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BASIL BLACKWELL

OXFORD POETRY

1921

EDITED BY
ALAN PORTER, RICHARD HUGHES,
ROBERT GRAVES

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THE EDITORS of this year's Oxford Poetry, the work of undergraduates who have been in residence since the date of the last collection, have attempted to make the volume more representative of Poetry and less representative merely of Oxford than its predecessors. There is always at Oxford a fashion in verse as much as in dress, and, to judge from the bulk of contributions submitted, this fashion has not changed materially since last noted and recorded in print. Mr Jones-Smith, of Balliol, still writes musically of brimming chalices, vermilion lips, chrysoprase, lotuses, arabesques and darkling spires against glimmering skies; Miss Smith-Jones, of Somerville, is equally faithful to her scarlet sins, beloved hearts, little clutching hands, little pattering feet, rosaries, eternity, roundabouts, and glimmering spires against darkling skies. Exclusion of these worn properties has given the fewer writers than usual represented here, extended elbow room, and a chance of showing some individual capacity for better or worse.

Most of the pieces have already appeared serially in *The London Mercury*, *The Spectator*, *The Westminster Gazette*, *The New Statesman*, *The Nation and Athenæum*, *The Observer*, and the other leading literary reviews.

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TRESPASSERS

GAUNTLY outlined, white and still,
Three haystacks peer above the hill;
Three aged rakes thrust sprawlingly
Fantastic tendons to the sky.
In the void and dismal yard
Farmer's dog keeps rasping guard,
Challenging night's trespassers,
The solemn legions of the stars;
Growling ignominious scorn
At Cancer and at Capricorn.
The yellow stars, serene and prim,
Tolerantly stare at him.

THE WATERMILL

I'LL rise at midnight and I'll rove
Up the hill and down the drove
That leads to the old unnoticed mill,
And think of one I used to love:
There stooping to the hunching wall
I'll stare into the rush of stars
Or bubbles that the waterfall
Brings forth and breaks in ceaseless wars.

The shelving hills have made a fourm
Where the mill holdings shelter warm,
And here I came with one I loved
To watch the seething millions swarm.
But long ago she grew a ghost
Though walking with me every day;
Even when her beauty burned me most
She to a spectre dimmed away—

Until though cheeks all morning-bright
And black eyes gleaming life's delight
And singing voice dwelt in my sense,
Herself paled on my inward sight.
She grew one whom deep waters glassed.
Then in dismay I hid from her,
And lone by talking brooks at last
I found a Love still lovelier.

O lost in tortured days of France!
Yet still the moment comes like chance
Born in the stirring midnight's sigh
Or in the wild wet sunset's glance:
And how I know not but this stream
Still sounds like vision's voice, and still
I watch with Love the bubbles gleam,
I walk with Love beside the mill.

The heavens are thrall'd with cloud, yet gray
Half-moonlight swims the fields till day,
The stubbled fields, the bleaching woods;—
Even this bleak hour is stolen away
By this shy water falling low,
And calling low the whole night through,
And calling back the long ago
And richest world I ever knew.

The hop-kiln fingers cobweb-white
With discord dim turned left and right,
And when the wind was south and small
The sea's far whisper drowsed the night;
Scarce more than mantling ivy's voice
That in the tumbling water trailed.
Love's spirit called me to rejoice
When she to nothingness had paled:

For Love the daffodils shone here
In grass the greenest of the year,
Daffodils seemed the sunset lights
And silver birches budded clear:
And all from east to west there strode
Great shafted clouds in argent air,
The shining chariot-wheels of God,
And still Love's moment sees them there.

A THICK hot haze had choked the valley grounds
 Long since, the dogday sun had gone his rounds
 Like a dull coal half lit with sulky heat;
 And leas were iron, ponds were clay, fierce beat
 The blackening flies round moody cattle's eyes.
 Wasps on the mudbanks seemed a hornet's size,
 That on the dead roach battered. The plough's increase
 Stood under a curse.

Behold, the far release!
 Old wisdom breathless at her cottage door
 'Sounds of abundance' mused, and heard the roar
 Of marshalled armies in the silent air,
 And thought Elisha stood beside her there,
 And clacking reckoned ere the next nightfall
 She'd turn the looking-glasses to the wall.

Faster than armies out of the burnt void
 The hour-glass clouds innumerably deployed;
 And when the hay-folks next look up, the sky
 Sags black above them; scarce is time to fly.
 And most run for their cottages; but Ward
 The mower for the inn beside the ford,
 And slow strides he with shouldered scythe still bare,
 While to the coverts leaps the great-eyed hare.

As he came in, the dust snatched up and whirled
 Hung high, and like a bell-rope whipped and twirled,
 The brazen light glared round, the haze resolved
 Into demoniac shapes bulged and convolved.
 Well might poor ewes afar make bleatings wild,
 Though this old trusting mower sat and smiled,
 For from the hush of many days the land
 Had waked itself: and now on every hand
 Shrill swift alarm-notes, cries and counter-cries,
 Lowings and crowings came and throbbing sighs.
 Now atom lightning brandished on the moor,
 Then out of sullen drumming came the roar
 Of thunder joining battle east and west:
 In hedge and orchard small birds durst not rest,
 Flittering like dead leaves and like wisps of straws,
 And the cuckoo called again, for without pause
 Oncoming voices in the vortex burred.
 The storm came toppling like a wave, and blurred
 In grey the trees that like black steeples towered.
 The sun's last yellow died. Then who but cowered?
 Down ruddying darkness floods the hideous flash,
 And pole to pole the cataract whirlwinds clash.

Alone within the tavern parlour still
 Sat the gray mower, pondering his God's will,
 And flinching not to flame or bolt, that swooped
 With a great hissing rain till terror drooped
 In weariness: and then there came a roar
 Ten-thousand-fold, he saw not, was no more—
 But life bursts on him once again, and blood
 Beats droning round, and light comes in a flood.

