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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SUMMER'S POEMS ***

A SUMMER'S POEMS

BY

F. J. LYS

LONDON SEELEY AND CO. LIMITED ESSEX STREET, STRAND 1893

These poems were written,—except No. III., which was partly written two or three weeks earlier,—during a stay of six weeks, in August and September, at Hallstatt, among the mountains of Upper Austria.

They are published at once, not because I am unaware of their defects, but in the hope that, in spite of these, they may give some small pleasure to a few friends and other readers.

F. J. L.

OXFORD,

September 28th, 1893.

A SUMMER'S POEMS.

I. TO THE MUSE.
II. TO A FLOWER.
III. LIFE'S VOYAGE.
IV. ON RE-READING 'RUTH.'
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XI. THE WAYS OF LIFE.
XII. TO R. H. K. AND J. M. K.

I. TO THE MUSE. Thy whispers float upon the liquid air,
The sunbeams quiver by thy breath made quick,
The myriad forest-branches thronging thick
Thrill with delight thy mystic touch to bear,
Like an enchanted harp to fingers fair
Yielding a music that can soothe the sick,
Or heal a heart that cruel pain doth prick;
Waters and winds thy living spirit share;
Thy wrath is in the thunder, and thy tears
Weep for man's dulness in melodious rain.
Mistress, forgive me if on deafened ears,
Full of life's clamour and its harsh refrain,
Thy words have fallen all these barren years,
And take me for thy minister again.

II. TO A FLOWER.

Happy blossom that shinest,
Lit by the smiles of the sun,
Lavishing of thy finest
Fragrance on every one;
Happy that ne'er repinest
For the day when the dusk is begun,
But humbly thy head inclinest,
Content that thy work is done.

Sorrowing hearts thou cheerest,
Bidding them live like thee,
Who calmly the wild storm hearest
Gathering threateningly,
And never the dark night fearest,
And trustest that, though they be
Withered and dead, thy dearest
Another summer shall see.

III. LIFE'S VOYAGE. Επ' ἠεροειδέα πόντον πλαζόμενοι. Proudly the glad ships breast the buoyant wave, Touched by the radiant fingers of the sun, Exulting in the promise of dawn, and brave Over the deep their unknown race to run, From nothingness that none remembereth On to the undiscovered haven of death.

Out of the impenetrable night they drew,
Mist-curtained, moving darkly through the haze;
And the East brightened and the breezes blew,
And o'er life's widening waters now they gaze,
Greet the companions of their voyage, and know
Some dim awakening purpose in them grow.

Lightly they sail beneath unclouded skies,
Effortless gliding on their easy way,
Till the winds gather and the wild floods rise,
And tempests frown upon the forehead of day,
And they that fared together lonelier drift,
Sundered by driving storms and tides that shift.

Quenched are the beacon lights that brightly burned,
Distant the guiding voices that were near;
The frolic temper of the prime is turned
To weariness, and faith is dimmed with fear:
What if one battle against the beating waves,
Who knows if he shall win the haven he craves?

Where lies the haven, or if there be in sooth
Some haven of peace for them that wrestle and fight—
Who shall be bold to take his trust for truth,
The gleams he follows for the world's one light,
When to his fellows' eyes as naught they seem,
Or but false phantoms of a fading dream?

This way or that on waves that rise and fall—
Falling and rising aimlessly they drive—
Haply some flash of light, some far-off call
Wakes them a little while to struggle and strive
Onward with hope, until it fades again,
And leaves them drifting on the dreary main.

Blindly the many drift, and drifting dream,—
Dream idle dreams, or waking scarce descry
Aught but the froth and foam and fitful gleam
Of clashing cataracts as they thunder by:
They feel some short-lived passion in them glow,
Or wondering watch the bubbles come and go.

And here is one undauntedly that steers—
Or there another—steadfast through the surge,
Through storm and darkness. What is that which cheers
His spirit in danger? what beyond the verge
Of vision leads him on his perilous path?
Sure naught but God's own truth such following hath.

