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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OXFORD POETRY, 1917 ***

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1917

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W. R. C., T. W. E., AND D. L. S.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
<u>P. BLOOMFIELD</u> (BALLIOL)	
<u>SECOND-BEST</u>	1
<u>M. ST. CLARE BYRNE</u> (SOMERVILLE)	
<u>FAVETE LINGUIS</u>	2
<u>J. E. A. CARVER</u> (MAGDALEN)	
<u>TINTAGIL</u>	3
<u>EUGENE PARKER CHASE</u> (MAGDALEN)	
<u>ON SUSSEX DOWNS</u>	4
<u>W. R. CHILDE</u> (MAGDALEN)	
<u>THE LAST ABBOT OF GLOUCESTER</u>	5
<u>THE GOTHIC ROSE</u>	6
<u>GERALD H. CROW</u> (HERTFORD)	
<u>AD DOMINAM SUAM MARIAM VIRGINEM</u>	7
<u>DESIDERIO DESIDERAVI</u>	8
<u>HUMILITY</u>	9
<u>D. N. DALGLISH</u> (ST. HILDA'S)	
<u>OTMOOR</u>	10
<u>E. C. DICKINSON</u> (NON-COLL.)	
<u>A CHILD'S VOICE</u>	12
<u>RIVER SONG</u>	14
<u>E. R. DODDS</u> (UNIVERSITY)	
<u>MEASURE</u>	15
<u>C. J. DRUCE</u> (NON-COLL.)	
<u>THE MEETING</u>	16
<u>T. W. EARP</u> (EXETER)	
<u>THE CANAL</u>	18
<u>SOLITUDE</u>	19
<u>U. ELLIS-FERMOR</u> (SOMERVILLE)	
<u>SED MILES</u>	20
<u>JOAN EVANS</u> (ST. HUGH'S)	
<u>THE HAMADRYAD</u>	21
<u>FLORA FORSTER</u> (SOMERVILLE)	
<u>DUCKLINGTON</u>	22
<u>L. GIELGUD</u> (MAGDALEN)	
<u>SUMMER DEVILRY</u>	23
<u>ROBERT GRAVES</u> (ST. JOHN'S)	
<u>DOUBLE RED DAISIES</u>	24
<u>DEAD COW FARM</u>	25
<u>RUSSELL GREEN</u> (QUEEN'S)	
<u>DE MUNDO</u>	26
<u>MERCY HARVEY</u> (ST. HILDA'S)	
<u>SONG</u>	28
<u>H. C. HARWOOD</u> (BALLIOL)	
<u>CALL OF THE DEAD</u>	29
<u>RETURN</u>	30
<u>E. E. ST. L. HILL</u> (KEBLE)	
<u>DIFFIDENCE</u>	32
<u>A. L. HUXLEY</u> (BALLIOL)	
<u>L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE</u>	33
<u>C. R. JURY</u> (MAGDALEN)	
<u>LOVE</u>	37
<u>SONNET</u>	38
<u>CHAMAN LALL</u> (JESUS)	
<u>THIRTY YEARS AFTER"</u>	39
<u>M. LEIGH</u> (SOMERVILLE)	
<u>TWO EPITAPHS</u>	41
<u>E. H. W. MEYERSTEIN</u> (MAGDALEN)	
<u>THE FINGER</u>	42
<u>LONDON</u>	43
<u>EVAN MORGAN</u> (CHRIST CHURCH)	
<u>IN OLDEN DAYS</u>	45
<u>A SERENADE</u>	46
<u>F. ST. V. MORRIS</u> (WADHAM)	
<u>LAST POEM</u>	47
<u>ROBERT NICHOLS</u> (TRINITY)	

<u>THE MAN OF HONOUR</u>	48
<u>ELIZABETH RENDALL</u> (HOME STUDENT)	
<u>MY SOUL IS AN INFANTA</u>	50
<u>D. L. SAYERS</u> (SOMERVILLE)	
<u>FAIR EREMBOURS</u>	52
<u>H. SIMPSON</u> (HOME STUDENT)	
<u>THERE ARE QUANTITIES OF THINGS"</u>	54
<u>E. E. SMITH</u> (UNIVERSITY)	
<u>THE VOYAGE</u>	55
<u>L. A. G. STRONG</u> (WADHAM)	
<u>THE MAD MAN</u>	56
<u>THE BAIT-DIGGER'S SON</u>	57
<u>D. E. A. WALLACE</u> (SOMERVILLE)	
<u>SONNET IN CONTEMPT OF DEATH</u>	59
<u>LEO WARD</u> (CHRIST CHURCH)	
<u>THE LAST COMMUNION</u>	60

SECOND-BEST

I WOULD sail all alone up the stream,
Since you are far away, dear brother;
I would sail alone, and rather dream
Of you, than change thoughts with another.

Now May is come so beautiful, so blue,
And the chestnuts and the willows are green
Again ... then, since I may not be near you,
Dear brother, let me sail alone, unseen,
'Neath the overhanging buds, past rushes
Where the white, graceful swan sits on her nest,
Hear the song of the ripples and thrushes
And be with solitude ... the second-best.

All alone up the stream would I sail,
Think of your smile, and your voice, and eyes,
Fear you were out of a fairy-tale,
Paint your vision, brother, in the skies.

FAVETE LINGUIS

THERE are few people, being by,
That leave me peacefully to lie:
Mostly their restless brains, or mine,
Seek each the other to divine:
Silence, that rightfully should be
Clear-hearted as a stretch of sea
That runs far inland, luminous,
To rest in still shades verdurous,
Becomes instead a thwarted thing,
With only waywardness to bring.

All otherwise in you I find
The inner places of the mind:
The gift of quiet on your brow
Like some long benediction now
Closes upon me: spirit-born
Tranquillity enfolds each worn
Wan thought, with slender fingers cool
Drawing away from off the pool
Of night the mists that hide a star,
Dreaming wondrously afar:
Till vision cometh down for me
In gracious white serenity.

TINTAGIL

I LAY on the verge of a Western cliff
On a waning Summer's day,
And watched the seagulls' skimming flight
As their shrill call filled the bay.

