell.

XV

THE FAIRY GLEN REVISITED

p. 26

THAT pure and shy retreat
A Tartar would have spared,
But not that lawyer cur from Inverness,
Who thought its sylvan virgin loveliness
Would bring him gold if rudely bared
And hawked upon the street.

There children checked their race
And crept on tiptoed feet,
Lest they should break upon the rainbow rings
Of fairies glinting through transparent wings,
Or kindly wizard come to meet
A maid with lovelorn face.

No snow nor stinging sleet
Could chill the fairies' bath;
So close the vaulting was with fir and larch
Which laid deep carpets underneath their arch,
That on the fairies' silent path
No blast could ever beat.

Mid foam more white than fleece
 The waterfall rang sweet,
 It made each rocky cup a rippling well,
 It coyly dived and peeped along the dell,
 Then ran the rising sea to greet,
 And greeting found its peace.

And now the cold and heat
 Scourge all the glen with ire;
 The broken boughs have choked the sobbing stream,
 The silver birch is but a sodden beam,
 The fairies' path is sunk in mire,
 The moss has left their seat.

Flash sorrow and disdain
 For this most sordid feat,
 You whom Burns taught to love a daisy's face,
 And Scott to love the mountains' gloom and grace;
 Or say they scattered chaff for wheat,
 And sang their songs in vain.

XVI WAITING

BASED ON THE GAELIC FEAR A' BHÀTA

THE year may change its time,
 But still I climb
 The cliff above the sea,
 And look with eyes half dim with rain,
 To know if God has brought again
 My lover back to me.

When darkness downward glides
 And slowly hides
 The fading hills of blue,
 I never bar the cottage door
 Without one look across the moor,
 A look of hope for you.

Sometimes when I am free
 I seek the quay
 Soon after break of day,
 And find a newly harboured boat,
 And ask if you are still afloat
 Near home or far away.

I ask if you are well,
 And they can tell
 My heart is set on you:
 And then they call me just a fool,
 A baby in the world's hard school
 To give you love so true.

You promised me silk gowns
 From Lowland towns,
 And rings of twisted gold;
 And, best of all, your picture bound
 With stones to hem its beauty round
 That I might kiss and hold.

My love is not the flower
 Of one short hour;
 You were my childhood's pride;
 Your image is my dream by night,
 By day if ever put to flight
 It comes back like the tide.

The swan upon the lake
 When robbers take
 Her young, is left to moan;
 None tends her wounds or heeds her cry,
 She wails her loss and waits to die:
 Like her I cry alone.

XVII
NEAR HAARLEM

TRIUMPHANTLY it soars, that full-domed sky,
Of lucent turquoise fading into pearl;
And here the happy birds their brown wings furl
By waters that lisp seaward dreamily.

Beyond these plains of silver and of green,
Amid the floating vapours of the town
The vast grey church uplifts its belfry crown,
A chiselled shrine through incense dimly seen.

The burdened barges trust the smiling flood,
Calm wraps the distance of reclining dunes,
The tower rings peace in soft alternate tones.

And who that hears the bells' low luting tunes,
Now thinks of Haarlem's siege and starving moans,
Or how these brooks once bubbled with brave blood?

XVIII
THE TOMB OF ST. AUGUSTINE AT PAVIA

BENEATH the low barbaric Lombard apse
It rises like a ridge of Alpine snow,
And wry-wheeled ages with uneasy lapse
Creak past its majesty, and go.

Such music as leaves Milan's marble spires
To mount towards a greater whiter throne,
Or tempts to earth again seraphic choirs,
Is at Augustine's shrine unknown.

No wave of pilgrim footsteps surges here,
No sheaf of tapers lifts its votive gleam,
The half-taught critic comes not with his sneer,
When I draw nigh, dear saint, to dream.

Enough if far-off sounds of children's glee
Bid me to "take and read" God's open call,
Or some sad Monnica pray here to see
Her son, like thee, a second Paul.

XIX
MODERN FLORENCE

HARD by the home of Dante's infant life
I saw a Yankee "Kake Walk" advertised;
Within San Miniato's pillared aisle
A Japanese was peering unsurprised;
Where Michelangelo set "Dawn" and "Night,"
And her, most blest, whose softly sculptured smile
Glows with a maiden's and a mother's light,
A German Jew was nagging with his wife.