He stares, and sees the sashes battered awry,
 The wainscot shivered, the crocks shattered, and by,
 His twisted scythe, melted by its fierce foe,
 Whose Parthian shot struck down the chimney. Slow
 Old Ward lays hand to his old working-friend,
 And thanking God Whose mercy did defend
 His servant, yet must drop a tear or two
 And think of times when that old scythe was new,
 And stands in silent grief, nor hears the voices
 Of many a bird that through the land rejoices,
 Nor sees through the smashed panes the sea-green sky,
 That ripens into blue, nor knows the storm is by.

THE TIME IS GONE

THE TIME is gone when we could throw
Our angle in the sleepy stream,
And nothing more desired to know
Than was it roach or was it bream?
Sitting there in such a mute delight,
The Kingfisher would come and on the rods alight.

Or hurrying through the dewy hay
Without a thought but to make haste
We came to where the old ring lay
And bats and balls seemed heaven at least.
With our laughing and our giant strokes
The echoes clacked among the chestnuts and the oaks.

When the spring came up we got
And out among wild Emmet Hills
Blossoms, aye and pleasures sought
And found! bloom withers, pleasure chills;
Like geographers along green brooks
We named the capes and tumbling bays and horseshoe crooks.

But one day I found a man
Leaning on the bridge's rail;
Dared his face as all to scan,
And awestruck wondered what could ail
An elder, blest with all the gifts of years,
In such a happy place to shed such bitter tears.

THE SOUTH-WEST WIND

WE STOOD by the idle weir,
Like bells the waters played,
The rich moonlight slept everywhere
As it would never fade:
So slept our shining peace of mind
Till rose a south-west wind.

How sorrow comes who knows?
And here joy surely had been:
But joy like any wild wind blows
From mountains none has seen,
And still its cloudy veilings throws
On the bright road it goes.

The black-plumed poplars swung
So softly across the sky:
The ivy sighed, the river sung,
Woolpacks were wafting high:
The moon her golden tinges flung
On these she straight was lost among.

O south-west wind of the soul,
That brought such new delight,
And passing by in music stole
Love's rich and trusting light,
Would that we thrilled to thy least breath
Now all is still as death.

THERE so dark and still
Slept the water, never changing,
From the glad sport in the meadows
Oft I turned me.

Fear would strike me chill
On the clearest day in summer,
Yet I loved to stand and ponder
Hours together

By the tarred bridge rail—
There the lockman's vine-clad window,
Mirrored in the tomb-like water
Stared in silence

Till, deformed and pale
In the sunken cavern shadows,
One by one imagined demons
Scowled upon me.

Barges passed me by,
With their unknown surly masters
And small cabins, whereon some rude
Hand had painted

Trees and castles high.
Cheerly stepped the towing horses,
And the women sung their children
Into slumber.

Barges, too, I saw
Drowned in mud, drowned, drowned long ages,
Their gray ribs but seen in summer,
Their names never:

In whose silted maw
Swarmed great eels, the priests of darkness,
Old as they, who came at midnight
To destroy me.

Like one blind and lame
Who by some new sense has vision
And strikes deadlier than the strongest
Went this water.

Many an angler came,
Went his ways; and I would know them,
Some would smile and give me greeting,
Some kept silence—

Most, one old dragoon
Who had never a morning hallo,
But with stony eye strode onward
Till the water,

On a silent noon,
That had watched him long, commanded:
Whom he answered, leaping headlong
To self-murder.

'Fear and fly the spell,'
Thus my Spirit sang beside me;
Then once more I ranged the meadows,
Yet still brooded,

When the threefold knell
Sounded through the haze of harvest—
Who had found the lame blind water
Swift and seeing?

THE MARCH BEE

A WARMING wind comes to my resting-place
And in a mountain cloud the lost sun chills;
Night comes, and yet before she shows her face
The sun flings off the shadows, warm light fills
The valley and the clearings on the hills,
Bleak crow the moorcocks on the fen's blue plashes,
But here I warm myself with these bright looks and flashes.
And like to me the merry humble bee
Puts fear aside, runs forth to meet the sun
And by the ploughlands' shoulder comes to see
The flowers that like him best, and seems to shun
Cold countless quaking windflowers every one,
Primroses too; but makes poor grass his choice
Where small wood-strawberry blossoms nestle and rejoice.
The magpies steering round from wood to wood,
Tree-creepers flicking up to elms' green rind,
Bold gnats that revel round my solitude
And most this pleasant bee intent to find
The new-born joy, inveigle the rich mind
Long after darkness comes cold-lipped to one
Still hearkening to the bee, still basking in the sun.

LOUIS GOLDING

PLOUGHMAN AT THE PLOUGH

HE BEHIND the straight plough stands
Stalwart, firm shafts in firm hands.

Naught he cares for wars and naught
For the fierce disease of thought.

Only for the winds, the sheer
Naked impulse of the year,

Only for the soil, which stares
Clean into God's face, he cares.

In the stark might of his deed
There is more than art or creed;

In his wrist more strength is hid
Than the monstrous Pyramid;

Stauncher than stern Everest
Be the muscles of his breast;

Not the Atlantic sweeps a flood
Potent as the ploughman's blood.

He, his horse, his ploughshare, these
Are the only verities.

Dawn to dusk with God he stands,
The Earth poised on his broad hands.

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

I HAVE been given eyes
Which are neither foolish nor wise,
Seeing through joy or pain
Beauty alone remain.

I have been given an ear
Which catches nothing clear,
But only along the day
A song stealing away.

My feet and hands never could
Do anything evil or good:
Instead of these things,
A swift mouth that sings.

SHEPHERD SINGING RAGTIME
(For F. V. Branford)

THE SHEPHERD sings:
*'Way down in Dixie,
Way down in Dixie,
Where the hens are dog-gone glad to lay...'*

With shaded eyes he stands to look
Across the hills where the clouds swoon,
He singing, leans upon his crook,
He sings, he sings no more.
The wind is muffled in the tangled hair
Of sheep that drift along the noon.
The mild sheep stare
With amber eyes about the pearl-flecked June.
Two skylarks soar
With singing flame
Into the sun whence first they came.
All else is only grasshoppers
Or a brown wing the shepherd stirs,
Who, like a slow tree moving, goes
Where the pale tide of sheep-drift flows.