The waves rolled on from pool to pool
To the end of the rock-strewn lea:
Where a glistening stream through a vale sped on,
With its leaping trout, to the sea.

The wind rose, too, from a breath to a blast
As the rising tide drew near,
And the rain-clouds swelled from the distant deep,
So I knew 'twas a storm to fear.

I've lived on that coast for years now,
And I love the roar of the waves
As they lash the seaweed on the shore,
And the cold grey rocks and the caves.

ON SUSSEX DOWNS

A BOY stood on the windy Sussex downs,
Resting a moment in his lonely walk
To gaze at the fresh fields, and their neighbour towns
Sunk in the valleys watered by thin streams
And sheltered by the pallid hills of chalk.

It seemed a land for slow and leisured dreams,
For fantasy, vague and cool as the mist.
The church there in the field, with yew-trees round
Should send across the air a silver sound
Of holy bells. The loud rooks should desist
A moment from their cawing; the dim sun
Brighten his face, the rounded meadows glisten,
And all the windswept grassy hillsides listen
And then take up the sound the bells begun.

Slowly, at length, rounding the hill, a white,
Long, slender, floating airship flies.
It, of this quiet landscape, is the sight
Most peaceful—white splash on the blue spring skies.
It passes over the church-crowned slope, it blends
Its whiteness for a moment with the cloud,
And finally, with nose a little bowed,
Off towards the distant sea its course it bends.

The watching boy beheld no other change
In all the placid, comfortable scene,
And yet he deeply realized what mean
The airships and the other things that are strange,
But form a living part of England now;
And when he left the place where he had been,
He seemed to have become a man somehow.

THE LAST ABBOT OF GLOUCESTER

THE Middle Ages sleep in alabaster
A delicate fine sleep. They never knew
The irreparable hell of that disaster,
That broke with hammers Heaven's fragile blue.

Yea, crowned and robed and silent he abides,
Last of the Romans and that ivory calm,
Beneath whose wings august the minster-sides
Trembled like virgins to the perfect Psalm.

Yea, it is gone with him, yea, it returns not;
The gilt proud sanctuaries are dust, the high
Steam of the violet fragrant frankincense burns not:
All gone; it was too beautiful to die.

It was too beautiful to live; the world
Ne'er rotted it with her slow-creeping hells:
Men shall not see the Vision crowned and pearled,
When Jerusalem blossomed in the noontide bells!

THE GOTHIC ROSE

AMID the blue smoke of gem-glassed chapels
You shall find Me, the white five-wounded Flower,
The Rose of Sarras. Yea, the moths have eaten,
And fretted the gold cloths of the duke of York,
And lost is the scarlet cloak of the cardinal Beaufort;
Tapers are quencht and rods of silver broken,
Where once king Richard dined beneath the leopards:
But think you that any beautifulness is wasted,
Wherewith Mine angels have blessed the blue-eyed English,
Twining into stone an obscure dream of Heaven,
A crown of flinty spines about the Rose,
A slim flame blessing the coronal of thorns?
And York is for ever the White Rose of Mary,
And Lancaster is dipt in the Precious Blood,
Though the high shrine that was built by the king of the Romans
Be down at Hayles, and the abbey of saint Mary
Be shattered now in three-towered Eboracum.

AD DOMINAM SUAM MARIAM VIRGINEM

O LILY Lady of loveliness,
O tender-hearted, marvellous-eyed,
Bend from Thine aureate throne and bless
The lonely people and comfortless
At Jesu-Mass and Vespertide.

And bless the mighty and proud of mien,
The scornful folk that pity and pass,—
For they are lonely as none have been,
The proud that lack on whom to lean—
At Vespertide and Jesu-Mass.

And bless before Thou makest end
Both me and mine in sorrow and pride,
Where frankincense and prayer ascend
And kneeling lilies whisper and bend
At Jesu-Mass and Vespertide.

DESIDERIO DESIDERAVI

DEAR Father God, I want but one thing now.
Because I have been heart-proud all my days,
And given and asked all proudly for Love's sake,
In search of some lost tenderness out of the world,
And somehow never found it, I want this.
I want to choose my death as I have chosen
Mine other lovers proudly, and cleave to him.
I do not want to die afraid and failing
Some king that trusted me; nor yet to leave
This beautiful bright-coloured world in anguish,
Dirt, ugliness, old age, or shamefully
Eaten up with lust. I want to make myself
Lovelier on that last day than any of these
My lovers yet have found me, and so to die
Calmly by mine own hand and follow after
That tenderness that somehow passed me by,
That tenderness that will not let me be.

HUMILITY

TAKE counsel, O my friend, of your heart's pride,
And choose the proud thing alway. Never heed
The "wretched, rash, intruding fools" of the world,
Nor take the half-truths that life brings old men
For wisdom: nor the naked indecencies
That purity-mongers have shamed children with
For goodness: nor the silly hypocrisies
Of mean men for humility. But say,
"God is my Father. Christ was young and died
To comfort me. The towering archangels
With all their blue and gold and steely mail
Are my strong helpers and mine elder brothers.
The sweet white virgins gone to martyrdom
Calm-eyed and singing are my sisters." Yea,
Because of all these things keep your heart proud.
Be proud enough to serve the poor, too proud
To attend the rich: enough to love, not hate,
And give, not sell. Remember gentleness
Is the heart's pride of understanding, truth
Her greatness that will not be afraid for wrath
Nor flatter favour. This remember also,
The pure in heart shall walk like fierce white flames
Questing across the world in goodlier hope
And knightlier courtesy than they of the Graal,
For these are they in the end that shall see God.