XX
TO DANTE

THE Church divided and the Empire fell,
Grave Dante, but thy verse in magic grows
And charms men upward to the snow-white Rose

Of heaven from the mire and grief of hell.

No lonely isle of dull forgetfulness
Hides Beatrice within its shadowed gloom,
For 'mid the petals of thy Rose's bloom
Time's hand has set that pearl of loveliness.

Though patched and powdered poets could not taste
Thy limpid sweetness, and exposed thy fame
To meet the leering Frenchman's cynic air,

Thy love was fair without brocade or paste,
Thyself too great to need a gilded name;
Thy Comedy and God survive Voltaire.

p. 34

XXI
TO PETRARCH

Yes, Petrarch, we most certainly believe
That you who wore your heart upon your sleeve,
Did love your love for Laura, and the eye
Of public fame, at which your sonnets fly,
Like skyward larks that court the genial sun;
And o'er the tears you treasured one by one
You downward bent with all a statue's grace
To see reflections of your tearful face.
But none redeemed by love will e'er consent
To say you tasted of love's sacrament.

p. 35

XXII
TO A LADY OF
THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

IN MEMORY OF METASTASIO

Nice, though your lips of coral
Now are dust;
And the schoolboy scans the moral
Graven on your broken bust

In the gilt barocco chapel
After Mass;
Where ten coats with brodered lappel
Bent when Nice used to pass.

Still perchance your spirit hovers
Where the lute
And the voices of your lovers
Chimed, but now are gone and mute.

Where the lonely arbour's hollow
Shadier grows,
And the butterflies can follow
Fearlessly to kiss the rose.

And you smile because a poet
À la mode
Flouted you; and then, we know it,
Wrote an abject palinode.

For your hands, though light as feathers,
Held him tight:
Love was made to last all weathers,
Not to change with day and night.

p. 36

p. 37

XXIII
THE "LIBERAL" DIVINE

THE "middle path" meets every need,
The Stagirite and Buddha say;
I won't doubt more than half the creed
Nor wear a costume wholly lay.

p. 38

XXIV THE QUARREL

SUGGESTED BY A PICTURE OF FRAGONARD

ON the elm tree she was swinging,
Just beyond the hedge of yew;
But she slowly ceased from singing,
From her breast a pink she drew.

Buttoning his coat of satin,
Off he strode towards the woods,
Tartly quoting Virgil's Latin,
That a woman's made of moods.

Long ago within God's garden
Both were wrapped in long lone sleep,
Heeding not if hoar frosts harden,
Or the autumn leaves fall deep.

Laugh not at the statue calling
Phyllis with her marble muff,
Nor the marble cupids sprawling
On a cloud of powder puff.

Laugh not at his hermit fashions
Nor the book unwarmed by hope;
Say not that it shows the passions
Of a stony misanthrope.

p. 39

For they loved while they were living,
Loved with love untold, unheard;
Though they parted unforgiving,
Each too proud to say a word.

XXV THE OLD FOUNTAIN

p. 40

ONE gay glint of rose and silver flounces
In a deep green dell,
Where a streamlet bubbles down and bounces
From a Triton's mossy shell.

One more dance ere sunset on the mountain
Laughing says, "Too late";
One sweet lute that tinkled with the fountain
Called two hearts to court their fate.

Some small raindrops, just to tease the Triton,
Mischievously fell;
Some one spoke a jest that quenched the light on
Eyes that he had long loved well.

That dark night he cursed the love he brought her,
Though it made his soul;
And she sobbed an echo to the water
Brimming in the fountain bowl.

XXVI LOVE AND DEATH

p. 41

ONCE toward a sunlit garden, laden
With the lime trees' scented breath,
Came to watch a merry youth and maiden,
Love and Death.

At their bosoms Love threw fragrant posies,
Tossed them laughing low and blithe,
In the background Death amid the roses
Moved his scythe.

Ere the latest rose the path was strewing,
Her sweet maiden soul was fled;
He beside her grave his cheeks bedewing,
Bent his head.

Sobbing Love then thought to give him pleasure,
Bade his curse on Death attend;
But the youth begged Death who held his treasure
Be his friend.