See! the sun smites
With molten lights
The turned wing of a gull that glows
Aslant the violet, the profound
Dome of the mid-June heights.
Alas! again the grasshoppers,
The birds, the slumber-winged bees,
Alas! again for those and these
Demure things drowned;
Drowned in vain raucous words men made
Where no lark rose with swift and sweet
Ascent and where no dim sheep strayed
About the stone immensities,
Where no sheep strayed and where no bees
Probed any flowers nor swung a blade
Of grass with pollened feet.

He sings:
*'In Dixie,
Way down in Dixie,
Where the hens are dog-gone glad to lay
Scrambled eggs in the new-mown hay...'*

The herring-gulls with peevish cries
Rebuke the man who sings vain words;
His sheep-dog growls a low complaint,
Then turns to chasing butterflies.
But when the indifferent singing-birds
From midmost down to dimmest shore
Innumerable confirm their songs,
And grasshoppers make summer rhyme
And solemn bees in the wild thyme
Clash cymbals and beat gongs,
The shepherd's words once more are faint,
Once more the alien song is thinned
Upon the long course of the wind,
He sings, he sings no more.

Ah now the dear monotonies
Of bells that jangle on the sheep
To the low limit of the hills!
Till the blue cup of music spills
Into the boughs of lowland trees;
Till thence the lowland singings creep
Into the dreamful shepherd's head,
Creep drowsily through his blood;
The young thrush fluting all he knows,
The ring dove moaning his false woes,
Almost the rabbit's tiny tread,
The last unfolding bud.
But now,

Now a cool word spreads out along the sea.
Now the day's violet is cloud-tipped with gold.

Now dusk most silently
Fills the hushed day with other wings than birds'.
Now where on foam-crest waves the seagulls rock,
To their cliff-haven go the seagulls thence.
So too the shepherd gathers in his flock,
Because birds journey to their dens,
Tired sheep to their still fold.

A dark first bat swoops low and dips
About the shepherd who now sings
A song of timeless evenings;
For dusk is round him with wide wings,
Dusk murmurs on his moving lips.

*There is not mortal man who knows
From whence the shepherd's song arose:
It came a thousand years ago.*

*Once the world's shepherds woke to lead
The folded sheep that they might feed
On green downs where winds blow.*

*One shepherd sang a golden word.
A thousand miles away one heard.
One sang it swift, one sang it slow.*

*Two skylarks heard, two skylarks told
All shepherds this same song of gold
On all downs where winds blow.*

*This is the song that shepherds must
Sing till the green downlands be dust
And tide of sheep-drift no more flow;*

*The song two skylarks told again
To all the sheep and shepherd men
On green downs where winds blow.*

GHOSTS GATHERING

YOU HEAR no bones click, see no shaken shroud.
Though no tombs grin, you feel ghosts gathering. Crowd
On pitiful crowd of small dead singing men
Tread the sure earth they feebly hymned; again
With fleshless hand seize unswayed grass. They seize
Insensitive flowers which bend not. Through gross trees
They sift. Nothing withstands them. Nothing knows
Them nor the songs they sang, their busy woes.
'Hence from these ingrate things! To the towns!' they
weep,
(If ghosts have tears). You think a wrinkled heap
Of leaves heaved, or a wing stirred, less than this.
Some chance on the midnight cities. Others miss
The few faint lights, thin voices. Wretched these
Doomed to beat long the windy vacancies!
Some mourn through forlorn towns. They prowled and seek
—What seek they? Who knows them? If branches creak
And leaves flap and slow women ply their trade,
Those all are living things, but these are dead,
All that they were, dead totally. What fool still
Knows their extinguished songs? They had their fill
Of average joys and sorrows. They learned how
Love wilts, Death does not wilt. What more left now?
But one ghost yet of all these ghosts may find
Himself not utterly faded.
Through his blind
Some old man's lamp-rays probe the darkness. Sick
Of his gaunt quest, the ghost halts. The clock's tick
Troubles the silence. Tiredly the ghost scans
The opened book on the table. A flame fans,
A weak wan fire floods through his subtle veins.
No, no, not wholly forgotten! Loves and pains
Not suffered wholly for nothing!
(The old man bends
Over the book, makes notes for pious ends,
—Some curious futile work twelve men at most
Will read and yawn over.) The dizzy ghost,
Like some more ignorant moth circles the light...
Not suffered wholly for nothing!... 'A sweet night!'
The old man mumbles... A warmth is in the air,
He smiles, not knowing why. He moves his chair
Closer against the table. And sitting bowed
Lovingly turns the leaves and chants aloud.

SILVER-BADGED WAITER

POOR trussed-up lad, what piteous guise
Cloaks the late splendour of your eyes,
Stiffens the fleetness of your face
Into a mask of sleek disgrace,
And makes a smooth caricature
Of your taut body's swift and sure
Poise, like a proud bird waiting one
Moment ere he taunt the sun;
Your body that stood foolish-wise
Stormed by the treasons of the skies,
Star-like that hung, deliberate
Above the dubieties of Fate,
But with an April gesture chose
Unutterable and certain woes!
And now you stand with discreet charm
Dropping the napkin round your arm,
Anticipate your tip while you
Hear the commercial travellers chew.
You shuffle with their soups and beers
Who held at heel the howling fears,
You whose young limbs were proud to dare
Challenge the black hosts of despair!

ROBERT GRAVES

CYNICS AND ROMANTICS

IN CLUB and messroom let them sit
At skirmish of ingenious wit;
Deriding Love, yet not with hearts
Accorded to those healthier parts
Of grim self-mockery, but with mean
And burrowing search for things unclean,
Pretended deafness, twisted sense,
Sharp innuendoes rising thence,
And affectation of prude-shame
That shrinks from using the short name.
We are not envious of their sour
Disintegrations of Love's power,
Their swift analysis of the stabs
Devised by virgins and by drabs
(Powder or lace or scent) to excite
A none-too-jaded appetite.
They never guess of Love as we
Have found the amazing Art to be,
Pursuit of dazzling flame, or flight
From web-hung blackness of night,
With laughter only to express
Care overborne by carelessness;
They never bridge from small to great,
From nod or glance to ideal Fate,
From clouded forehead or slow sigh
To doubt and agony looming by,
From shining gaze and hair flung free
To infinity and to eternity—
They sneer and poke a treacherous joke
With scorn for our rusticity.