OTMOOR

THE armies take the field in May,
And trees go marching all the day
On Otmoor, where the winds are strong
And mornings are a season long;
Where shining clouds halt for a pace,
Idling behind out of the race.
On Otmoor, hedges never die
Once spring has flung her tapestry;
And there most kindly summer throws
The lightest snowflakes of the rose,
And buttercups grow tall and straight
In fields that keep an open gate,
And daisies make a frosty gleam;
And yet you may not sleep nor dream,
Though field and road and wood are blessed,
Touched by the peaceful hands of rest.
On Otmoor, you may hear the voice
Of living green things that rejoice—
Hedges that boast defended fields,
And green seclusions proud of shields;
Great open deserts in the sky,
Cool icebergs slowly riding by
In the unruffled sea of blue;
Branches that let the sun pass through,
The cuckoo and the ecstatic lark,
Shadows that play at being dark—
In every leaf and stem and flower
There throbs a kindly, silent power,
And energies of being pass
From every breeze that stirs the grass,
And close around, with friendly care,
I feel the encircling sky and air,
That keep me safe, that hold without
Each shuddering fear, each traitorous doubt.
So am I safe and fenced around;
Boundless themselves, they set my bound,
For, should I make the ring less wide,
My fears start up on every side;
And only in unmeasured space
Can lives meet Life with braver face.
Here I may watch the silent earth
Consuming what shall come to birth;
For every leaf that falls and dies
Unbounded woodlands shall arise,
And though the roadside stream be dead,
New springs leap at the mountain head.

A CHILD'S VOICE

'T WAS in a far back swallow-time
When the air was filled with chime
Of Sunday bells that danced in tune
With Eastern phantasies,
A child within a garden's boon
Oft sighed with saddened eyes.

A swallow screamed and wheeled at him
Beside the greenhouse door;
It knew that there he strove to limn
The need in his soul's core:
And he is lonely and sad who tells
His need to Sunday bells.

Of playfellows there was not one
To whom at wake of sun
The child might turn to speak a dream
Of lazy summer seas
O'er which a ship rode fair of beam
Bringing his soul's keys;

And how a wondrous alien boy
Trode proud that ship of Fate.
There mid the bells of Sunday joy
He whispered, "Come not late
Within my longing, for my play
Won't keep for any day."

"The greenhouse tank is stagnant now
Under the cherry bough;
And there a ship is by the quay,
The joy of my Baghdad.
Oh come, oh come and play with me
That I should not be sad."

The jewelled shade of evening's hood
Held many Eastern tales;
And cinnamon and sandalwood
Lurked in his camels' bales.
But then a swallow harshly screamed
And tumbled what he dreamed.

And that was back in swallow-time
With life a child's rhyme.
And some came true of what he dreamed,
And some has been forgot.
But life with sadness still is seamed,
And thorns take long to rot.

RIVER SONG

ONE day I would be glad
And with all quiet be
Except your cadenced murmur
Beside the willow-tree.

One day I would be glad
With fields of king-cup gold:
One day of dancing water
Below the cuckoo-fold.

One day I would be glad
With crowned vermillion kings
Whose scarves are lilies blowing
Where youth for ever sings.

One day I would be glad
With Oxford's poplared grace:
One day with love between us
And then—to lose your face.

MEASURE

I THINK we are made the prisoners of the sun,
Snared in the waxing and the waning passion,
Lest life should grow intense
To burn up sense
And lose life's fashion in the unfashioned One.

I believe the cool unlabouring dark is sent
Swift on the wildness of the day's mad ending
Lest the delight of fire
Consume desire
And in Love's spending Love itself be spent.

I believe the rain-soft autumn has its task
To curb the stretched importunate flame of summer,
For fear too strong a fever
Should quite dissever
The invisible murmur from the coloured mask.

This is the sun's wisdom: that change and rest
And change, the embodied world's recurrent measure,
In check and counterpoise
Contain all joys
Lest the one treasure perish, being possessed.

THE MEETING

BUT we should meet in very different wise—
On some clear-lifted crest when sunset stills
Wide cleansing winds, and transient beauty lies
Immortal in the moment it fulfils:

Or down a deep glade you should come to me,
Moving your limbs with slow primordial ease,
With eyes whose calm has caught the mystery
That walks at dawn beneath the gloom of trees:

Or by the tenderness of a placid stream:
Or anywhere where trivial clamours cease,
And things irrelevant fade like a dream,
That souls may grow articulate in peace.

Instead of this, I know what will befall:—
The seething station where, urged and confined,
Chaotic energies interweave and brawl,
And confused sights and sounds beat on my mind;

There I shall wait, and feel my spirit's flame
(Trained upwards, purged, for that white moment's sake)
Flicker, burn thickly, bowing to the claim
Of alien currents that I cannot break.

For all the folk who come and go, or stand
With strained expectant eyes, or talk with those
From whom they soon must part, have at command
Some part of my unwilling brain, impose

Conjectured joys and griefs upon my sense,
As they, perhaps, guess at my purpose here;
And jealous egotisms feed suspense
As the desired, half-dreaded hour draws near.

At last a rumble, distant, ominous, hoarse,
Swells to a shattering roar that daunts the world;
And round the curve, a black embodied force
Triumphantly increases, and is hurled

Like a great wave upon us, swallowing all.
Vague figures wax and wane and fluctuate
In the inane, till one, more steadfast-small,
Persists, grows luminous, letting penetrate

Some likeness of your shape, and of your face
Some strange reflected charm: I grope to find
A hand with mine in the resisting space,
Hear my tongue utter what no thought designed,

Weak ineffectual words, unheeded of replies—
Questions of tickets, luggage, urge and swarm—
But far beneath all this, in secret lies
An infant consciousness, yet feebly warm

With life, and promise that the time is nigh
That crowds or things no longer may subdue,
When the dull futile body that is I
Shall feel the quickening spirit that is you.

THE CANAL

WHEN you're tired of books and the dusty, well-known room
It's good to put on a gown and go for a walk,
Taking deep breaths and smelling the hawthorn bloom
By the canal, where shadowy lovers talk.

They are far too happy to care if anyone passes,
And you envy a little, as you go along,
Those happy lovers of the lower classes
Whose emotions are like the rhythm of a rag-time song.

The breath of the summer night is about your head,
Burdened with fragrance, lulling the brain to sleep,
You begin to forget the dull things you have read,
And just go walking on and breathing deep.

SOLITUDE

THEY have been sitting here until eleven,
The loud and the quiet and the one who is never shocked,
And we talked of most of the things between hell and heaven,
But now the last friend has gone and the door is locked.

And I cannot help feeling, though it's rather silly,
A little afraid to be left so quiet and alone;
I can hear a petal drop from the tiger-lily,
So complete and awful has the silence grown.