Death as friend might give the old completeness
Time could give to him no more,
Death, not Love alone, the former sweetness
Might restore.

Love then saw the youth was worthier loving,
Dowered with a stronger grace;
And with downcast eyelids shyly moving,
Kissed Death's face.

p. 42

XXVII VIOLETS

p. 43

WHERE burning tapers hold
White suppliant hands from arms of gold
Around the Host; there no one sets
Sweet violets.

Fair roses droop and die
In halls of dance and minstrelsy;
But who within those walls has met
The violet?

Where faintly smiles the sun
Through chequered skies on beech groves dun,
There hides in vales sequestered yet
The violet.

Where I shall lie asleep,
Some friend, perhaps, a tear will weep,
And if our love knew no regrets,
Strew violets.

XXVIII THE GARDENS OF THE SOUL

p. 44

IN a restless land beside a river
Stands a stone enclosure tall,
Rich the finder is, and rich the giver
Of the key to pierce that wall.

Once within, you drink the clearest pleasures,
And your sorrow change for ease;
Ancient bards enchant you with their measures,
Sweetly sighs the Highland breeze.

Next amid the orange trees and cedars
Bearded Homer deigns to roam,
Musing tales of marching Argive leaders,
And Ulysses welcomed home.

Here where daffodils their crowns are bending
On a lawn of English green,
Milton gravely sits to tell the ending
Of angelic strifes unseen.

Here the almond bloom for ever blushes,
And Italian fountains rise;
While the wine of dawn their dewdrops flushes,
Dante speaks of Paradise.

But beyond where any poet paces,
Grows a gnarled grey olive grove,
Where the furthest stars have veiled their faces,
Weeping for eternal Love.

p. 45

XXIX

A MAN TO CHILDISH THINGS

p. 46

WHERE are the domes of pure mysterious gold,
And myriad angel wings in ordered flight
My childish gaze could once at eve behold
Before the mountains melted into night?

Where is the island, shy abode of bliss,
Which seemed through summer haze to rise and float,
The isle which merchant fleets could never kiss,
But once stood still for Brendan's hermit boat?

Where are my paladins with souls of snow,
Whose swords were fashioned at no mortal forge,
The men who rode where Arthur bade them go
To meet the dragon in his dungeon gorge?

O happy, happy dreams, ye were no lies,
No true apostle made me put away
Such "childish things," which mirrored to mine eyes
Faith, Hope and Love. I call you back to stay.

XXX

THE KNIGHT

p. 47

HE was so courteous to the paynim horde,
Men doubted if he served the Lord
Or held the faith of Christ.
They said he proudly scorned life's sweetest prize,
Who never played with sparkling eyes
Or kept an evening tryst.

Their god of love was but Cupidity,
Their Lord an idol vanity
With mail below his vest:
While he, true knight, believed in Christ alone,
And though they thought his heart a stone,
Made love a hero's quest.

XXXI

HOPES

p. 48

To have lived just like a man
And done what one man can,
Not basking like a dog in summer dust;
Nor like a butterfly
That flaunts and flutters by,
Till showers have dimmed its silver wings with rust.

To have lightened some stiff load
Of men upon the road—
May some remember I am flesh and blood!
To have dried some children's tears,
And slain some women's fears
That bid them crouch beneath a brooding flood.

To have known the throbbing stars,
And traced the ancient scars
That streams have ploughed upon the mountain side;
To have sung songs passing sweet,
And sung with lasting heat
As pure as that of stars that burn and bide.

To have said the simply true,
Although to preach the new
Might win me prizes and the world's caress;
To have been misunderstood,
If so the common good
Might bear more harvest through my loneliness.

To have learnt that love is light
In rain and fog and night,
For eyes that sadly peer and feet that plod:
To have found all life a song
Of rapture calm and strong,
And found the music of the song was God.

p. 49

XXXII THE PATH

p. 50

To buzzing lecture halls his steps he bent,
Where all the paths to God were well discussed,
Or faith and reason weighed with balance just,
Till he was dizzy with strong argument.
He saw philosophers who shook their fists,
And broke commandment nine;
He saw the Sadducean alchemists
Draw water out of wine;
He saw the knife-eyed Pharisees
Adjusting their phylacteries:
But never found the gate where he could see
The One in Three.