'ALONE

Through forests evergreen,
By legend known,
By no eye seen,
Unmated
Unbaited
Untrembling between
The shifting shadows
The sudden echoes,
Deathless I go
Unheard, unseen,'
Says the White Doe.

Unicorn with bursting heart
Breath of love has drawn
On his desolate crags apart
At rumour of dawn,

Has volleyed forth his pride
Twenty thousand years mute,
Tossed his horn from side to side
Lunged with his foot.

'Like a storm of sand I run
Breaking the desert's boundaries,
I go in hiding from the sun
In thick shade of trees

Straight was the track I took
Across the plains, but here with briar
And mire the tangled alleys crook
Baulking my desire.

Ho, there! what glinted white?
(A bough still shakes)
What was it darted from my sight
Through the forest brakes?

Where are you fled from me?
I pursue, you fade;
I run, you hide from me
In the dark glade.

Towering straight the trees grow,
The grass grows thick.
Where you are, I do not know,
You fly so quick.'

'Seek me not here
Lodged among mortal deer,'
Says the White Doe,
'Keeping one place
Held by the ties of space,'
Says the White Doe.

'I
Equally
In air
Above your bare
Hill crest, your basalt lair,
Mirage reflected drink
At the clear pool's brink
With tigers at play
In the glare of day
Blithely I stray,
Under shadow of myrtle
With Phoenix and his Turtle
For all time true,
With Gryphons at grass
Under the Upas,
Sipping warm dew
That falls hourly new,
I, unattainable
Complete, incomprehensible
No mate for you.
In your's home

in sun s beam
Or star-gleam,
No mate for you
No mate for you,'
Says the White Doe.

SULLEN MOODS

LOVE, do not count your labour lost
Though I turn sullen, grim, retired
Even at your side; my thought is crossed
With fancies by old longings fired.

And when I answer you, some days
Vaguely and wildly, do not fear
That my love goes forbidden ways
Hating the laws that bind it here.

If I speak gruffly, this mood is
Mere indignation at my own
Shortcomings, plagues, uncertainties;
I forget the gentler tone.

'You,' now that you have come to be
My one beginning, prime and end,
I count at last as wholly 'me,'
Lover no longer nor yet friend.

Friendship is flattery, though close hid;
Must I then flatter my own mind?
And must (which laws of shame forbid)
Blind love of you make self-love blind?

Do not repay me my own coin,
The sharp rebuke, the frown, the groan;
But stir my memory to disjoin
Your emanation from my own.

Help me to see you as before
When overwhelmed and dead, almost,
I stumbled on that secret door
Which saves the live man from the ghost.

Be once again the distant light,
Promise of glory, not yet known
In full perfection—wasted quite
When on my imperfection thrown.

HENRY AND MARY

HENRY was a worthy king,
Mary was his queen,
He gave to her a snowdrop
Upon a stalk of green.

Then all for his kindness
And all for his care
She gave him a new-laid egg
In the garden there.

Love, can you sing?
I cannot sing.
Or story-tell?

Not one I know.
Then let us play at queen and king,
As down the garden walks we go.

ON THE RIDGE

BELOW the ridge a raven flew,
And we heard the lost curlew
Mourning out of sight below
Mountain tops were touched with snow;
Even the long dividing plain
Showed no wealth of sheep or grain,
But fields of boulders lay like corn
And raven's croak was shepherd's horn
To slow cloud shadow strayed across
A pasture of thin heath and moss.
The North Wind rose; I saw him press
With lusty force against your dress,
Moulding your body's inward grace,
And streaming off from your set face,
So now no longer flesh and blood
But poised in marble thought you stood;
O wingless Victory, loved of men,
Who could withstand your triumph then?

A LOVER SINCE CHILDHOOD

TANGLED in thought am I,
Stumble in speech do I?
Do I blunder and blush for the reason why?
Wander aloof do I,
Lean over gates and sigh,
Making friends with the bee and the butterfly?

If thus and thus I do
Dazed by the thought of you,
Walking my sorrowful way in the early dew,
My heart pierced through and through
By this despair of you,
Starved for a word or a look will my hope renew.

Give then a thought for me
Walking so miserably,
Wanting relief in the friendship or flower or tree,
Do but remember, we
Once could in love agree
Swallow your pride, let us be as we used to be.

NIGHT-SOUNDS

FAINTLY through my window come
Sounds of things unheard by day,
Things that nightly speak and play,
But by day again go dumb.

Uncouth owls, with shuddering cry,
Flap great wings in horrid grief
Flap and swoop on journeys brief,
Hooting long and miserably.

Lurching in unsteady flight
Comes a lean bat, singing shrill,
Stumbles on my window sill,
And staggers off into the night.

Wild duck, waking on the marsh,
Din against my sleepy senses;
Like the wind on creaking fences
Comes their croaking, faint and harsh.

There's a little bush I hear
Muttering, frightened, half-asleep;
Now a leafy voice, more deep,
Rustles vague comfort, soothes its fear.

Water flows not as by day.
A new tone through its voice has crept.
Streams that in daylight laughed and leapt
And had humorous things to say,

Speak so gravely now, and mutter
Of things secret, scarcely guessed,
Winds' and Waters' veiled unrest,
Griefs too big for man to utter.

Of the days before man came
The days when man shall be no more,
And Earth again be ruled by Four,
Air and Water, Earth and Flame.

Now a sudden silence falls;
Until like rocking, silver boats
Come the curlew's ripply notes
How far the curious music calls!

And sweet twitters whisper clearly
From the tree tops dimly seen
Piping from the shadowy green
That the dawn is here, or nearly.

'A STRONGER THAN HE SHALL COME UPON HIM...'

AND then he was seized by one who was stronger than
he,
Seized and tamed and bound and forced to obey;
From the swinging choice of evil or good he was free;
Good was no longer; evil had vanished away
He left to another the gain or loss of the day.

Was he driven or drawn? What matter? He was content.
He yielded him, body and soul, to the whirl of War
As one yields to the high sea-wind, and is buffered, bent
To his will, when, shouting, he stamps in over the shore
Triumphant, driving all things like dust before.