Faint the gleams flicker through the earthborn cloud;
Trust thou and follow where they seem to lead;
Soon will thy sight be clearer, and the shroud
Of night be shrivelled, and the day succeed:
Light may be stained or hidden, yet 'tis light;
Trust thou and follow—'tis not of the night.

IV. ON RE-READING 'RUTH.' As one that in the sapless winter of life
Feels the benumbing touch of icy death
Chill his warm pulses, and no more for strife
Against the foe that ever followeth
Finds the old fire within, or power, or breath,
But knows that soon the eternal frost shall bind
These failing organs of his earthly mind:

And looking backward through the misty years
Beyond the harvest and the summer glow,
Into awakening life's fresh springtide, hears
Voices that rang around him long ago,—
Strange sweet dream-music that he seems to know,
And dimly sees old faces that made bright
The days of childhood with love's softest light:

Like one beneath the glimmering starlight treading Ways unfamiliar save in the full sun,
He moves bewildered where remembrance, shedding Faint fitful gleams, illumines one by one Far-distant scenes where life was first begun,
Quick with light-hearted fancies and fresh hope,
Fearless and steadfast with all foes to cope:

And as he looks he wonders if indeed
That life beyond the years be truly his—
His those high-soaring hopes, that simple creed,
That buoyant spirit: till some light that is
The lode-star of his life shines out in this
Far-off child-world, some goal whereto his aim
Has aye been set unchangingly the same.

And so to eyes that through long-buried ages
Look on that alien-seeming world, that glows
Pictured in fire upon the sacred pages
Where God his dealings with his children shows,—
A larger life than our dwarfed spirit knows,—
Man in the giant vigour of his prime
Looming heroic even through guilt and crime;

Creature in converse with Creator,—signs
Of power writ large in heaven and on the earth,—
Pillar of cloud by day and fire that shines
In darkness,—plague and pestilence and dearth
And deluge,—almost from our very birth
Familiar,—yet how strange and far away
From all the fever of our little day.

Yet as we look on that mysterious story,
Scarce feeling kinship with that primal race,
We that with sin have marred and dimmed the glory
Of God's own presence manifest by grace,
Until he seems to hide afar his face,
Find something in our deadened hearts that rings
Responsive to those far-off echoings.

Ours the old war with sin, the struggle of soul
In passions' eddying waters, ours the choice
To falter and fail, or battle towards the goal
Unyielding; and at times our hearts rejoice,
When borne from out the distance comes a voice
Of brother-men that in the self-same strife
Have fought through weakness and have won their life.

And more than all, when haply shines above
The clouds and heavy mists of low desire
The perfect beauty of true human love,
Beaconing through the darkness like a fire,
And witnessing that hearts can yet aspire
To kinship with the soul that shone in Ruth,
Of woman's faithfulness and woman's truth.

"Επους σμικροû χἁριν.

Her eyes shone bright as the luminous star That breaks through the shadows of dusk from far, And the wavy tresses that floated and gleamed, Guarding her radiant temples, seemed As the faery fires that a vision enfold, Or light as the tremulous flames of gold That quiver and glance on the forehead of dawn, When the curtains of night are backward drawn; And her smile was like to the rippling sea Greeting the beams of the sun with glee; And her voice was the singing of springtide, heard In the orison chanted by soaring bird, And in the breath of the soft west breeze Wooing the buds of the wakened trees, And in the music of fountains free At last from their icy slavery; And she moved with a step as light and glad As ever a nymph or a goddess had.

Could mortal eyes on a form divine
Gaze for a moment, and then not pine
With passionate hunger for that sweet food
Of the beauteous blossom of maidenhood?
To feed for ever on that soft light
That conquered the gloom of the world's dark night,
And shed in its lustre a mystic sense
Of soothing solace and joy intense?

Could ears drink once of the silver flow Of melody poured from her lips, nor know The thirst of a madman, rendering up Life for the pleasure of one sweet cup?