He watched the hills as dawn unlocked the day,
And felt vibrating o'er the low green lea
The breath of lilac and of hawthorn tree,
While gold laburnums rocked each pendent spray.
He saw the sun salute the moon afar,
And felt their common soul;
He heard the song of star to sister star
Around the sky's deep bowl;
He watched the waves withdraw their foam,
He watched the rivers wending home:
He found the One, and yet he could not see
The One in Three.

p. 51

Still doubting he beheld a brother man,
Whom he ignored and scorned to think akin;
But now a sudden breath of love within
Drove him to serve, and humbly he began.
His hands that worked in love were torn with red,
He shrank not at the sight,
For he who suffered saw a Heart that bled
Become his beacon-light.
Thus brother to the Son of God
With life from heaven on earth he trod:
The Life, the Light, the Love, he knew to be
The One in Three.

XXXIII
THE CALL TO BETHLEHEM

p. 52

SHEPHERDS, come to Bethlehem,
Pluck yon bush of Christmas rose,
Weave a dainty diadem.

From my flute with tuneful stem
Music warbles as it flows,
"Shepherds, come to Bethlehem."

Lo, upon the mountain's hem
Ruby clouds above the snows
Weave a dainty diadem.

Seek not proud Jerusalem,
Where the empty temple shows;
Shepherds, come to Bethlehem.

Christ without a crown or gem
Lies on straw while winter blows;
Weave a dainty diadem.

Christ will not our gift condemn;
All our poverty He knows.
Shepherds, come to Bethlehem,
Weave a dainty diadem.

XXXIV
A CHRISTMAS LULLABY

p. 53

ADAPTED FROM THE SPANISH

STARS,
Stay your bright amethyst cars,
Flee not away,
Wait till the day,
Come and adore.

Flowers,
Born in the morning's first hours,
Stars of the earth,
Bloom for Christ's birth,
Come and adore.

Birds,
Songs are far fresher than words,
Christ is your Sun,
Sing every one,
Come and adore.

Streams,
Whisper in tune with Christ's dreams,
Throw your sweet spells
From crystal bells,
Come and adore.

p. 54

Breeze,
Say to all lands and all seas,
"This merry morn,
Jesus is born,
Come and adore."

Child,
Seeking the lost on the wild,
Though Thou dost sleep,
Smile on thy sheep
Come to adore.

TO THE HOLY CHILD

AS PAINTED BY RAPHAEL

O LORD, Thyself hast taught that sight is not belief;
And yet within Thine eyes I see eternity,
The love which told the dying thief
That he should rest in Paradise
Is there, though Thou art still a Child at Mary's knee;
The joy of perfect sacrifice
Is there, and that unfathomed grief
In which our griefs have sunk like tears in one wide sea.

XXXVI MATER AMABILIS

p. 56

AS PAINTED BY BOTTICELLI

MARY, on the Prince of peace thy gladness
Gleams from radiant eyes;
But their light is touched with passing sadness,
Like our English summer skies.
Angels' arms above thy head are holding
Crowns of golden stars;
But the baby hands thy breast enfolding
Show to thee their future scars.
Lilies cense thee with their exhalations,
But thy heart has guessed
Slanders of the scoffing generations
Who will call thee cursed, not blessed.
So when clouds of faint foreboding sorrow
From an unknown sea
Come to warn me of a broken morrow,
Mother Mary, pray for me.

XXXVII SAINT STEPHEN

p. 57

I SEE that I must die.
O Christ, how shall I bear the cruel stones,
E'en though there be a place among the thrones
At thy right hand for me? Create again
The very sinews of my soul:
I ask not for an aureole,
But strength to brave the pain.

Help me, for life is dear:
The growing rapture of the summer morn,
The cedared hills, and soft-cheeked roses born
Within the cooling breath of Hermon's snow,
The rare reluctant shaded streams,
The sea that sings, and weeps, and dreams;
I love them: Thou dost know.

I loved my father's faith:
The synagogue with all its sacred gear,
The feasts that guard the march of every year,
The trumpets, lamps, and waving of the palms,
The azure fringe on robes like milk,
The yellow scrolls wrapped round with silk,
The triumph of the Psalms.