Can aught but a rock stand firm, or question his might
Who tosses the leaves and clouds from a hand so
strong?

The trees and grasses bow in awe of his might,
And men in the mountains, hearing his giant-song,
Yield, and are hurried—whirled—hounded along.

Thus he yielded to War, who was stronger than he—
No time to think—no time to ponder and weigh—
He was swept like a straw on the wind—and yet he knew
himself free
Was it freedom or bondage, this? In truth, it were hard
to say;
But, slave or king, he bowed his head to obey.

COLOUR

FLOWERS, thick as stars, lay
Splashed about the roadway—
Flowers nodding up and down,
Gold, lilac, fern-brown,
 Colour in which to drown.
The Channel was a dark blue streak,
With pools rosy like the cheek
 Of a girl too shy to speak,
And coloured clouds went tossing past,
 Warm and windy,
 Vivid and quaint,
Faint and eager and vast.

Colour, thick as dust, lay
Spattered about the highway—
Colour so bright that one would think
White, blue, cherry-pink
 Were made to clutch and drink,
Colour that made one stop and say,
'Earth, are you Heaven to-day?'
 Colour that made one pray.
Lumps of colour, liquid and cool,
 Cool and near,
 Clear and gay
Tumbled about my way.

WHITE MAGIC

YOU came, but still, with heart full-given to gladness,
I paused, as one stands stricken ere he falls;
Not yet my fumblings swept their bounds, clogged sense its
 Weakling walls.

Quaint spaceless musings held me—idiot Mind was
Gaped and gilled like a fish to suck through slow
Tentative pores swift sweetness of strange waters'
 Ebb and flow.

Yet how could I praise in darkness?—Life, like a sodded
Seed, moved in drought-sleep and cleft its clay
Freshly it seemed, though each sap-season spired its
 Stalks into day:

Till now (ah, deft magician!) your wand hovers
Over all Spirit—over those lost grey fields
Where one frail flower, with burning stem, glad, gradual
 Petals yields;

And whose past pitiful bitter blooms live only
In the flushed mockery of remembering lovers.

THE SINGING FURIES

THE YELLOW sky grows vivid as the sun,
The sea glittering, and the hills dun.

The stones quiver. Twenty pounds of lead
Fold upon fold, the air laps my head.

Both eyes scorch: tongue stiff and bitter.
Flies buzz, but no birds twitter:

Slow bullocks stand with stinging feet,
And naked fishes scarcely stir, for heat.

White as smoke,
As jetted steam, dead clouds awoke
And quivered on the Western rim.
And then the singing started, dim
And sibilant as rime-stiff reeds
That whistle as the wind leads.
The North answered, low and clear;
The South whispered hard and sere,
And thunder muffled up like drums
Beat, whence the East-wind comes.
The heavy sky that could not weep
Is loosened: rain falls steep,
And thirty singing furies ride
To split the sky from side to side.
They sing, and lash the wet-flanked wind:
Sing, from Col to Hafod Mynd
And fling their voices half a score
Of miles along the mounded shore:
Whip loud music from a tree,
And roll their paeon out to sea
Where crowded breakers fling and leap,
And strange things throb five fathoms deep.

The sudden tempest roared and died:
The singing furies muted ride
Down wet and slippery roads to hell;
And, silent in their captors' train
Two fishers, storm-caught on the main;
A shepherd, battered with his flocks;
A pit-boy tumbled from the rocks,
A dozen back-broke gulls, and hosts
Of shadowy, small, pathetic ghosts,
Of mice and leverets caught by flood,
Their beauty shrouded in cold mud.

THE SERMON
(Wales 1920).

LIKE grippt stick
Still I sit:
Eyes fixed on far small eyes,
Full of it:
On the old, broad face,
The hung chin;
Heavy arms, surplice
Worn through and worn thin.
Probe I the hid mind
Under the gross flesh:
Clutch at poetic words,
Follow their mesh
Scarce heaving breath.
Clutch, marvel, wonder,
Till the words end.

Stilled is the muttered thunder:
The hard, few people wake,
Gather their books and go—
Whether their hearts could break
How can I know?

TRAMP

WHEN a brass sun staggers above the sky,
When feet cleave to boots, and the tongue's dry,
And sharp dust goads the rolling eye,
Come thoughts of wine, and dancing thoughts of girls:
They shiver their white arms, and the head whirls,
And noon light is hid in their dark curls:
Noon feet stumble, and head swims.
Out shines the sun, and the thought dims,
And death, for blood, runs in the weak limbs.

To fall on flints in the shade of tall nettles
Gives easy sleep as a bed of rose petals,
And dust drifting from the highway
As light a coverlet as down may.
The myriad feet of many-sized flies
May not open those tired eyes.

The first wind of night
Twitches the coverlet away quite:
The first wind and large first rain
Flickers the dry pulse to life again:
Flickers the lids burning on the eyes
With sudden flashes of the slipping skies.
Hunger, oldest visionary,
Hides a devil in a tree,
Hints a glory in the clouds,
Fills the crooked air with crowds
Of ivory sightless demons singing—

Eyes start: straightens back:
Limbs stagger and crack:
But Brain flies, Brain soars
Up, where the Sky roars
Upon the back of cherubim:
Brain rockets up to Him.
Body gives another twist
To the slack waist-band;
In agony clenches fist
Till the nails bite the hand.
Body floats light as air,
With rain in its sparse hair:

Brain returns, and would tell
The things he has seen well:
Body will not stir his lips:
Brain and Body come to grips.

Deadly each hates the other
As treacherous blood-brother:
No sight, no sound shows
How the struggle goes.

They sink at last faint in the wet gutter;
So many words to sing that the tongue cannot utter.

ETERNAL gratitude—a long, thin word:
 When meant, oftenest left unheard:
 When light on the tongue, light in the purse too:
 Of curious metallurgy: when coined true
 It glitters not, is neither large nor small:
 More worth than rubies—less, times, than a ball.
 Not gift, nor willed: yet through its wide range
 Buys what it buys exact, and leaves no change.