I long to hear that tramp of the policeman's
Outside the shutters, but the night is dumb,
And in a state of tension unknown to Huysmans
I wait and wait for the sound that will not come.

SED MILES...

BEAR the hearse, bear the pall,
We shall fare forward,
We have answered the problem,
We have closed the volume.

In the doubt, in the strife,
We chose the giving,
We have had light for doubt,
We have had our answer.

Doubts of the end of life,
We have been spared them;
We have given the tangled skein
To be cut by the shearers.

Violet scent, flower of broom,
We have foregone them,
We have given the morning,
The gods have accepted,
They have pardoned the reckoning.

THE HAMADRYAD

HER flitting form is slim and pale
As beechen stems at night,
Her hair is dark as barren trees
Against the moon's pale light.
Her dreadful seeking hands are curved
Like chestnut buds in spring;
Against her bosom close she holds
A dove with frightened wing.
We may not see her as she goes
Over the leaf-strewn moss;
But see the russet leaves are stirred,
Feel some strange sense of loss.
We cannot see her cold sad eyes
Filled with a craving pain—
We only hear upon the leaves
Patter of April rain.

DUCKLINGTON

DOWN there at Ducklington
The ducks are never old;
The geese are always goslings,
The catkins always gold.
The orchards blossom ever
Like foam heaped on a cup,
Down there at Ducklington
Where never a duck grows up!

Down there at Ducklington
The years linger yet
At April, with its little leaves
And ash-buds of jet.
And I could be a child again
And drink, as from a cup,
Youth, down at Ducklington,
Where never a duck grows up!

Down there at Ducklington,
With its ducklings ever young,
With its year ever at April,
And the songs of June unsung—
The potion of eternal youth
Is brewed there in a cup—
Down there at Ducklington
Where never a duck grows up!

SUMMER DEVILRY

THE sky is very near to me to-night:
It breathes, as from a throat of molten lead,
A damnèd effluence about my head,
An effluence of hell, a fœtid blight:
Dark visions break on my distorted sight
Of bloody lust and cruelty and dread,
Devils unnamed in their own likeness tread
The ways of earth, and are not put to flight.
In rifts of voiceless lightning, such as breaks
This goitrous firmament, have stood revealed
Over the dead in some old battlefield
The ghastly dogs of death, and bloated snakes
Dripping the slime of Acherontian lakes
On some dead sovereign's blood-emblazoned shield.

DOUBLE RED DAISIES

DOUBLE red daisies, they're my flowers
Which nobody else may grow
In a big quarrelsome house like ours
They try it sometimes, but no,
I root them up because they're my flowers
Which nobody else may grow.
*Claire has a tea-rose, but she didn't plant it;
Ben has an iris, but I don't want it.
Daisies, double red daisies for me,
The beautifullest flowers in the garden.*

Double red daisy, that's my mark:
I paint it in all my books.
It's carved high up on the beech-tree bark—
How neat and lovely it looks!
So don't forget that it's my trademark;
Don't copy it in your books.
*Claire has a tea-rose, but she didn't plant it;
Ben has an iris, but I don't want it.
Daisies, double red daisies for me,
The beautifullest flowers in the garden.*

DEAD COW FARM

IT'S told in those old sagas, how
In the beginning the First Cow
(For nothing living yet had birth
But Elemental Cow on earth)
Began to lick cold stones and mud.
Under her warm tongue flesh and blood
Blossomed, a miracle to believe.
And so was Adam born, and Eve.

Here now is Chaos once again,
Primæval mud, cold stones and rain;
Here flesh decays and blood drips red,
And the Cow's dead, the old Cow's dead.

DE MUNDO

... And then arose the vision of the world
Immense, a tangle of dark ravelled time,
Twisted and knotted by a surge of men:
Vast sombre tribes forth from the old abyss
Clambering, travailed, hated, fought and fell.
The slow tower, stone upon laborious stone,
Compacting men and clans, cities and states,
Aspired through ages to the unknown god:
Adventurers with the guidance of no star,
Discovering all, rich isle and barren shore,
And ever seas beyond the indolent seas
Rounding known courses with uncharted doubt:
A people wandering in the wilderness,
So vague a cloud, so dim a pillar of fire
They blindly followed to a promised land
Flowing with rivers of perennial truth—
And they the chosen vessel,—who of old
Knew not wherefore they broke their bonds and fled.
Yet in the end a desolation came
And the golden bowl was broken....
I saw men, symbols of humanity,—
Immortal longings bound in mortal clay,—
Wayfaring still upon the ancient road
Winding away to the invisible hills.

Still on the visionary scaffolding
The players played the old Morality,—
The pilgrim Life waylaid by cruel Despair,
Wealth dowering Evil and maltreating Good,
And Pain and Care tormenting Body and Soul,
And Giant Sin bestriding hill and dale,
Building his shrines for men to worship him;
Corruption, too, with serpents in his hair,
And next, obscene Ungodliness, whose eyes
Vacant and dull, bent ever on the earth.
Then, last of all, Humanum Genus came
Bearing a scroll with the Apostle's words—
"Having no hope and without God in the world."

So from the seat of vision I arose
Trembling, appalled, and went upon my way
Sadly, for all my vision ended in this—
Piercing of heart, reason's bewilderment—
"We've come from mystery and to mystery go."

What shall be said when all things have been said?
What shall be said when this is pondered on—
"Either He lives not who created man,
Or man for sin is cast forth from His grace;
Yea, between Him and man a gulf is set"?

This poem originally appeared in *The Westminster Gazette*.

SONG

FOR Beauty's sake I weep,
Because my love is beautiful,
I came upon her lying asleep
Within a bower sweet and cool.
The tall trees intertwined
And made a bower for my love,
With green shrubs nestling there behind,
And a blue strip of sky above.
For Beauty's sake I grieve,
That Beauty soon must fade and die,
As lilac blossoms fall, nor leave
One ghostly fragrance lingering nigh.
For Beauty's sake I strive
For one long moment's raptured bliss
To hold her in her form alive
And give her one impassioned kiss.
For her own sake she dies,
Nor leaves behind one memory;
The light out of the western skies
Is gone, and thou art gone from me.