Seeing and hearing, he scarce wist first What light on his sunless path had burst, But he felt about him a wondrous glow Flooding the field of his vision, so That the shadows shrank as in shame away, And hope rekindled her flickering ray; And over his spirit seemed to flow A guickening influence, even as though, Out of the heavy and poisoned air Of some dark city, a God might bear One that struggled with labouring breath, All but held in the grasp of death, And might set him high on the aery brink Of a loftily-bastioned Alp, to drink The strength of the mountains—a stronger draught Than ever of vintage fire was quaffed, Coursing exultantly through and through His veins, and giving him life anew.

So awhile he rejoiced, scarce heedful why, And the days went sweetly and swiftly by; Alas! too swiftly over and lost, Like blossoms of summer seared by the frost, That feel more bitter the wintry spite Because of the fulness of past delight.

'Twas but a parting, and oft before
Parting of friends, though his heart was sore,
Parting and loss he had known to bear—
'Tis a lesson we learn from our cradle to share:
But a sudden anguish upon him fell,
As upon one cast from heaven to hell,
For a moment showed what had lifted his life
Out of the weary and sordid strife
Of men that struggle and die for gold,
And sell themselves as a chattel is sold.—

And lo! it was over, and life once more
Must sink to the depth where it groped before:
To part;—and it might be, never again
To know the joy of her presence; fain
Was his heart to utter its secret woe,
And all the strength of its love to show.
Sure 'twas a strength that must prevail
To win the world, or the heavens to scale:

High above earth she seemed, yet heaven Is mingled with earth by love's sweet leaven, And even the goddess of dawn, 'tis said, Deignèd a mortal man to wed.

Yet when he looked on the light divine That seemed in those lustrous orbs to shine, His lips would falter, and pale shame froze The fountain of love from his heart that rose: How could a spirit as free as air Brook to be fettered, or stoop to share An earthlier life from her range sublime? Even the fancy he deemed a crime,— As if one dreamt to win for his own The queen of night from her star-girt throne And enjoy the light of the world alone,— What if he spake could she feel or say? Words of scorn? or of anger? Nay, Pity belike for a mind distraught, That rashly to soar from its sphere had sought. Harder were pity to bear than scorn; Better to hide how his heart was torn: So might the thought of that sweet time be Ever a cloudless memory, As of a day that from break to close Never a film on its bright face shows.—

And so she was gone from his life, and left His heart of joy and of light bereft, And tenanted only by blank despair, That finds no longer the sunshine fair, And knows no healing for its distress Except to pass into nothingness. 'Tis but a word and the tale is o'er,-And haply the like has chanced before, And it wants not this poor art of mine,-For he sought as his sorrow's anodyne The blood-red riot of war, to sate All thought with the numbing opiate Of the frenzy of battle; and gave his life As a prodigal gives, in an alien strife: And under the shroud of the desert sand He lies at rest in a far-off land.

And one there is that for many a year Hath mourned with many a secret tear; And the light of her eyes is dimmed with care, And age has silvered her sunny hair, And hollower rings the full rich flow Of her voice; and her step is weary and slow; And little, I ween, is understood The tale of her maiden-widowhood: And naught of her trouble of soul she saith, But ever beyond the river of death, Soothed as she draws to its margin nigher, She looks to the haven of her desire: And dimly her gaze through the mist descries One that waiteth with earthward eyes, Fired by a deathless love whose glow Spoke to her heart long years ago, When his lips were sealed and he thought her higher (Coward lips!) than he durst aspire; And when she hid in her woman's pride The love for which she had gladly died.

VI. ON A ROCK IN THE WALDBACH TORRENT.

The leaping waters thunder at my feet,

Thunder, and rush upon white wings of foam
Down from the fastness of their glacier home,
Laving the limbs that lift this rocky seat:
They part a moment, and again they meet
Far down the gorge, from where my slow steps clomb
The towering mountain: jubilant they roam,
With eager voices, hurrying to greet
Hearts grown aweary of the wasting strife
Of low ambition,—brother trampling down
The soul of brother for some tinsel crown;—
They bear cool healing for our fevered life,
And a sweet message of serene repose
Fresh from the pure and everlasting snows.