Old Gurney had it, won on a hot day
 With ale, from glib-voiced Gypsy by the way.
 He held it lightly: for 'twas a rum start
 To find a hedgeling who had still a heart:
 So put it down for twist of a beggar's tongue...
He had not felt the heat: how the dust stung
 A face June-roasted: *he* saw not the look
 Aslant the gift-mug; how the hand shook...
 Yet the words rang his head, and he grew merry
 And whistled from the Boar to Wrye-brook ferry,
 And chaffed with Ferryman when the hawser creakt
 Or slipping bilge showed where the planks leakt:
 Lent hand himself, till doubly hard the barge
 Butted its nose in mud of the farther marge.
 When Gurney leapt to shore, he found—dismay!
 He had no tuppence—(Tuppence was to pay
 To sulky Ferryman)—'Naught have I,' says he,
 'Naught, but the gratitude of Tammas Lee
 Given one hour.'—Sulky Charon grinned:
 'Done,' said he. 'Done: I take—all of it, mind.'
 'Done,' cries Jan Gurney. Down the road he went,
 But by the ford left all his merriment.

41

This is the tale of midday chaffering:
 How Charon took, and Gurney lost the thing:
 How Ferryman gave it for his youngest daughter
 To a tall lad who saved her out of water—
 (Being old and mean, had none of his own to give,
 So passed on Tammas'; glad to see her live):
 And how young Farmer paid his quarter's rent
 With that one coin, when all else was spent,
 And how Squire kept it for some goldless debt...
 For aught I know, it wanders current yet.
 Yet Tammas was no angel in disguise:
 He stole Squire's chickens—often: he told lies,
 Robbed Charon's garden, burnt young Farmer's ricks
 And played the village many lowsy tricks.

No children sniffled, and no dog cried
 When full of oaths and smells, he died.

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JUDY

SAND hot to haunches:
Sun beating eyes down,
Yet they peer under lashes
At the hill's crown:

See how the hill slants
Up the sky halfway:
Over the top tall clouds
Poke gold and grey.

Down: see a green field
Tipped on its short edge,
Its upper rim straggled round
By a black hedge.

Grass bright as new brass:
Uneven dark gorse
Stuck to its own shadow
Like Judy that black horse.

Birds clatter numberless,
And the breeze tells
That beanflower somewhere
Has ousted the bluebells.

Birds clatter numberless:
In the muffled wood
Big feet move slowly:
Mean no good.

THE RUIN

GONE are the coloured princes, gone echo, gone
laughter:
Drips the blank roof: and the moss creeps after.

Dead is the crumbled chimney: all mellowed to rotting
The wall-tints, and the floor-tints, from the spotting
Of the rain, from the wind and slow appetite
Of patient mould: and of the worms that bite
At beauty all their innumerable lives.

But the sudden nip of knives,
The lady aching for her stiffening lord,
The passionate-fearful bride,
And beaded Pallor clamped to the torment-board,
—Leave they no ghosts, no memories by the stairs?

No sheeted glimmer treading floorless ways?
No haunting melody of lovers' airs,
Nor stealthy chill upon the noon of days?

No: for the dead and senseless walls have long forgotten
What passionate hearts beneath the turf lie rotten.

Only from roofs and chimneys pleasantly sliding
Tumbles the rain in the early hours,
Patters its thousand feet on the flowers,
Cools its small grey feet in the grasses.

INTRODUCTION TO A NARRATIVE POEM

THE VAPOUR, twining and twitching, seems to throw
 Black, precipitous boulders to and fro
 Light as a bandied scoff; and, look, the cliff—
 Whose root claws at the midworld fire with stiff
 Unmolten, adamantine fingers—fails,
 Lurches. Above, cold and eternal gales
 Run worrying, shredding, eternal sunlight; snatch
 At the heather; puff at the flocks of cotton; scratch
 White scars along the bents. If strangers climb
 To this plateau that buffets back slow time,
 They stand awhile impotent, grey with fear,
 And feel solidity's foundation stir.

But even here a cottage free from harms
 Lies havened, hugged and sheltered by the arms
 Of a narrow, green recess. A few stunt oaks,
 Elders, and barren apples beard the rocks;
 But, sleeker than a pool, the lawn beneath
 Burns white and blue, bewildering the heath.
 On a low wood-bench, rifted by years of rain,
 Warped at one end, split far along the grain,
 A meagre man with a waste, weary smile
 Reads to a boy and girl, or plays awhile
 Some quiet, grown-up game. He suddenly bows
 Head between hands: no more his children rouse
 Flicker or flame, by question or caress,
 To break the dead, monotonous, featureless
 Winter of grief. At last he rises, and,
 With empty scrutiny, feet that understand
 No path but falter at random, stumbles out
 Where tigrish winds whirry and havoc and shout.
 His back-blown hair, wet, smarting eyes, recall
 The conscious pang of life; and he must fall
 Faint on the ground, or whet his courage keen,
 Clench all his being, prise a path between
 The loud, inimical flaws. With even might
 He batters on, to earth's and air's despite,
 In storm and tumult winning peace and light.

Yet, in these roads of quiet, muniment
 From fury of nature, home from discontent
 Surely of earth's mean, trafficking miseries,
 In this domain of flower and fragrance, this
 Green plat of smooth, immotionable ground,
 Why does the panther sorrow skulk around
 And leap like fear from unsuspected fourm?
 Weigh this doubt rather—if the embittered swarm
 Of multitudinous grief thins ever or stays
 From most unmerited sally; for in what ways
 A man may tread, and fate how seeming fair,
 His intimate heart is troubled, and despair
 Lays present ambush. Many feel the sting
 Of casual time like bramble-thorns, that bring
 A not-enduring spasm: in other blood,
 More sensitive, urging a froward, perilous flood,
 It racks like tropic ivy, whose embrace
 Turns travellers maniac; nor shall lapse of days,
 Nor drug, nor simple, medicine back the mind;
 They go forgetting all their manhood, find
 No recollection save the venom of death
 That whistles about their brain and sears their breath.

Thus almost had it been with him, thus grief
 Came turbulent, and left him no relief.