CALL OF THE DEAD

HAVE you not waited there too long,
 Little brother of mine,
With a spirit too weak in a world too strong?
You do not play as you used to do
When you and I were an army of two.
Surely you dally there too long,
 Little brother of mine.

Death is an old benevolent king,
 Little brother of mine,
And around his throne the children sing.
Time, life's sullen minister,
Dulls the heart and dulls the hair,
But does not stand before my king,
 Little brother of mine.

Hopes we cherish down below,
 Little brother of mine,
Melt in manhood like the snow.
Tranquil in inexperience,
Call on Death for your defence,
And leave the tangle down below,
 Little brother of mine.

Forgotten laughter, remembered tears,
 Little brother of mine,
Would be the burden of your years.
So let us play together again
With a child's swift joy and swifter pain,
And reckon no more of months and years,
 Little brother of mine.

RETURN

AGAINST the ebbing tide we make our way.
Beyond the low green banks the fenlands stretch
To a far horizon. Trawler, smack and ketch
Are passing for the business of the day.

There is the inlet where the immortal boys,
As white and slim as ever, splash and call.
Deserted on the other bank Blake Hall
Still contemplates contemptuously their noise.

There are the docks where the tall mastheads shine
Of mighty *Helsingfors*, the timber ship.
And a new craft is lying in the slip
Which presently shall be baptized with wine.

The houses gather thicker, and a girl
Waves her indifferent smiling welcome. See!
The loungers are awakened on the quay
And stand to catch the rope the sailors curl.

Now grey and swift the startled seagulls wheel.
The engine-room is silent which so long
Has shaped our lives to its monotonous song.
The fenders bump against the slowing keel.

The smoke is rising from my father's home
Across the street, and flapping in the breeze
A curtain welcomes me from off the seas,
The querulous seas, where I was wont to roam.

And there miraculously free from age
The faces of my playfellows are seen.
And all is now as it has ever been,
Or smiling destiny turns back the page.

But always ere my feet are firm upon
The natal shore, dream ship, dream river fade,
And I am burdened with the choice I made
And lonely in the land where I am gone.

DIFFIDENCE

DULLED is the azure of the skies.
Can aught but woe my woes beget?
My inmost self in anguish cries
"I love my Love"—My Love!—and yet
I cannot as a lover say
"I love my Love," because I know
I am not worthy. Still I may
Win in the end the right to show
My Love what is my heart's desire.
For more than this I may not hope,
To naught beyond can I aspire.
Alone, in secret, I must grope
My way and be content to see
The beauty of my star above,
For never will my Love love me
Though I so truly love my Love.

L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE

(From the French of Stéphane Mallarmé.)

I WOULD immortalize these nymphs: so bright
Their sunlit colouring, so airy-light,
It floats like drowsing down. Loved I a dream?
My doubts, born of oblivious darkness, seem
A subtle tracery of branches grown
The tree's true self—proving that I have known
No triumph, but the shadow of a rose.

But think. These nymphs, their loveliness ... suppose
They bodied forth my senses' fabulous thirst.
Illusion! which the blue eyes of the first,
As cold and chaste as is the weeping spring,
Beget: the other, sighing, passioning,
Is she the wind, warm in your fleece at noon?
No. Through this quiet, when a weary swoon
Crushes and chokes the latest faint essay
Of morning, cool against the encroaching day,
There is no murmuring water, save the gush
Of my clear fluted notes; and in the hush
Blows never a wind save that which through my reed
Puffs out before the rain of notes can speed
Upon the air, with that calm breath of art
That mounts the unwrinkled zenith visibly,
Where inspiration seeks its native sky.

You fringes of a calm Sicilian lake,
The sun's own mirror, which I love to take,
Silent beneath your starry flowers, tell
*How here I cut the hollow rushes, well
Tamed by my skill, when, on the glaucous gold
Of distant lawns about their fountain cold,
A living whiteness stirs like a lazy wave,
And at the first slow notes my panpipes gave
These flocking swans, these naiads rather, fly
Or dive.*

Noon burns inert and tawny-dry,
Nor marks how clean that Hymen slipped away
From me who seek in song the real A.
Wake, then, to your first ardour and the sight,
O lonely faun, of the old fierce white light,
With, lilies, one of you for innocence.

Other than their lips' delicate pretence,
The light caress that quiets treacherous lovers,
My breast, I know not how to tell, discovers
The bitten print of some immortal's kiss.
But hush! a mystery so great as this
I dare not tell, save to my double reed,
Which, sharer of my every joy and need,
Dreams down its cadenced monologues that we
Falsely confuse the beauties that we see
With the bright palpable shapes our song creates:
My flute, as loud as passion modulates,
Purges the common dream of flank and breast,
Seen through closed eyes and inwardly caressed,
Of every empty and monotonous line.

Bloom then, O Syrinx, in thy flight malign,
A reed once more beside our trysting-lake.
Proud of my music let me often make
A song of goddesses and see their rape
Profanely done on many a painted shape.
So, when the grape's transparent juice I drain,
I quell regrets for pleasure past and feign
A new real grape. For holding towards the sky
The empty skin, I blow it tight and lie
Drowsy drunk till evening, evening it

Dream-drunk till evening, eyeing it.

Tell o'er

Remembered joys and plump the grape once more.

Between the reeds I saw their bodies gleam

Who cool no mortal fever in the stream,

Crying to the woods the rage of their desire:

And their bright hair went down in jewelled fire

Where crystal broke and dazzled shudderingly.

I check my swift pursuit; for see where lie,

Bruised, being twins in love, by languor sweet,

Two sleeping girls, clasped at my very feet.

I seize and run with them, nor part the pair,

Breaking this covert of frail petals, where

Roses drink scent of the sun and our light play

'Mid tumbled flowers shall match the death of day.

I love that virginal fury, ah! the wild

Thrill when a maiden body shrinks, defiled,

Shuddering like arctic light, from lips that sear

Its nakedness ... the flesh in secret fear!

Contagiously through my linked pair it flies

Where innocence in either, struggling, dies,

Wet with fond tears or some less piteous dew.

Gay in the conquest of these fears, I grew

So rash that I must needs the sheaf divide

Of ruffled kisses heaven itself had tied.