VII. BY THE WALDBACH.

Here let me dream a little, while the day
Wears not one cloud upon his lustrous brow,
And care and coward fears their faces bow,
And shrink before his searching light away,
And only what is pure and true dares stay:
For the strong spirit of the mountains now
Steals on me, as I lie and listen how
Far, far below the torrent-waters play,
And near beside me slides a sheet of foam
Precipitous; and high above those cold
Gaunt sentinels their silent watches hold,
And warn the dull world from their rocky home:
And I will ponder upon thoughts untold
Even to the poets of the age of gold.

VIII. IBIDEM.

Fresh from the mountain snow,
And the cold blue glacier-field,
Leaping and dancing the waters flow;
Long have they been frost-fettered and sealed,
And freed at last they are fain to go,
And find what riches the world may yield
Far in the plains below.

First by its gray ice-walls
Moaning the torrent swirled,
And now 'tis a cataract sheer that falls
Over the rocks by its rush down-hurled,
And foaming in tumult of thunder, calls
To the dumb stark pines; and shattered and whirled
They bow their heads as its thralls.

Ah! but ye little wot,
Waters so strong and free,
That the fuller life that ye seek is not
Like to the dreams that your young hopes see:
Liberty soon, too soon, may be got,
But stained and troubled your course shall be,—
'Tis life's common lot.

IX. AUTUMN.

Spirit, whose silent breath
Teaches the withering leaves
To rejoice at the coming of Death,
Though man at his menace grieves,
Would that mine ear might know
The message thou bearest of good,
That makes them to flush and glow
More than the summer could.

X. 'JUSTITIA EXCEDENS TERRIS.'

Of old upon the earth sat Justice crowned,
And truth clear-flashing from her lucent eyes
Withered the pale and festering jealousies
That in diseased hearts a harbour found;
But when the voice of hate and the shrill sound
Of rancorous spite and greed gat strength to rise,
Borne on the vaporous breath of poisoning lies,
Through realms that had shone pure with peace profound,
Then wintry grief upon her bright face froze,
And her white wings she spread, and soaring high,
Where the unsealed mountain meets the sky,
Mantled her in a robe of ageless snows:
Thence in the sobbing breeze is borne her sigh,
Thence her far voice that once was heard anigh.

XI. THE WAYS OF LIFE.

Narrower day by day
Shrinks the valley we thread;
Once how many a way
Into the unknown led!
All in the morning light
Beaded with pearls of dew,
And each, to our wondering sight,
Full of enchantment new.

One on the easy plain
Loitering, one on fire
The topmost summit to gain,
And to mount from high to higher;
On by the sparkling brook,
Or climbing the steep hill-side,
Lightly our way we took,
For the world before us was wide.

Lightly the branching ways
We passed, for the gains of each
Seemed to our dreamy gaze
To linger within our reach;
And all that was bright whereon
The desires of our youth were set,
Gathered and fused in one,
In the glory of manhood met.

Little of all that we saw
The goal of our vision hath,
And closer the dark cliffs draw
Frowning about our path;
And seldom they part to disclose
Issue or choice anew,
But the track that the child once chose,
The man must still pursue.

XII. To R. H. K. and J. M. K.

Summer is fled, and the skies are weeping
For withered blossom and faded scent,
And over the face of the forest is creeping
A flush of fever with pale fear blent,
And even the brows of the mountains borrow
From the gray cloud-fleeces a scarf of sorrow.

Summer is fled, and the fleeting swallows
Gather in grief on his path to pursue,
But not as the loss of one that follows,
Follows to find, is the loss that I rue;
For cold is the north, and from true friends parted,
Few can I find not colder-hearted.

Transcriber's Notes

Table of Content has been added to the beginning of this e-text. It was not available in the original book.

Obvious printer's errors have been repaired, inconsistent or archaic spellings have been kept.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SUMMER'S POEMS ***

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