I loved to preach the truth,
To thrust and parry in a fair debate,

p. 58

To trace God's dayspring in His nation's fate,
To lift up Christ, who dying broke death's bands;
I loved to give men joy for sighs,
To win the thanks of widows' eyes,
And children's trustful hands.

"The truth." Yes, I will die.
This chafing Sanhedrin shall not prevail
To check me. They shall see the truth full-sail;
They cannot sink truth, stone me though they can.
Lord, I am ready. By thy grace
No shade of fear shall cross my face,
And I will play the man.

XXXVIII

SAINT JOHN AT EPHESUS

p. 59

MEN ask why I am left alone:
My brother, James, and Peter, all are slain;
Brave men who met the surging crimson deep
With equal minds. And Mary fell asleep,
His mother whom He gave me for my own.
But I with anchored hope remain.

I loved Him. It is long ago
Since I with Mary stood upon the hill
Where His last breath rose up in Sacrifice,
While tears fell earthward from our burning eyes,
And Jews were gibing on the slope below.
And yet I know He loves me still.

He loved me. And whene'er I dream
Of sunsets changing into glassy gold
The waters of the Galilean lake,
Or see in thought the Temple portals take
A pearly softness from the moonlight gleam,
He speaks with me, as once of old.

I love Him, for He first loved me.
He let me lean upon His holy breast,
He brought me first to view His empty grave;
He bade me learn that only love can save,
And call no fire from heaven but charity.
I work and wait, for He knows best.

p. 60

That Rome which now oppresses us,
And all this rout of grey idolatry
Shall soon dissolve. For I can see the Light
Which guides the sun disperse the Asian night:
And straight above the reek of Ephesus
There burns the Love which died for me.

XXXIX

THE LITTLE CHILDREN

p. 61

ALONG the ocean's stormless side,
Below the never setting sun,
Where Innocent is every one,
Meet all Christ's babes that ever died.

Some home around their Monarch's seat,
Like doves that flutter to their rest;
Within His arms they find their nest
And wonder at His wounded feet.

Some make a goal of Mary's knee,
To which they run in joyous race;
Then tell her that their mother's face
On earth was just like hers to see.

Some call the angels to their play
Mid flowers of one unfading spring;
In radiant wheels they move and sing,
And learn the angels' roundelay.

p. 62

But some, I think, amid those bands,
Remembering our ruder lore
And love, towards this colder shore
Lift speed-well eyes and rose-leaf hands.

XL

p. 63

THE CIRCUMCISION

MORE bright than rosebuds on the rounded base
Of some veined alabaster urn,
Wherein a lamp was set to burn
And throw false smiles on Aphrodite's face.

More bright than crowns of red anemones,
Which every flushing Syrian year
Saw laid upon Adonis' bier
By mourning maidens on adoring knees.

More brightly flashed the drops of precious blood,
The rubies linked upon the shrine
Of Christ the Babe, the Christ divine,
To seal His body for the holy rood.

XLI

p. 64

THE RETURN OF THE MAGI

How they did laugh, when mounting our camels
Three of us rode, obeying the light;
Slowly we cut our hearts from the trammels
Doubt flung around us that first wistful night.
Only a star above wind and rain,
Only a bloom on the passionless plain,
Waving us onward; yet we were right.
We thank Thee, Lord.

Oft we recalled that kindly derision,
Measuring seas of measureless sand,
Mocked by the streams and trees of the vision
Moving and melting at magic's command.
Cheated and choked we quailed and burned,
While the blast blew and the desert was churned,
Slipping, it seemed, out of God's own hand.
We praise Thee, Lord.

Onward we rode, where silver-meshed rivers
Sang to the birds which singing replied,
Where the soft light through rose-bowers quivers,
On past the voice of the bridegroom and bride.
Seeking the desert and star again,
Leaving the homesteads and fields of white grain
Where the doves called us to dream and bide.
We bless Thee, Lord.

p. 65

Onward we went, past temples that brighten,
Sepulchres hiding souls that are dead,
Chambers where bought lips wearily whiten,
Altars and pavements with hecatombs red.
Onward we travelled to Bethlehem,
Guided from Zion, the earth's diadem,
On to a stable and manger bed,
To greet Thee, Lord.