For as I leaned to stifle in the hair

Of one my passionate laughter (taking care

With a stretched finger, that her innocence

Might stain with her companion's kindling sense,

To touch the younger little one, who lay

Child-like unblushing) my ungrateful prey

Slips from me, freed by passion's sudden death,

Nor heeds the frenzy of my sobbing breath.

Let it pass! others of their hair shall twist

A rope to drag me to those joys I missed.

See how the bursting currants ripe and red

To quench the thirst of the mumbling bees have bled;

So too our blood, kindled by some chance fire,

Flows for the swarming legions of desire.

At evening, when the woodland green turns gold

And ashen-grey, 'mid the quenched leaves, behold!

Red Etna glows, by Venus visited,

Walking the lava with her snowy tread

Whene'er the flames in thunderous slumber die.

I hold the goddess!

Ah, sure penalty!

But the unthinking soul and body swoon

At last beneath the heavy hush of noon.

Forgetful let me lie where summer's drouth

Sifts fine the sand, and then with gaping mouth

Dream, planet-struck by the grape's round wine-red star.

Nymphs, I shall see the shade that now you are.

LOVE

THOUGH life has stooped before its height,
And beauty, that I still shall trust,
The child of a diviner light
Be torn, and lower than the dust,

Love has a life beyond the heat
Of sorrow, pain, desire or dread;
He holds as his eternal seat
The great remembrance of the dead.

They lose no splendour by decay;
They are a fixed immortal power,
And I their lover, though I stay
Surrounded by the dying hour.

And now thy beauty, as that fire
Which walks against the morning, bears
Of day and night one great desire,
Has made life's splendour one with theirs.

They live; I see them in thine eyes;
Thy life is theirs; no death can stem
Their torrent. When I watch it rise,
I love thee, as I worship them.

SONNET

I WOULD to God thou wert mine own good son
Thy face is fair, thy body strong and pure,
Thy spirit nobly high, thy deeds well done,
Thy heart well set to love and to endure.
'Tis such a fearless boy I would beget,
To give the venerable world its due;
Yea, to be bold and lovely ere I set,
To take the time, and mould what shall ensue.
I would thou wert the fruit of my best hour,
So that I might bequeathe thee my strong fire;
But I am like to die before my flower
And lose inheritors for my desire.
O if thou wert mine own, I had this boast;
Therefore I love thee better than thou know'st.

"THIRTY YEARS AFTER"

IT is thirty years since we two parted,
It is thirty unswept, cobweb years
Since, with a look of indifference, in a storm of elegance,
Like some knowing, hungering bird,
Like some forewarned, huckstering drone of a butterfly,
Like a swift passion—she swept past my youth unhonied.
And I am now a very old man—almost dead;
I am now a very old ornament of lead;
Weismann and Ellis, Burton I have read
These thirty years in bed.

This room;
And the shadows lengthening on the lawn;
And the distant boom, boom of the world;
Wearisome watchings for the first star;
And the toil, toil of the dawn:
These have emptied my soul of its waves,
These have made cold prisons of my faery caves,
These have frosted
The red, red poppy-leaf of time.

Who now cares for my politics?
Who now cares for my brilliant repartees
That crushed one with an epigram,
That struck one like an oriflamme?
But now they ask me who I am.

Once women came to me,
And she,
Once women came to me with their offerings
Like long lines of brown bees
Burdened with offerings,
Like naked houris of turbaned Kings,
Once—But now drifts
Across the living-deadness
Of an Egyptian desert
My barren Arab way,
My unflowered desert way.

It is thirty years since we two parted,
It is thirty unswept, cobweb years
Since, with a look of indifference, in a storm of elegance,
Like a swift passion—she swept past my youth unhonied.
And I am now a very old man—almost dead;
I am now a very old ornament of lead;
Weismann and Ellis, Burton I have read
These thirty years in bed.

TWO EPITAPHS

ON TWO LOVERS

LOVE, when we walked on earth, your chastity
Was all to you, your body all to me;
Now the grave holds the flesh that parted us,
And being nought, we shall united be.

ON AN ARISTOCRAT DYING UNDER A DEMOCRACY

LIVING, your constitution levelled me;
Dead, all are equal in their six-foot graves:
But God counts not by heads; in His regard
One freeborn man is worth a host of slaves.

THE FINGER

(To R. T.)

How curiously this triple whole
Of skin and blood and bone
Consenteth to the mind's control
And to the mind's alone.

'Tis for diurnal uses mine,
To move howe'er I please,
Or mingle with its brothers nine
Enclasped about my knees.

Yet often when the mind's afar,
By vagrant thought bestirred,
It gaily shifts and beats the bar
To songs and sounds unheard.

Mute eloquence! 'Tis plain to see
As face in looking-glass
That more than one is lord of me
When this is brought to pass.

What else but mind and mind alone
Should rule the triple whole,
But how if skin and blood and bone
Themselves enshroud a soul?

LONDON

SIR, you're from Oxford, seat of bliss
Arrived in the Metropolis;
We hold you well and think we can
Make you, in your despite, a man.

'Tis here our wont, though strange it seems,
To deal in solid facts, not dreams;
For lies are lies, and gold is gold,
And men are daily bought or sold.

Parade the purlieus if you wish
To study poor-law and fried fish;
There's much that waits to be improved,
And an improver's rarely loved.

Or yours is the creative touch;
We have a score of shops for such,
Where novelties in paint and words
Are scrutinized by lonely herds.

Colour and motion are aglow
In streets above and tubes below.
We energize: to meditate
Only befits a culture-state.

Such friends we'll give you as will prove
The world is only made of love;
But life is necessary too,
And vices, seeing you are you.

For in this pantomimic scene
There's nothing common or unclean;
You lodge upon the second floor
And opposite a noted whore.

So, when your dreams are laid to rest,
You're part of what you most detest,
And know this nightmare was made real
To dissipate a false ideal.