SUMMER BATHING

THE RUCKLING pool, torn grey by Pendry Weir,
Became Cocytus to my boy time fear.
Two haw-trees, pulping fat their close, green fruits
Turned cuttlefish below, wagging no roots
But narrow tentacles. Old Jacob Fry
Tells how he drained this pool one hot July
When drought had sucked the white stream thick and slow:
Fish, four-foot deep, shone thirty feet below.
Leaning to drop a stone, the farmboy whews
Bewildered that his confident ear should lose
All thud for grounding. Now he fears to stay,
And walks by whistling on another day.

Here, when the black bees blundered in the heat
Half-drunk, rifling the fine-flurred meadowsweet,
I stripped and bathed. At first, numb for delight,
I lost all thought but this—Come, you must fight
Free from the swirl. But when blank eyes grew clear
Like a pit-pattering mouse came fluttered fear.
Now here and there slide snakish eels, now voles
Bolt hizzing over the brook to round, black holes.
These groping roots perhaps will grip my flesh
Till I grow tired of screaming: so the mesh
Will move, my bones will crackle, I sink down;
So to an end.

Or in some cave of brown
Sluttering scum and broad, plump bladder-weeds
Old fiends may sprawling meditate false deeds;
One, ware of prey, slip out lean fingers, pluck
Unusual meat through water's rush and ruck.

Yet, braving all, to prove wild fancy vain,
I held my breath and sank. The brook, astrain
And fierce to be free, spun snarling overhead;
Dull roars droned round, cold currents buffeted.
Proud of this daring shewn—but doubtful, too,
Of tempting fortune far—I battled through
To the root-held scroll of turf on the sagging bank,
And carefully muscled up. The sheep-field drank
The wide-spent, white-spilt sun, the wrapping air
Swung flame-like past, and, while I ran, the bare
Close-nibbled grass pushed hot against my feet.
The yeanelings rose and rushed with timid bleat
Full-tilt at the mothering ewe; fed sleek with clover,
Three cows, in mild amazement bending over
The gap-set palings, rubbed their necks or chewed.
But in mid-course I staggered, having trod
Firm on a flat and spiny thistle; stayed
Nursing my foot, half grinning, half dismayed:
Then lay full length, as light-heel time were not;
Pale fears, fantastic perils, all forgot.

COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

THIS grave, moss-grown, marks him who once went free;
Now pent—no, portionless; from sharp life lost;
Mere mouldered bone-work. His unheeded name

Who, curious, pausing, may decipher? See;
Thin gulled by running rain, by chipping frost
Frustrated, muffled under a yellow, same,

Fat scurf of lichen, the dim characters
Withstand conjecture, aimless and awry.
Yet here lies one who, living, peopled earth

With indestructible fancy. Now he hears
No nature's music, who for hours would lie
To hear the blue-caps click their quick, small mirth.

THE day was death. A chalk road, pale in dust,
 Accused with leprous finger the long moors.
 The drab, damp air so blanketed the town
 No doddered oak swung leathern leaf. The chimneys
 Pushed oddling pillars at the loose-hung sky.
 May, pansy, lilac, dense as the night steam
 Of lowland swamps, fettered the sodden air,
 And, through the haze, along the ragstone houses,
 Blood-lichens dulled to a rotten-apple brown.
 Behind close doors pale women drooped and dragged
 In customary toils. They dusted shelves
 Or changed from chair to chair dull, cotton cushions:
 Soon, vacantly, they bore them back and wiped
 With languid arms the black, unspotted shelves.
 Such mind's own symbols of despair they went
 That never movement shook a face to grief—
 At first they looked no more than cheerless women,
 But dug deep in the plaster of their flesh
 Those eyes were year-dead, underpouched with blue.
 A word would sear the silence of a week.
 Of a sudden, turning a byeway corner, a cripple,
 Bloodless with age, lumbered along the road.
 The motes of dust whirled at his iron-shod crutches
 And quickly settled. A dog whined. The old
 Cripple looked round and saw no man, but gave
 A cruel, crackling chuckle, swung a yard,
 And stopped to look about and laugh again.
 'That,' said a girl in a flat voice, 'is God.'
 She turned and slid the table-cover straight.
 Her mother could not answer, but she thought
 'It must be Beggar Joe, gone lately mad.'
 He lumbered along the road and turned a corner.
 His tapping faded and the day was death.

LOST LANDS

WHEN from this alien multitude of man
These, kind or kindred, speak in approbation
Of what I strove to write, for all my pleasure
I feel my gross dismerit and fall shamed.

Set no regard on me: not I can pierce
Clogged air and homely falsehood in prophetic
Dream or sudden awakening. Sinewed phrases,
There are my petty troublings of weak sight.

Shame took me once, and shame has tracked me since:
My friend spoke of a man who lives bewildered,
Even in London striding over mountains,
Through populous roads companioning the dead.

Stars move around him and the dew falls grey;
Thin firs pry through the mist. Old fables quicken—
Undine laughs by the waters, vague, uneasy:
Maiden Mary sings to the sleepy Child.

Then I remembered boyhood, in whose hours
Thistles were knights, old men were murderous, daytime
Intractable as dream. I knew that either
Hid with coarse walls imaginable worlds.

Now I am dulled, habitual now with known
Earth. Never shall other-country pathways
Bring me, familiar, through amazing valleys
Fire-white with blossom, dark with ancient boughs.

FRANK PREWETT

COME girl, and embrace,
And ask no more I wed thee;
Know then you are sweet of face,
Soft-limbed and fashioned lovingly;—
Must you go marketing your charms
In cunning woman-like,
And filled with old wives' tales' alarms?
I tell you, girl, come embrace;
What reck we of churchling and priest
With hands on paunch and chubby face;
Behold, we are life's pitiful least,
And we perish at the first smell
Of death, whither heaves earth
To spurn us cringing into hell.
Come girl, and embrace;
Nay, cry not, poor wretch, nor plead,
But haste, for life strikes a swift pace
And I burn with envious greed:
Know you not, fool, we are the mock,
Of gods, time, clothes, and priests?
But come, there is no time for talk.

I WENT out into the fields
In my anguish of mind,
And sought comfort of the trees
For they looked to be kind.