Dimly His eyes flashed, laden with presage,
Telling of strife and triumph to be;

Gracious His lips, and glowed with a message
Merciful, strong to set prisoners free.
Lord, use our myrrh and our urns of gold;
Fairer than children of men to behold,
Thine is the sceptre and victory!
We worship Thee.

p. 66

XLII
ATONEMENT

WHAT love it was that Thou shouldst choose to feel
The chill of valleys where no dawns emerge
To break the mist, and streams repeat the dirge
For faith crushed like a pearl beneath man's heel.

How just it was that Thou our Judge shouldst learn
The force of taunts that goad us into sin,
And slowly aureoled perfection win
Through blackened hopes, and through the stripes that burn.

Thou who didst steel thy will to impotence,
And wouldst not save Thyself, or take control
Of force, make us so dead that we may live.

Thou God of sorrows, wash our penitence,
Thou who wast naked, help each smitten soul,
Christ strong to suffer, stronger to forgive.

p. 67

XLIII
CALVARY

As some weak bird, tossed homeward by the gale,
Is safely nested in the rocky scar
That cleaves the curving beach, but hears afar
The ocean writhing at the tempest's flail,

So thou, my soul, hast reached the refuge hill
That Pilate made a pleasance for his jest,
And in Christ's rose-red side hast found a rest,
Borne half by passion, yet by conscious will.

O Lord, whose spirit waged so hard a fight,
Scorn not the tainted thing beside thy heart
As too unfit to feel that sacred glow;

But lest I ere forget how much I owe,
Let not the vision utterly depart
Of frenzied storm and all-engulfing night.

p. 68

XLIV
"THE DESERT SHALL BLOSSOM"

LONG, long ago He died, and yet He is not dead;
From out His riven side and patient hands that bled
Flows one unebbing tide, by love and pity fed.

God's heart is satisfied, man's eyes are upward led,
And o'er the desert wide, the dew that's downward shed
Drawn from that flowing tide, forms flowers white and red.

p. 69

XLV
RESURRECTION

HOPE, last of all the angels, left the three
Who with their woman's courage watched Christ die;
 But Hope, when she had fled,
Returned to plant in them one humble flower,
The thought that in His grey sepulchral bower
 They three might strew around the Dead
The alms of one adoring sympathy,
 And pray a last good-bye.

They sped in silence, but the sharp-fanged doubt
Lurked in the path to mock their pungent store
 Of spices, hissing, "Nay,
Ye cannot reach the Tenant of that gloom."
But when the dawn and they retouched the tomb,
 They found the stone was rolled away,
And He, their Life who died, now stood without,
 Alive for evermore.

Thus when we seek our buried innocence
With bitter myrrh and grey-leaved rosemary,
 And writhing doubts delay
Our steps towards the tomb of our desire,
Do Thou, O Lord, our musing eyes inspire
 To see the stone is rolled away,
And find that self has thrown its grave-clothes hence
 And risen to live free.

p. 70

XLVI THE ASCENSION

p. 71

"Lo, I am with you alway." Thus He spake
Girt with the zone of His disciples' love,
And straightway, like the nascent flames that wake
Upon a placid hearth, He soars above.
 Forlorn they cannot move;
Their eyes are voyaging to track the Friend
Who promised to be with them till the end.

Once, the last once, His scar-gemmed Hand He lifts,
The Hand that twined the children to His knee,
Once downward bends the pitying Eye that sifts
Our chaff and grain for all eternity:
 The blue immensity
Robes its Creator in a cope of light,
A cloud receives Him from their upturned sight.

Thou "alway with us"? Do the brakes of thorn
No more entangle our tormented earth,
Do women travail less when babes are born,
Costs it less sweat for men to fight with dearth,
 Is life one Eden mirth,
Moves there more laughter on the purple sea,
Or richer gold across the rippling lea?

p. 72

I care not: but we know, O Friend of friends,
Thou throned above art by our weary side,
The light that upward sailed with Thee descends
To be our morn undimmed by night or tide;
 And Thou, eternal Guide,
Art not content to lead us to thy goal,
But buildest heaven in the broken soul.