IN OLDEN DAYS

AN ALLEGORY

DOWN from the flowering tulip-tree
The birds of love flew down to me,—
The birds of love with plumage rare
Sped in circles 'bout my hair,
And it was dawn and I was glad,
And Dawn appeared, a Spartan lad;
With flowers twined about his hair,
A countenance that knew not care.
The flow'rs waved in careless joy
As they nodded and danced o'er the head of the boy.
Lo! he picked the birds up one by one
And he killed them in his wanton fun,
So I cried to him: "They're the birds of love
That abide in the jewelled tree above,
And the tree and the birds are the jewels of love."
But the youth of the morn with laughter cried:
"Those birds are mine that you espied;
Mine are these birds, and mine this tree:
I am the God of Love," cried he,
"The God of Love, of birds and tree."
"I weep for the birds, for they brought me love
Down from the tulip-tree above,
From the tree above they brought me love."
"I'll give you love, my sorrowful brave—
I'll give you myself to hold as a slave,"
So taking Love as a slave with me,
Fast I fled from the tulip-tree;
I fled from the tree and my slave with me,—
Love was the slave and I Poetry.

A SERENADE

YOUR love is like some wondrous scented rose.
The evening sees a purple pool of blood
Beneath the tree that Summer's glory chose
Crimsonly thick with passion'd joys to flood.

Your love is like the harvest of the sun
Moltenly golden, gloriously sublime.
Were I the reaper, swiftly would I run
And reap thy golden love till death were time.

Your love is like the shadows of the ev'n,
The gold-green tints that linger in the sky;
When the red king in opal cloud flies heav'n,
Leaving the dewy earth to sleep and cry.

Your love is like the mystery of the night,
When the wan mists the dreamy violets kiss,
It comes like ghostly owl with muted flight,
It comes like Death;—but Death from you is bliss.

F. ST. V. MORRIS
(WADHAM)

[3rd Batt. Sherwood Foresters, attached
R.F.C. Died of wounds, April 29, 1917]

LAST POEM

THROUGH vast
Realms of air
 we passed
On wings all-whitely fair.

Sublime
On speeding wing
 we climb
Like an unfettered Thing,

Away
Height upon height;
 and play
In God's great Lawns of Light.

And He
Guides us safe home
 to see
The Fields He bade us roam.

THE MAN OF HONOUR

I.

O HAD I died when o'er the sullen plain
The harsh light drifted and the roaring guns
Lifted their voices summoning amain
Youth from its joy in storms and flying suns
And happy comradeship of weathered men,
All had been as in purpose due and well,
Honourable my service had been then
And honoured the blank spot on which I fell.

But now—O heart!—how much dishonoured I,
And by my own hand too—twice bitter case—
My true love stained with secret infamy,
My treachery disguised by friendship's face,
And that bare passion bade me forth to die
Fouled to the instrument of my disgrace!

II.

What has a man but honour? When 'tis gone
The man is gone: for all that in him blent
To strike a star for men to gaze upon
Becomes his quicker ruin's instrument.
For from that height to which with toil we climb,
From that we fall and to the further pit,
Who honour bore and lost. This is my crime
And this the daily punishment of it:—

To honour honour more than e'er I did
When I possessed it, to esteem the lot
Of those whose treasure from themselves lies hid
Or those who lose it and yet miss it not.
O God, now raise me to the thing forbid
Or from my eyes its pure light wholly blot!

III.

Wherefore on God thou callest? 'Tis in vain:
Our hearts our fortunes are until we die,
And naught can change them or for loss or gain
Save Courage at least glance of Honour's eye.
For Honour, daughter of sound brain and blood,
Motions us ever though we may not heed;
She is imperative hunger for the good,
Good so instinctive that to gain we bleed.

Wherefore, dishonoured soul, part from thy love—
Fearfuller wrench than muscle torn from bone—
Or her soul too must perish here. Enough!
I cannot leave her. Then there is but one
Refuge for us now to make trial of,—
Refuge to which I cannot fare alone.

IV.

They burned too deep. Had they but taken that lightly
Which take they must, Love being absolute lord—
Parted by now they yet had rendered rightly
Memory each to each, love's last reward.
But of their love maybe a fiercer glow
They had who saved their honour at the last
By direst means. Whether it be or no,
In death their faces held a *something* fast.

Beneath the fall's white glare and drumming zest,
Where on black depths an hundred suns are burning,
Their bodies bound, like faggots, breast to breast
Rose for a peaceful space, lazily turning:
Their mutual smile acknowledged *this* was best.
Love had found Honour's way. O bitter learning!

MY SOUL IS AN INFANTA

(From the French of Albert Samain.)

MY soul is an Infanta, robed for state,
Whose exiled years, termless, imperial,
Are mirrored in some dim Escorial,
Forgotten as old galleys in the roads disconsolate.

Fleet as the wind, her daisèd throne beside,
Twin greyhounds couch majestic, and seem
To course, through Forests of Enchanted Dream,
At will, a phantom fancied quarry, melancholy-eyed.

Stirless, she holds a tulip flower, attent
The while her page, whose name is Yesterday,
Reads with hushed breath an old bewitching lay,
And hears its magic in her heart die impotent.

Before her—marbled fountains, terraced slopes,
And all the green of Spring. Sombre, her mind
She mads with those high dreams, the unconfined
Horizon hides, and turns, for our despair, to wistful hopes.

Here dwells she, gracious, unrebelling, kind,
Knowing, since Fate is Lord, the strife how vain;
Knowing, for all her birthright of disdain,
Her spirit touched to pity as the sea stirs to the wind.

Here dwells she, unrebelling, past surprise,
Tranquil through tears, save when she evokes the ghost
Of Hope's Armadas with their piteous host
Foundering, betrayed anew eternally before her eyes.

Yet, in some magic, purple, sunset hour,
Old portraits, shadowy on the tarnished gold—
Ivory, black of velvet—wake to hold
New promise from the past of splendid insubstantial power.

Pale painted hands Velasquez pictured, guide
Her soaring thoughts again to nothingness
Miraged so fair, dies all her weariness
And glows a sudden glory from the rubies of her pride.

But lo, old horror of the world of men
And all its brazen clangour stills her blood...
Life flows—a distant murmur—like the flood...
More secret and more strange the smile is on her lips again.

No breath may trouble now her eyes' repose
Where haunt the veiled ghosts of cities dead;
Adown dim corridors with tranquil tread
Singing she passes where an idle fountain idly flows.

Pale at her casement sits she, to await
Till pride and peace shall have an end at last,
Holding her tulip, mirrored in the past,
Forgotten as old galleys in the roads disconsolate.