'Alas!' cried they, 'who have peace?—
We are prey that is caught,
The sun warms us, the blast chills,
And we understand not.'

On rolled the world with fools' noise,
But I strode in tears' wrack;
Would God, fools, I too were fool,
Or had light that I lack.

I held the fields all day,
I, a madman, too;
My spirit called aloud
To sift the false from true.

The troubled sun turned black,
Earth heaved to and fro,
Whene'er I spurned the flowers
Lifting heads to grow.

Trees reached their hands to stay,
Whistled birds to me,
'Spurn one, thou spurnest all,
Brother, let things be.

For not their heads alone
Bleed, but the stars fade
And all things grieve, for we
One fabric are made.'

The heavens and earth do meet
And all things are true,
So trample ye no flowers
Lest skies lose their blue.

COMRADE, why do you weep?

Is it sorrow for a friend
Who fell, rifle in hand,
His proud stand at an end?

The harsh thunder-lipped guns
Roll his dirge deep and slow,
Where he makes his dreamless bed,
Head to head with a foe.

The sweet lark beats on high,
For the joy of those who sleep
In quiet embrace of earth.
Comrade, why do you weep?

THE winds caress the trees,
Woman to man is led,
And I too have my love,
Though she comes not to bed.

Beyond the heat of flesh,
Which has its place and day,
We hold our keen delights
In spirit, earth away.

Mount me on high, O soul,
Expand me my desires,
So shall I clasp in love
Even the heavenly fires!

COMPLAINT OF A TADPOLE CONFINED IN A JAM-JAR

WHAT reveries of far-off days
These withered plaques of duck-weed raise!

The creeping wretches, the crowded pond,
A death in life, no Culture, no Beyond.

Light and No-light in dull routine;
Thought and No-thought two shades of green.

The fair ideals all creatures need
Smothered beneath the inferior weed.

For highest aspirations stop
With breathing, at the water's top.

O Fairy Metamorphosis
For Being to become What Is.

Here ceaseless radiance fills my sphere,
The Lamp my Moon, all night, bright, near.

And clustering on the crystal wall
Great strawberries iconistical.

No strife to propagate the kind
But leisure to improve the mind;

Till curious sensations range
About the tail and hint at change.

The weed with flowers stars the sky
And monstrous forms go dimly by.

Tail fades! The vestiges of gills
Swell with rare æther from the hills.

Now Time reared up in rocky crests
Where flaming fowl involve their nests,

Across the rippled Stream of Space
Throws shadows that obscure this place;

But in the valleys pipers play:
'Over the hills and far away.'

REGRET FOR THE DEPOPULATION OF RURAL DISTRICTS

I HAVE seen villages grow suddenly
From dust and stand upright in the air
With comfortable homes grouped round a spire;
And in the fields strong women bending
Down to coarse toil to nourish unborn women.
But in the gardens, languid with flowers' fragrance
Girls linger on close lawns for unknown happenings,
Tearing a petal in long shining fingers.
So waiting whilst pear blossom apple blossom
And white plum blossom are fallen down to earth,
And the white moon fallen. Then a heap of dust
That once was named, loved and familiar
Lies unsubstantial in the eternal sunlight.
 Whence faint thoughts
Stirring far down in twilight consciousness
Move dark-boughed yew-trees over graves and stars.

COMPLAINT AFTER PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

NOW my days are all undone,
Spirit sunken, girls forgone,
I will weave in other mesh
Than fading bone and flesh.

Into cold deserted mind
Drag the relics of the blind;
And raise from wives none other sees
Substantial families.

Hunt through woods of maidenhair
Tangled in the shining air
The forms of ecstasies achieved,
Not then believed.

O Unicorns and jewelled Birds
And trampling dappled moonlight herds,
In icy glades now slain
With arrows bright as pain.

Leap, Moon, from the berg's pale womb!
Frail Bride, out of Earth's tomb!
The stars are ashen cold
Beneath their gold.

DESIRE

AS the white sails of ships across the ocean,
The last sounds fade when the sun has declined.
I am alone. There is no motion
Rippling the clear waters in the mind.

Only now the madrepores' frail tentacles
Sway languidly before they fall asleep;
And waiting in their dark pinnacles
The virgin medusae watch and weep.

Moving darkly among the forests of weed
Ancient memories drag their crinkled shells
To glades where crimson tree-trunks bleed
Thickly, and hushed are the faint sea-bells.

Out of that silent depth loveless arising
Undine sheds on the water her shining hair,
Softly calleth her soul, devising
A fragrance of music in the air.

TRENCH POETS

I KNEW a man, he was my chum,
But he grew blacker every day,
And would not brush the flies away,
Nor blanch however fierce the hum
Of passing shells. I used to read,
To rouse him, random things from Donne,
Like 'Get with child a mandrake-root,'
But you can tell he was far gone,
For he lay gaping, mackerel-eyed,
And stiff and senseless as a post,
Even when that old poet cried,
'I long to talk with some old lover's ghost.'

I tried the Elegies one day;
But he, because he heard me say,
'What needst thou have more covering than a man?'
Grinned nastily, and so I knew
The worms had got his brains at last.
There was one thing that I might do
To starve the worms; I racked my head
For healthy things and quoted *Maud*.
His grin got worse, and I could see
He laughed at passion's purity.

He stank so badly, though we were great chums
I had to leave him; then rats ate his thumbs.

WINTER PROPHECIES

CITIES with tall and graceful spires I know
Mirrored in pools and rivers silver bright,
That wither if the softest wind should blow
And by a stone are blotted out of sight.
Frailer they are than curvèd leaves of snow
Fluttering down from the dark trees of night
Slowly, and then unutterably slow,
And ceasing as most quietly comes the light.

Water is carved like fern and stone takes on
The flush of life when flesh lies quiet as stone;
Whilst sinister and clownish, bright and wan,
With solemn affectations the old Moon
Spins dooms and weirds and meltings of the bone
And universal silence to be soon.

Transcriber's Notes

Simple typographical errors were corrected.

Page 2: "fourm" was printed that way.

Pages 53-57: The poems of Frank Prewett are untitled except in the Table of Contents, so two consecutive blank lines are the only visible boundaries between them in some versions of this eBook.

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