XLVII A HYMN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

p. 73

O SMILE upon the mirror of the world,
O Bearer of the censer whence is curled
The fragrant breath of watered trees at eve,

And fires that slowly in the sunrise weave.

Thou art the Why within the universe,
Thou fillest hidden caves which seas immerse,
Thou sowest flowers upon the snow-bound hills,
And teachest music to the listening rills.

Thou art the Guide of man's supreme ascent
From sullen shapes that through the forest bent,
To minds that sift the sovran right from wrong
And forms more perfect than a polished song.

The lily sceptre of sweet virgin love
Is thine; the rosy coronet above
The bridal brow is thine; from Thee the might
Of infant eyes, like stars that calm the night.

Thou art the Spirit of insurgent truth,
Thou givest buried lore a second youth,
Thou makest charity with wisdom grow,
And provest falsehood but a losing throw.

Thou calledst Moses from the wealthy Nile
And all the idols of fair Philae's isle,
To march for life beneath the desert sun
And teach a rabble that their God was one.

And Thou didst barb the tongue of Socrates
To sting a city settled on the lees,
To lash the vice of fluent sophistry
And crucify the shifting inward lie.

Thou plantedst pity in the Indian sage,
Who conned the verses penned on sorrow's page,
And strove to cut by mental abstinence
The silken cord that threads the beads of sense

But could not in himself his pity slake,
And watching lotos blooms upon a lake,
Which helpless sank or rose with every wave,
Resolved all sinking souls to lift and save.

And Thou within a cloud of maiden white
Didst form that sun of radiating light,
Christ's strong immaculate humanity,
Transparent monst'rance of His Deity.

He, sinless, trod the brink of sin's abyss
And for His love received a traitor's kiss;
Then driven by thy soft compelling breath
He, who was Life, resigned himself to death.

He showed us that this fleshly house of sense
Is not a nomad tent or barrier fence,
But some fair chancel where thy vivid flame
Might find an altar and reveal His name.

Come, Holy Ghost, and breathe from sea to sea,
Give each his special fruit of liberty;
Tear from deceit the scintillating robe,
From Satan's hands hurl down the rod and globe.

Break Thou the spirit of the lords of lust,
Whose passions scatter an infected dust;
Reduce the men for whom the poor have bled,
Who elevate their gold as God and Bread.

Grant me a mind that may become thy lyre,
A hate of hatred and a tongue of fire;
And mid the clamour of all transient things
Let me not miss the passage of thy wings.

p. 74

p. 75

XLVIII
"ADORA ET TACE"

p. 76

LOVE only is the school of love,

And they who learn from Thee their art,
Will find thy presence from above
Touch altar, hand, and heart.

While others ask how Thou canst come,
Or tell me when Thou goest away,
Be mine to call Thee to my home,
And know that Thou wilt stay.

While others all their worship weigh,
And keenly blame the less or more,
Be mine my lowly best to pay,
"Be silent, and adore."

Give me to keep thy new command,
Who at thy precious blood was priced;
Make all my world a holy land,
Let all my life be Christ.

XLIX

THE REFUGE OF THE WANDERING

p. 77

COLD and cruel as the winds that carry
Arctic hills of ice and snow,
Past the cliffs where skirling sea-birds tarry
And the seething breakers flow.

Burning as the Afric wind that races
Northward from its desert land,
Wind that blasts and covers green oases
With its ropes of parching sand.

Rough and angry as the winds that bluster
Where Tibetan temples shine,
Winds like savage lancers come to muster
On an Eastern frontier line.

Sad and blind as winds that wander sobbing,
Where the raw Atlantic mist
From the stars their pearly radiance robbing,
Grips the shore with damp white fist.

So our souls from every quarter eddy,
North and South and East and West,
Jesu, till the wayward and the ready
On thy heart all sink to rest.

p. 78

L

THE LEGEND OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

p. 79

ON to the bank that recedes,
On through the shadows that mock,
Tearing my staff from the weeds,
Bruising my feet on the rock,
Caught by this Babe who appealed,
Calling to echoes astray;
Would that my heart I had steeled,
Left Him to listen till day!
Child, who dost crush me with weight,
Child of the pitiful eyes,
Whence didst Thou come to my gate?
How didst Thou fool me to rise
From my lone bed?