My soul is an Infanta, robed for state.

FAIR EREMBOURS

A SONG OF THE WEB. FRENCH, XII c.

WHEN in the long-day month, the month of May,
The Franks of France from king's court ride away,
Reynault rides foremost, the first in rank alway.
Passes the tower where Erembours doth stay;
He never deigned to lift his head her way,
Ha, Reynault, ha, true love!

Fair Erembours, within the window's ray,
Holds on her knees a web of colours gay,
Sees Franks of France from king's court ride away,
Sees Reynault riding the first in rank alway,
Speaketh aloud, on this wise she doth say:
Ha, Reynault, ha, true love!

Reynault, true love, I have beheld the day
When if my father's castle stood on your way
You had been sad, had I had nought to say.
—Ill hast thou wrought with me, king's daughter, yea,
Hast loved another, cast my love away.
Ha, Reynault, ha, true love!

Reynault, fair sir, on relics solemnly
I'll swear, before an hundred maidens free
And thirty ladies that I shall bring with me,
I never loved another man save thee;
Take this amends, I'll give thee kisses three.
Ha, Reynault, ha, true love!

O then Count Reynault up by the stairway ran,
Wide were his shoulders, and small his girdle's span,
His hair close-curled, and very fair to scan,
In all the world is not so fine a man.
Erembours saw him, and so to weep began.
Ha, Reynault, ha, true love!

Count Reynault mounts into her highest towers
And sets him on a bed of broidered flowers,
And close beside him sits fair Erembours.
Then they take up their loves of former hours.
Ha, Reynault, ha, true love!

"THERE ARE QUANTITIES OF THINGS..."

THERE are quantities of things
One would like to be and do
When one's mind unfurls its wings;

Clouds full chase across the blue
All unthinking in their flight;
Overcasting me and you,

Sometimes raining out of spite.
Or perhaps you would prefer
To go coasting through the night

With a flutter and a stir,
Like a nightjar in a wood
Rising softly with a whirr.

Or with cold and scanty blood
Don a fish's suit of scales,
And go oaring through the flood

Under bigger fishes' tails,
Into warm and open sea
While above you blow the gales—

So my mind spins constantly
In unprofitable rings
Almost to infinity—

Such innumerable things
One would like to do and be
When one's thoughts shake out their wings.

THE VOYAGE

O MY soul that fliest over never-ending seas
That are so still their deeps lie dark beneath the sun,
Untroubled by any foam, so that the ship-boy sees
All the world's water, and thinks his voyage never done:
Some day thou wilt stay thy wings and stoop to land
Where the sea's edge lies sharp like a bright sword,
And hardly break the waves, and sweet is the sand
Where the keel runs home and ships are gently shored.
There sit the solemn seamen, with rings in their brown ears,
Who are grave when they laugh and are not ashamed to weep;
Their hair and their beards are grown long with the long years,
And some are too old and too wise for speaking, and some sleep.
And when the night grows cold they stir, and touch their lips
With dark-red sluggish liquor, and kindle a fire from wood
Washed up by a quiet wave from the wracked majestic ships,
The planks where the feet of the sea-captains and the ship-boys stood.
Their eyes grow silent and dark, their gnarled bodies swing
Like trees that are stript in a wind; they go mad with moon and stars,
Murmuring songs like water, and beating their hands as they sing
Of how they are fled far off from the foam of tides and the handling of bars.

THE MAD MAN

I THINK I'll do a fearful deed
Of wickedness and cruelty,
And then, if Father Walsh speaks truth,
Jesus will weep a tear for me,

And I will catch it in my hat
Just here outside my cabin door:
And put it on my little field
Where nothing ever grew before.

And it will sprout so fine and brave,
That lovely birds with yellow bills
Will come to peck my crowded corn
From all the Seven Holy Hills.

THE BAIT-DIGGER'S SON

AYE, there's many a man does be drowneded,
An' carried a middling way:
But never the like o' me brother
Was floated from Dublin to Bray.

An' him only two days in it—
Sure ye'd hardly believe it at all:
But it's God's truth. He went down fishing
One night from the North Wall.

What way was it? There's none knows rightly—
He was there one turn o' the light,
An' when next it came round he was no place:
An' no sign of him till next night,

When two men out o' Coliemore Harbour,
Rowin' back from the fishin' ground,
Seen him floatin' by on his belly
Down the middle o' Dalkey Sound:

But they didn't dare stop for to get him,
For the boat was a heavy weight,
An' the wind was strong, an' the current
Was runnin' the divil's own gate.

An' he crossed the Bay o' Killiney;
Till next mornin', at twelve o' the clock,
They found him all swelled an' puffy,
At Bray, in the slit of a rock.

Aye, there's many a man does be drowneded,
An' carried a middling way:
But never the like o' me brother
Was floated from Dublin to Bray.

SONNET IN CONTEMPT OF DEATH

WHEN I consider some day wanton Death
With sudden hand ungently laid above
The heart of her, my softly-sleeping love,
Shall fright away her sweet and rhythmic breath;
Shall quell the colour in her flower-face,
Inevitable and unheralded
As frosts in May that strike the blossom dead—
Shall quench her eyes, transfix her dreaming grace;
When I consider that her limbs shall be
Set stiffly in a strong rigidity;
That by-and-by her flesh shall fall away,
Unsightly in a horrible decay,
Then do I laugh, despite my catching breath—
A piteous fool, a sad, blind fool is Death!

THE LAST COMMUNION

THERE is a time wherein eternity
Takes rest upon the world: King Charity
Bow'd to our fallen state: the God of Grace
Made visible upon a human face:—
When the deep harmony, the eternal Word,
The unfallen Wisdom (only love has heard!)
Touches the troubled body, bruised and hard
With the long fight, yet now set heavenward:—
When the deep argument of souls must cease,
Dying—to meet the victory of peace!

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Transcriber's Notes

Obvious typographical errors have been silently corrected, other variations in spelling, accents and punctuation are as in the original.

In the original, the poems each started with a dropped capital initial letter. This has been replaced with a raised capital for consistency of rendering.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OXFORD POETRY, 1917 ***

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