Sweeter than bells at the Mass,
Older and newer than time,
Charming the shadows to pass
Ringeth His voice in a chime.
Firm is the touch of His hands,

p. 80

Soft as my mother's caress,
Loosing my misery's bands,
Calming the wrath I confess.
Child, who hast healed all my pain,
Joy of my soul, must we part
Just when the bank we shall gain?
Blest be these feet on my heart!
They too have bled.

LI
THE LIGHT INVISIBLE

p. 81

O LIGHT that lives on every hill and shore,
Beyond the light that dies at close of day,
The tears fill up the chalice of mine eyes
With gladness, when I see Thee far away.

O Stream that flows until the world shall end,
Past fretful town and hermitage and field,
Red are thy waters, but they throb with peace;
I touch their dew and all my wounds are healed.

O Voice that speaks in every grove and street,
Above the song of birds and oaths of men,
I hear and follow Thee, although my steps
Begin a course that lies beyond my ken.

O Face returning at each Eucharist,
More close than forms that change with changing years,
I am the veil between myself and Thee,
Burn Thou the veil, and burning, kill my fears.

p. 82

O Guest that comes to take away our best,
And all the loves we garner at our side,
Thou art our Best, our Home art Thou. For Thee,
Attentive I will labour and abide.

LII
ONWARD

p. 83

FAR, and how far it is not mine to tell,
The hills of silken grey
Enfold the vale, and yet above that fell
The Shepherd knows a way.

Far, and how far it is not mine to guess,
A sea of hungry waves
Surrounds me, but the Pilot thwarts their stress
With skill that guides and saves.

Far, and how far is all unknown to me,
The many mansions lie
Beyond the grave, yet will the Builder see
And come to meet my cry.

LIII
THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

p. 84

SAY what good-bye
We owe to those who lived unstained by guile,
Who seemed to die,
But made their death a smile,
As though to promise we should meet within
A little while.

Is this good-bye,
To sorrow o'er the blood-red pall of day,
Till in the sky
Faint tapers coldly pray;
And think our joy died like the buried sun's
Last golden ray?

Is this good-bye,
To tread on fallow leaves in autumn rain,
And hear winds sigh
An echo of our pain;
And think that never can the bud-crowned spring
Return again?

Is this good-bye,
To watch the myriad falling flakes of snow
Whirl down and lie
Upon the fields below;
And think the wonted path is now too dim
For us to know?

Not so: good-bye
Means faith in love kept warm by robes of white,
Faith to deny
The death of any light,
Faith that to-morrow will be yesterday
Without its night.

p. 85

LIV LETHE

p. 86

ERE we shall touch the jasper parapet,
That God has set
About His garden and the sea of glass,
Shall we first pass
Through some calm stream of soft forgetfulness
And wash our hapless little joys away?
And shall our souls in infant nakedness
Emerge to bathe in God's eternal day?
Shall we forget the garden roundelays
Of piping Mays,
When thrushes sang around the dewy lawns
In roseleaf dawns,
And tulips—purple, saffron, red and white,—
Below the shade of box and fragrant bay,
Would lift to heaven their well-poised heads, as bright
As ever bloomed in Shiraz or Cathay?

Shall we forget the music of the sea,
The virgin glee
Which swayed beneath her robes dyed emerald,
And so enthralled
The vernal sun that he would downward shower
More silver on her violet crystal fringe
Than ever Sultan made his daughter's dower
Or locked in Istamboul with key and hinge?

p. 87

Shall we forget our hearts did ever ache
And slowly break,
Because a dream by lightning truth was rent,
Or we had spent
A love too deep for one whole life to speak
To gain a joy which proved too light to stay,
As quickly fading as the tulip's cheek,
As fickle as the sea in witching May?

LV AVE ATQUE VALE

p. 88

OUR life is but a rosary
Of Hail and then Farewell;
Some never read the mystery
The onyx beads foretell.

They think each bead falls on the ground
And spells another loss:
God gathers them to make a round
And seals it with His cross.

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FOOTNOTES

[6] This poem is founded on a genuine study of the history of the gipsies, whose language was learnt by the writer in his boyhood.

[19] This poem refers to the mother of one of my friends. She was believed by the peasants on her estate to have been stolen by the fairies.

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